

## Genocide Memorial Day January 2010, London, UK

### Imam Achmad Cassiem – The Stages of Genocide

For teachers: The video of this presentation can be found at:

[https://youtu.be/YX0CsrzOosE?list=PL0BCSWzStP7VeRbtH\\_Jvlo9c9J8\\_X1cLB](https://youtu.be/YX0CsrzOosE?list=PL0BCSWzStP7VeRbtH_Jvlo9c9J8_X1cLB)

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#### SUMMARY

Imam Cassiem overviews different legal and social definitions of genocide, and different ideas regarding the precursors to genocide, relating them to current and historical events.

**Raza Kazim:** In that regard, one of the things I would like to do is invite Imam Achmad Cassiem, to put the framework of genocide, and genocidal acts and modernity into a context. Imam – is a former prisoner of Robben Island, and has long fought against the Apartheid regime in South Africa, and continues the struggle against the injustices that are prevalent in South Africa today. With that, I would like to ask Imam Achmad Cassiem to speak about modernity, genocide and genocidal acts.

**Imam Achmad Cassiem:** Thank you Brother Raza. *Bismillah rahman al rahim.*

*'By the essence of all time.*

*Verily, all humankind is in deep loss.*

*Except those who believed (in the oneness of Allah) and performed good work and reminded each other of the truth and reminded each other to be patient.'*

*Surah Asr – Chapter 103, Holy Qur'an*

Good evening, and welcome to all of humanity, those present, those absent, the dead, the living and the unborn. The Creator says in no unmistakable terms in this very short *Surah*<sup>1</sup>, by the token of time through the ages, verily Man is at a loss. Except those who have faith, and act in accordance with what is right, and who in engage in the mutual teaching of truth, and who patiently strive. And that would be a synopsis of the whole of mankind's activity, since the time of the arrival on planet Earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Surah – revealed chapter of the Qur'an



There are many questions asked around the nature of Man. One of my most famous quotes that I have ever come across was that of Shakespeare, when I was in matric<sup>2</sup> decades ago. It actually struck a chord with me, and yesterday I made an effort to just bring it back to memory. In *Hamlet*, Act II, Shakespeare says:

‘What a piece of work is a  
man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express  
and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the  
beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this  
quintessence of dust?’

The moment I read that after a period of development throughout my teenage years, I could bravely and confidently say, Man is not an animal. Man is not even a sophisticated animal, because it is not created as an animal at all, for the Creator says that he blew *ruh ul qudus*<sup>3</sup> – of his *ruh*<sup>4</sup> – into Man. Man therefore is a unique creation.

It is because of modernity, it is because of this idea, that God is Dead – according to Nietzsche – it is because they say ‘God is dead’ that all things become possible. The immoral does not only become possible, it even becomes compulsive. Ignorance becomes the doctrine for a way of life – not just for individuals, but for political parties, for states, and even for international forums like the United Nations.

But if that was the whole side of the story, there would be no need for you and I to become teachers and students. But the mere fact that we are teachers and students means there is another side of Man’s activities which one finds expressed in the behaviour of Saint Theresa - who famously said: ‘The height of deprivation is to feel unwanted’ - and that of the late Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who said, ‘The height of deprivation is to be unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood’, and that is where I would like us to enter the debate.

Because to speak a word of truth is to perform an act of justice, and to tell a single lie is to permit an act of injustice. And we – we, as humanity, as all human beings, as mankind – we are not neutral in this affair, in this struggle between truth and falsehood. We are objective. I would even be so bold to say – on behalf of all sane human beings, that we are actually biased in the favour of truth. All scientists are biased in the favour of truth, and that is why the Creator categorically states, not to the Quraish, and not to the Prophet – because the revelation was not sent to the Prophet, he was

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<sup>2</sup> Matric - term commonly used to refer to the final year of high school and the qualification received on graduating from high school

<sup>3</sup> Ruh ul qudus – Holy Spirit

<sup>4</sup> Ruh - Spirit



merely the Messenger who had to carry it to the whole of Mankind – and he says, ‘And cover not truth with falsehood, nor conceal or camouflage the truth when you know what it is.’

It is on that principle that I speak here today without fear of contradiction. A very important principle surfaces, and that is, when one identifies a problem, the logical scientific thing to do is to define it correctly. We unfortunately are caught up in this mess, because we have a misdiagnosis of the problem. If there are any medical personnel or students here, they will immediately relate to the following mishaps.

1. When we misdiagnose a problem within man or within society, or globally, we are treating the wrong disease.
2. We are leaving the real disease untreated.
3. We are wasting resources, personnel, finance, time and energy.
4. We are aggravating the disease – we are making it worse – through misdiagnosis.
5. We are also totally instilling a false sense of confidence both within the patient, in the family, and in the staff who are meant to deal with this disease.
6. We are practising intellectual deception by justifying the treatment in accordance with the misdiagnosis.

And nothing could be worse than that. To say that Palestinians are a problem is to misdiagnose the disease.

To call Israel a state, in the sense that you have a legal and legitimate state is a misdiagnosis, and that has perpetuated itself since 1947, through the United Nations Organisation. Being at pains to identify ‘what is a genocide’ – we have had many speakers who spoke about massacres and killings – horrendous killings - and we have heard the term ‘Holocaust’. What is a genocide in the legal fraternity?

Let us go to the United Nations definition as recorded in what is called the CPPCG, the Convention on the Prevention – just listen to the terminology – and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. That was adopted in 1948 – 3 days after the end of the Second World War. It was only formally adopted in January 1951. It took governments 3 years to make up their minds whether they should support this issue. And moreover, it took the United Kingdom so long, that they only adopted it in 1971 - no, that is not the Freudian ‘slip of the tongue’... 20 years later they signed the Convention.

And what about this great world power called the USA? It adopted it, and signed the Convention in 1988. Can we now understand that legalities work behind the actions and thoughts and doings of Man? The legal framework never *precedes* anything, and that is why even the terror laws that are passed – they name it correctly, in South Africa it is called the Terrorism Law because it instils terrorism in people , and we today still refer to the terrorism of anti-terrorism. There is not a single human being on Earth that can be safe from this misdiagnosis.



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Coming to the definition, the United Nations says, 'Genocide is the deliberate and systematic destruction in whole, or in part, of an ethnic, racial, religious or national group.' Immediately I read that, and the warning signals went up from my intellect, and I said 'this is not acceptable.' Because when you destroy a people in part – which part must you destroy? If you destroy its government – some governments need to be destroyed, like in South Africa, there was a need to destroy the Apartheid terrorist regime. Now, which part? And how many must die before the legalists must say 'this is a genocide.'

Interestingly enough, there was a genocide in Rwanda. It lasted 100 days, and 800,000 people were killed. There was a genocide in what came to be known in the Holocaust camps. If the Jews were the only ones to be singled out, killed, massacred and tortured, then it would indeed be surprising. But all genocides form all holocausts – holocausts in the plural, listen very carefully. Because 'holocaust' in the religious language means to be consumed by fire. But, in this particular case, Hitler and the stormtroopers - the Nazis, first wiped out the opposition - communists and others who disagreed with them, and that is why many of those that were killed, were in fact the main stumbling block to that perpetration of extermination of whole peoples.

Did they succeed in part? Yes, they did. Does it cease to be a genocide, no. Does it cease to be a Holocaust? No.

In the case of Algeria - which was invaded in 1850 under Charles X - and even the socialists like Karl Marx – one of the great theorists of Communism - approved of the colonisation of Algeria. Now when we come to the figures in Algeria, it is shocking to realise that 6.25% of the total population were killed. 1 million out of 16 million people were killed, from 1830 to 1962.

In Rwanda, it took 100 days. In Algeria, it took just 6 years in the last stages of the revolution to double, triple and quintuple that number. In the case of South Africa, racism survived from 1652 until 1994, and the Western powers, all of them, had a great hand in the survival of that colonialist regime. How many people do you think were killed in more than 350 years – three and a half centuries. Slavery was only abolished on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1852 in South Africa. That is something like 170 odd years ago, and those numbers are not documented.

Genocidal activities between sections of the population are very well known. The Khoisan for example – what in historical textbooks would be called the 'Bushmen and the Hottentot' – they not only hunted them down like animals, but spread smallpox germs through the mission stations through clothing that was brought from Europe to be given to the poor and those in need.

Is that the only definition that is floating around on the internet? No. There is another definition coming from a more sober, a more sane analysis of these events. Genocidal activities have been there since time immemorial. We need to look at some of the others. Before we look at the second definition, the definition applied by UNO and adopted in January 1951, the first case applied under



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that definition was 40 years later, in 1991. That is how quick-thinking lawyers are, because this is a legal department.

And when was this definition adopted? You will not believe it. After the Nuremberg trial. Then they decided that there is a new crime on the block. The person who coined the term 'genocide' was a Polish Jew called Raphael Lemkin who lived between 1900 and 1959. Now for the second definition.

This writer, James Petras, says: 'It is a large-scale, state sponsored extermination of civilian non-combatants over an extended period of time because of ethnic, racial, class or religious identity.'

What the United Nations eventually decided in its debate that the extermination must be deliberate, it must be pre-planned, it must be coordinated. Then it can be called genocide.

This is not just an irrational outburst. At the moment as I am sitting here talking to you, South Africa is being wracked by xenophobic attacks, especially against Zimbabweans and Somalis. Zimbabweans are good agriculturalists, they are good agricultural workers. And Somalis are good traders, and this is now seen and used as justification for actions against them. We don't believe a word of it.

What is important is that the crime of genocide can be conducted during times of war, or during times of peace. Characteristics of genocide are the following:

1. It is normally preceded by state or civil society violence, testing the grounds, getting people to take sides on important issues. The Jews will testify how there were pogroms carried against them in the Soviet Union, in Poland, in Germany, and in other south-eastern European countries.
2. The opposition is co-opted, it is silenced, or it is banned. There is also race-based legislation, with which we South Africans are very familiar, starting not in 1950 with the Population Registration Act, but starting way back with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. So you are given an identity which becomes a crucial point of departure to carry out genocidal activities. As Frantz Fanon – a qualified psychiatrist from the West Indies who fought in the Second World War against Hitler then went to Algeria to fight on the side of the Algerian people, discovered that oppressors have no religion. Oppressors have no faith. Oppressors have no ideology, and therefore, there is no purist streak in their blood. There is a criminal streak in them that runs through them, from generation to generation. So whether it is our modern day Holocaust perpetrators, or of the ancient variety, they all belong to the same denomination – not referring to a religious domination.
3. Collective guilt and punishment is applied. It happens in our townships. A child is kidnapped or raped – just for your information, there are 50,000 rapes taking place in South Africa year, and 20,000 murders, so you can see how easy it is to stick a tag on a particular group, and say 'this rape or this murder was committed by a Somali,' and that inflames the passions of the communities.



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Collective guilt and punishment, we see best applied in occupied Palestine. Therefore, it is just history repeating itself. Different actors, the same actions, the same mentality. There is also legalised mass torture. There are two countries in the world that have legalised mass torture, and it is Israel – or what I prefer to call the Zionist terrorist state of Israel– as well as the USA. Guantanamo Bay is a case in example. The Bay should have been closed, but Obama got a Nobel Prize for his intention. As my colleague says, they should have given the Nobel Prize to his speech writer, and not to him, because he has done nothing.

4. Ethnic cleansing – what we in the apartheid terrorist regime knew as the Group Areas Act – where Blacks stay in black areas, whites stay in white areas, Indians in Indian areas and coloureds in coloured areas, which makes it much easier to exterminate sections of the populations once they start rebelling, because you don't have to be clinical now. That is why targeting Gaza is targeting civilian structures, and you can easily have a justification for that. 'They were using mosques and hospitals to hide weapons' – which sane Palestinian would endanger the lives of babies in incubators to hide weapons? They did the same in Algeria, where they claimed that the leaders of the rebels were cutting the wombs of mothers who were pregnant open with bayonets. There is no person worthy of the name of Muslim who would get near to contemplating something like that. Nowhere in any religion does it give you permission to humiliate yourself, and especially, you cannot humiliate yourself with your own permission.

Why are Holocausts and genocides committed? It is because of political and economic reasons, and this writer, James Petras, identifies it directly with occupation, expansion, dispossession, acquisition of raw materials, possession and training of labour and manpower to work plantations or factories etc, and it is no different today.

How does it manifest itself in various set ups in society?

1. Educationally, genocidal tendency is reflected in indoctrination. If your educational system is suspect, your whole society is suspect, and that is what we are still having today in South Africa with black affirmative action. You cannot say you fight racism and want to use racist categories to perpetuate a just social order or even to establish it – it is not going to happen.
2. Through propaganda, by the distortion of truth, and that happens every day. We are accused of being revisionists. When we say let us have another look at recorded history, you are a revisionist. Yet it is something every intellectual has to do every day of his life, when fresh information comes to light. But what the oppressor is, is a divisionist. He not only believes in divide and rule, but he also believes if you have 100,000 in a march, they would divide it by 20, and report that figure as the actual figure of protestors. It happens all over the world and it is not new to us. I would rather be a revisionist than a divisionist. We are here to unite Mankind, and we are here to reflect truth accurately.



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3. Philosophical justification is not far behind, because you have various schools of philosophy that will justify these absurdities. Even Jean-Paul Sartre who was an agnostic said: 'You must be prepared to meet absurdity at every corner.' So much for an intellectual who is supposed to raise the level of consciousness of people.
4. Psychologically it is expressed through fear and through terror, officially through terrorism. Anti-terrorism is a big industry. Every time somebody frisks you, or puts you in front of the scanner, somebody is making money out of it - or taking 100 photographs of the same person passing through the airport, somebody is benefitting financially.
5. Politically it is expressed through hegemony and manipulation. Elections that are either declared null and void, or unfair, or even interrupted for the sake of national security. Think of Hamas's victory in 2006, think of FIS's election victory in Algeria, and this will go on and on, because those are the tactics that are used in order to destabilise societies and allow the imperialists to get what they want.

Frantz Fanon correctly identifies six elements that you can tabulate to find out whether you are oppressed or not oppressed. Has a government or any ruling authority interfered in the bonding of human beings, especially your own family members? Have they separated you, have they put you in padlocks, in jail? And this has happened throughout slavery, throughout colonialism, and we see this on a massive scale in occupied Palestine, and of course, we saw it in Iraq as well as in Afghanistan.

The energy levels of the people's control – because once you control a people's food supply, there are only two options for them; to resist, or to capitulate. So when Egypt, which has been under a pharaoh for the past 27 years, cooperates with the Zionist terrorist state to seal off the borders, and cuts off the tunnels supplying food and medicines – all 400 of these tunnels as they claim they are – you are busy with genocidal acts. You want to starve these people into submission, you want them to capitulate. You have told them what to believe in. They believed in democracy, and when they won, you threw it back in their face.

They believed in the peace process. They went to Oslo, and you tore up the agreements. You said that Yasser Arafat had to denounce terrorism, which he did before Oslo, and you ignored him. And then you chose other leaders that should represent the Palestinian people, and that too, you now want to dictate how the Palestinians must fight, where they must fight, and when they must fight. That is illogical, it is absurd, it is incongruous.

Our movement is controlled when we are oppressed. Ask the people of Gaza, of Iraq, Afghanistan and anywhere else in the world. And the question of identity that we have already dealt with. The oppressor gives you an identity, and expects you to live in accordance with it.

And then the control of space and time. Ask the prisoners in Turkey the size of the cells they are put in. No bigger than dog kennels, in order to get them to capitulate. What do we identify as contributory factors? The first contributory factor was identified earlier as our apathy as human



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beings. I'm amazed that the sister had the courage to come up and say 'what can we do'? We who are having high tea and low tea, and every sort of party-time, while 80% of humanity is languishing in hunger, starvation and torture.

I come to a document drawn up by Gregory Stanton called genocide watch, in which he lists 8 steps in which to identify genocide, and how to introduce preventative measures. It makes very interesting reading, but nothing else. It says firstly that the characteristic is classification. Being black, coloured, white, Indian, Palestinian etc. It says, we must establish universalistic institutions to transcend divisions. Now as a Muslim, I shudder to think how people understand Al-Quran, and how they apply those categories, because the Quran was sent unto the whole of mankind. It was not sent unto a section of them. And that means all human beings will have this Quran accessible to them, to approach it, understand it and apply it.

Symbolisation must be curbed. Any symbols which are used to engender hatred. The Nazi symbol is one. You spray a Nazi symbol on a synagogue, you're asking for trouble. You spray the Star of David on a masjid in Jerusalem or anywhere else, the Palestinians will understand what you are saying, and the same in South Africa. So symbols are important to human beings, and those which are saying and reflect unity, rationality etc, must be encouraged, and those which court division should be destroyed.

The third one is dehumanisation – the third stage of his eight stages – he says, preventative measures condemn hate speech, ban organisations and freeze their finances. Why do you freeze the finances of charities which provide baby milk to Palestinian babies, or since '91 to Iraqi children, where more than half a million of them have died through lack of proper nutrition and lack of medical facilities. Why?

The fourth stage is organisation. Fighters are trained and armed to conduct these genocidal activities. They don't just spring out of the ground like weeds. They are trained, your stormtroopers were trained. Your special branches in South Africa, and all other state apparatus were used to hunt down communists like they did in Indonesia, where permission was given to slaughter anybody who apologises, professes or fraternises with communists. As a solution, this writer says there must be an arms embargo and instigate commissions of inquiry. South Africa was supposed to be under an embargo. Believe me, South Africa bought more weapons during that period than anywhere else in its history, cooperating of course with the Zionist-terrorist state of Israel, and they together developed nuclear weapons.

So arms embargos don't work. You'll get your arms on the black market at a higher price, but you will get it.

The fifth point is polarisation through propaganda, setting one group against another. And the preventative measure according to him is to protect the moderates, and assist the human rights groups. But if you read the RAND reports post 9/11, this is exactly what the American government



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was told to do. Fight the Muslim extremist, close the madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Those small groups that claimed to represent the moderate Islam, the Islam of the middle road - I still don't know what the middle road is between justice and injustice, between truth and falsehood, and between sincerity and insincerity. You must strengthen and arm them against the extremist.

And then he says, 'preparation for extermination.' Mark out your target groups. I believe in Nazi Germany they used to put a yellow Star of David on houses that had to be targeted. Is the same thing happening in other parts of the world? The answer is yes. To deal with problem number 6 – stage 6 – this writer says, there must be a genocide emergency declared. It didn't happen in Rwanda 1994, it didn't happen in Bosnia – which is 2 hours by plane from Paris- it didn't happen in Gaza, it didn't happen in the West Bank with Jenin and other attacks. Do we think that this is going to happen?

And then the extermination takes place.

How?

By any means possible. With machetes in Rwanda, with F-16 fighters in Gaza and the West Bank, with G7 cannons, and then of course, one of the greatest Holocausts that were perpetrated within seconds. The bombing of Hiroshima on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945, when Japan had already surrendered – it had indicated that to Stalin – and then just for good measure, we need to test whether this weapon really works, let us strike another one in Nagasaki. And this is the first time in man's history, that at the press of one button, you could exterminate people in whole cities, and it sets the trend for what is to come.

Does Iran have to take notice of these mad people? I would say yes. They have done it before, they will do it again. History is full of these examples; that we don't learn from history.

And then comes the 8<sup>th</sup> stage, which is denial. So we only know that you are prosecuted in France for Holocaust denial. I hope that the South African government will publish a law against Apartheid denial, because all of a sudden we can't find people who supported the apartheid terrorist regime. All of a sudden, they become comfortable, they become apologetic, because now the spoils of war will become available to them.

In summary, I would like to say that the proposed solutions are:

We all must acknowledge our common origin. *Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un*. We come from God, and unto God is our return. Secondly, we have a common destiny because of that. Thirdly, we have common ideals. The ideal here amongst us whilst we're alive and well and healthy – not so well wealthy and not so healthy – is to establish a just universal social order. It is not difficult to identify what that order is. And then we need to have universal principles that every one of us is prepared to learn, and prepared to teach. And it is very simple.



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All of us have rights, and all of us have a concomitant obligation – and it is on that second point where the system fails. It works wonderfully in Islam, when you say ‘it is a *fard ain* for me to do this, it is my obligation, it is my personal obligation’ – the personal obligation means essentially, it is an intra-personal obligation, something you owe to yourself as a human being. That is very important. If you don’t have that, you don’t fit in very well with humanity. But even if you don’t respect yourself, it is still our responsibility to respect you as a human being. That is what the innate being of human dignity means.

We also have to distinguish between cultural values and civilisational values. Cultural values are changeable, and all cultures, nationalities and tribes have different cultural values. But we who are conscious of what we do, we need to reflect civilisational values. Civilisational values are those values that can and must be universalised. It is against that background that I conclude with a very simple statement that the primary purpose of education, is to teach human beings how to live with other human beings. And if there is one great disaster that we have committed as human beings – we have failed in our educational systems. The more we fail, the more holocausts, the more genocides, the more massacres, the more rapes, and the more dispossessions and occupations will take place between now and the next millennium.

And I would like to conclude in Arabic the dua which the Holocaust survivor – he is not a Holocaust survivor, he is a Holocaust evolver, because he does not merely survive, but he comes up there and he is forgiving towards his oppressors. He prays that the day will come when the law, the natural law declared for man by the creator found its fulfilment, and he always said: ‘All praise be to God, to whom I owe my survival’, and ‘All praise be to God, through who I owe my evolution.’

And I will say: *Alhamdulillah ‘alaa kuli haal.*

All praise is due to Allah in all forms of adversity and prosperity, in illness and in health, in freedom and in slavery, for there is an opportunity for us to refine ourselves as human beings, and proceed onto the next stage of our evolution.



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