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United Nations officials are sometimes asked to comment on whether specific events, past or present, can be referred to as “genocide.” It is extremely important that United Nations officials adhere to the correct usage of the term, for several reasons: i) its frequent misuse in referring to large scale, grave crimes committed against particular populations ii) the emotive nature of the term and political sensitivity surrounding its use and iii) the potential legal implications associated with a determination of genocide. This note aims to provide guidance on the correct usage of the term “genocide,” based primarily on legal rather than historical or factual considerations.

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