PART ONE

INTRODUCTION
Chapter One

International Crimes and other Gross Human Rights Violations around the world

1. Introduction

‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’ (art. 1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights). It seems such a self-evident statement today, but that certainly has not been the case throughout history. People had to fight for their rights and it took many centuries before human rights achieved the status they have today. Human rights are now enshrined in nearly every national constitution and almost all states are party to the most important international human rights treaties, but even the international acknowledgement of human rights was not enough to guarantee their universal respect. Even today, many human rights violations are committed all over the world and man-made humanitarian disasters such as wars and gross human rights violations occur on a regular basis. Many international crimes are committed daily. People do not live ‘in a spirit of brotherhood’1 as was hoped for when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was promulgated.

International crimes and other gross human rights violations (GHRV) are the central themes of this book. The aim of this introductory chapter is to clarify these terms and to explain the legal discourses from which the terms stem. A brief overview of international human rights law (section 2) as well as international humanitarian law and international criminal law (section 3) will be given. International crimes and other gross human rights violations are manifestations of political violence as we will see in section 4. Within this section concepts such as state crime and armed conflict will be explained. In the last section, attention will be given to the particular difficulties in studying the incidence and prevalence of international crimes and other gross human rights violations (section 5). This chapter will serve as an introduction to the remainder of the book.

1 See article 1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of December 10, 1948.