



FACT SHEET

April 24 symbolizes the beginning of the Young Turk government's organized genocidal campaign to eliminate Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. On that day in 1915, the Ottoman Turkish government arrested some 200 Armenian community leaders, most of whom were later murdered.



Background

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire became the target of heightened persecution. This policy culminated in the Armenian Genocide. Conceived and carried out by the Young Turk regime from 1915 to 1923, the first genocide of the 20th century resulted in the deportation of nearly 2,000,000 Armenians, of whom 1,500,000 men, women, and children were killed, while the remaining 500,000 survivors were

expelled from their homeland of 3,000 years.

At the beginning of World War I, there were some 2,100,000 Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire. Following the Armenian Genocide, fewer than 100,000 declared Armenians remained in Turkey.

A Proud Chapter in U.S. History

American intervention prevented the full realization of Ottoman Turkey's genocidal plan. U.S. humanitarian assistance to survivors saved countless starving Armenians from further suffering. In September 1915, U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau telegraphed the State Department indicating that the "destruction of the Armenian race in Turkey is progressing rapidly" and called for the creation of a formal relief organization to aid the survivors. The U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, acting on instructions from Secretaries of State William Jennings Bryan and Robert Lansing, protested the slaughter of the Armenians to the Young Turk leaders. Other nations, including Great Britain, France, and Russia, accused Turkey of "crimes against humanity." In addition, the Allied Powers announced that Turkey would be held accountable for committing crimes against "humanity and civilization."

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson authorized Major General James Harbord, who served as General John J. Pershing's Chief of Staff during World War I, to lead an American Military Mission to Armenia. Major General Harbord submitted his report from the U.S.S. Martha Washington that same year, which read in part: "mutilation, violation, torture and death have left their haunting memories in a hundred beautiful Armenian valleys, and the traveler in that region is seldom free from the evidence of this most colossal crime of all the ages."

As a result of Ambassador Morgenthau's efforts and President Woodrow Wilson's encouragement, Congress established the Near East Relief Foundation in 1919.



In 1920, President Woodrow Wilson stated that "the sympathy for Armenia among our people has sprung from untainted consciences, pure Christian faith, and an earnest desire to see Christian people everywhere succored in their time of suffering, and lifted from their abject subjection and distress and enabled to stand upon their feet and take their place among the free nations of the world." Albert Shaw, the editor of the American Review of Reviews in 1930 echoed President Woodrow Wilson's observation noting that "the special appeal of the Near East Relief transcended anything in the way of a nationalizing movement of charity and brotherhood that we have ever known."

From 1923 to 1929, the Near East Relief initiated the "Golden Rule Sunday" wherein on the first Sunday in December, Americans were asked to eat only a one-course meal similar to what would have been served in an orphanage. The money saved would then be donated to the Near East Relief. As a result "remember the starving Armenians" became a common refrain in American households. The initiative helped raise over \$116,000,000 (or over \$1.75 billion in today's

dollars) from 1915 to 1930 to help aid survivors of the Armenian Genocide, including 132,000 orphans.

In 1922, as an expression of deep appreciation for the extraordinary efforts of the Near East Relief, thousands of Armenian orphans stood together to spell out "America We Thank You" at an orphan asylum in what is now modern-day Gyumri, Armenia.

In 1925, as a symbol of sincere gratitude for America's generosity and humanitarian relief, a rug woven by Armenian orphans was presented by Dr. John H. Finley, Vice Chairman of the Near East Relief's Executive Committee and Associate Editor of the New York Times to President Calvin Coolidge. The inscription on the rug read: "Made by Armenian girls in the orphanage in Ghazir, Syria, of the Near East Relief and presented as a Golden Rule token of appreciation to President Coolidge."

President Calvin Coolidge sent Dr. John H. Finley a letter stating in part: "The rug has a place of honor in the White House, where it will be a daily symbol of good-will on earth." The Armenian orphan rug was displayed in November 2014 at the White House Visitor Center.

First Genocide of the 20th Century

Professor Raphael Lemkin, a lawyer who escaped with his life during the 1939 Nazi invasion of Poland, is the key figure in the history of establishing genocide as a crime under international law. He coined the word "genocide" and invoked the Armenian and Jewish experiences as prototypical crimes of genocide.

Until his death in 1959, Lemkin worked tirelessly toward the adoption of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was ratified by the U.S. in 1948.

Affirmation of the Armenian Genocide

In addition to 49 U.S. states, of which ten have approved school curricula to ensure lessons of the genocide are not forgotten, 30 countries, including Germany, France, Canada, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, the Vatican, among others; and numerous multinational organizations, including the European Parliament, and MERCOSUR, have recognized and reaffirmed the Armenian Genocide as a historical fact.

The International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), the preeminent body on the subject matter adopted a resolution that stated: "That this assembly of the Association of Genocide Scholars in its conference held in Montreal, June 11-13, 1997, reaffirms that the mass murder of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 is a case of genocide which conforms to the statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. It further condemns the denial of the

Armenian Genocide by the Turkish government and its official and unofficial agents and supporters."

On April 15, 2015, the European Parliament passed a resolution commemorating the Armenian Genocide, and called on Turkey to "use the commemoration of the centenary of the Armenian genocide as an important opportunity" to open its archives, "come to terms with its past," recognize the genocide and so pave the way for a "genuine reconciliation between the Turkish and Armenian peoples."

On April 12, 2015, Pope Francis proclaimed, "In the past century, our human family has lived through three massive and unprecedented tragedies. The first, which is widely considered 'the first genocide of the 20th century,' struck your own Armenian people. It is necessary, and indeed a duty, to honor their memory, for whenever memory fades, it means that evil allows wounds to fester. Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it."

On October 29, 2019, by a vote of 405-11, the U.S. House of Representatives affirmed the Armenian Genocide by passing House Resolution 296 (H.Res.296) in a bipartisan manner. The resolution states that "it is U.S. policy to (1) commemorate the Armenian Genocide, the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923; (2) reject efforts to associate the U.S. government with efforts to deny the existence of the Armenian Genocide or any genocide; and (3) encourage education and public understanding about the Armenian Genocide." Buoyed by the House's overwhelming passage of H.Res.296, on December 12, 2019, the U.S. Senate approved a companion measure (Senate Resolution 150) which "expresses the sense of the Senate that it is the policy of the United States to commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance" by unanimous consent.

On April 24, 2020, former Vice President Joe Biden commemorated the Armenian Genocide reiterating his endorsement of H.Res. 296 and S.Res. 150 and stating in part that "failing to remember or acknowledge the fact of a genocide only paves the way for future atrocities.

In October 2020, the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Carla Hayden, determined that resources and books cataloged under the research heading "Armenian Massacres" will be corrected and referenced as "Armenian Genocide" at the Library of Congress.

In October 2020 former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris pledged to "recognize the Armenian Genocide and make universal human rights a top priority for his administration so that such a tragedy can never again occur."