



ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

FOURTEENTH ASSEMBLY, UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
RESOLUTION 15.23.01



15.23.01 The Assembly resolved to:

- a. acknowledge that the Armenian massacres and forced deportations of 1915-1923 constitute a Genocide;
- b. commend the NSW and SA governments in acknowledging the Armenian Genocide and encourage the Federal and other state governments to do the same; and
- c. affirm the value of recognising a date on or near the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, as a day of observance and commemoration of the Armenian Genocide and request the National Consultant Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship to prepare:
 - i. prayer to be provided for all congregations of the UCA for use on the day; and
 - ii. in consultation with others, educational and liturgical resources for congregations to use.

Rationale

The Oxford Dictionary defines genocide as “the deliberate killing of a very large number of people from a particular ethnic group or nation.” An outline of the Armenians and the Armenian genocide follows.

The Legend of the origins of Armenians goes back to Noah. The Legend has it that Hayk, the ancestor of the Armenians is the son of Torgom son of Tiras son of Gomer son of Japheth son of Noah. Hayk had an argument with Belus (Bel) and migrated with his group from Babylon to the North and settled in what became Armenia. The Land they settled in included current day Armenia, Nagorno Karabakh, Nakhichevan, parts of north-western Syria, part of south-western Georgia and the eastern half of Turkey.

In 301 C.E., Armenia became the first Christian nation. In 405 C.E., Mesrop Mashdots, a monk, created the Armenian alphabet and consequently the Armenian language that the church used for centuries, and still uses. The Bible was translated into this new language. The Language itself was a Christian creation stressing equality and inclusiveness. In 451, while the rest of the Christian world was at the Council of Chalcedon, the Persians demanded that Armenia become Zoroastrian, but the king refused and sent his generals to fight the invading Persians. All the soldiers were killed and the king captured, but within a few years the different freedom fighters were able to drive the Persians out and the Armenian Church was able to continue.

Between the 8th and 11th centuries the Seljuk Turks invaded the region, and in the late 13th and early 14th century they created the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia, which was an Armenian region, but because of the Roman, Persian and Arab conquests, had been under the rule of different empires. It had a diversity of cultures with a majority of Armenians. The Ottoman Empire grew and invaded Europe, the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Between 1894 and 1896, the Sultan ordered the killing of 200,000-300,000 Armenians, which was known as the Hamidian massacres. The Armenians, in trying to defend themselves, came together and formed a coali-



tion of freedom fighters which was called the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF).

Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, similar to other ethnicities, were considered second grade citizens. They were forced to wear different colours identifying their ethnicity. They were persecuted and marginalised. They were not allowed to occupy certain positions, and were not allowed certain jobs. They were not allowed education and many had gone to Russia or Georgia for their education. In 1908 the Young Turks took over the government, and introduced reforms. These reforms gave Armenians the opportunity for education and some of the positions they were denied in the past. Those educated abroad returned and the Armenian community prospered.

The Young Turks government considered this development a threat to the Empire's existence and on April 24, 1915, the day before the ANZACs attempted their invasion in Gallipoli, the Turkish government rounded up and arrested some 250 intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople. The genocide was carried out during and after World War I and implemented in two phases: the wholesale killing of the able-bodied male population through massacre and subjection of army conscripts to forced labour, followed by the deportation of women, children, the elderly and infirm on death marches leading to the Syrian desert.

Driven forward by military escorts, the deportees were deprived of food and water and subjected to periodic robbery, rape, and massacre. The total number of people killed as a result has been estimated at 1.5 million. A further 1 million were displaced. The deserts of Syria are filled with the bones of dead women and children. The Syrian government has given the Armenian community a piece of land in the city of Deir Ezzor, which was the final concentration place for annihilating the Armenian deportation caravans, where a memorial to the victims of the genocide is built.

Although religion was used in many instances and the phrase "Allah u Akbar" was heard when killing Armenians, this was a purely political decision. The government abused the religious difference to entice Turks to kill their Armenian neighbours. Many of the Muslim Turks, however, decided to protect and help their Christian neighbours from the government troops who came to kill them.

The governments of Great Britain, France and Russia at the time condemned the acts and considered them as crimes against humanity and civilisation. Churchill called it an unnamed crime, because the term genocide did not yet exist. Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish jurist, coined the term genocide in 1943, and mentions in many of his writings that he was troubled by the Armenian mass murders as a young boy which made him work tirelessly to coin the term genocide and make sure the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on December 9, 1948.

Since then, Armenians have been working to encourage organisations and governments to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide.

The Armenian Genocide is accepted by the following:

- World Council of Churches
- Presbyterian Church (USA): On June 20, 2014, the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide and designated April 26, 2015 as the day for its 100th year observance. It also directed the church's Mission Agency to prepare educational and liturgical resources for member churches in preparation for this event. This resolution was the first of its kind for a major American church body
- Union for Reform Judaism
- European Parliament
- Council of Europe
- Human Rights Association (Turkey)
- European Alliance of YMCAs



- Permanent Peoples' Tribunal
- Mercosur (a sub-regional bloc comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela with Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru as associate countries.)
- International Association of Genocide Scholars
- Countries: Argentina; Armenia; Belgium; Bolivia; Canada; Chile; Cyprus; France; Germany; Greece; Italy; Lithuania; Lebanon; Netherlands; Poland; Russia; Slovakia; Sweden; Switzerland; Uruguay; Holy See; Venezuela.
- German Bundestag on June 15, 2005 the German parliament passed a resolution that “honours and commemorates the victims of violence, murder and expulsion among the Armenian people before and during the First World War.” The German resolution also states “The German parliament deplores the acts of the Government of the Ottoman Empire regarding the almost complete destruction of Armenians in Anatolia and also the inglorious role of the German Reich in the face of the organised expulsion and extermination of Armenians which it did not try to stop. Women, children and elderly were from February 1915 sent on death marches towards the Syrian desert.” The German document is available at: <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/15/056/1505689.pdf>. A translated copy of the document will be available on the Assembly website.
- Regional governments in Spain, UK (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland), Australia (New South Wales, South Australia), Syria, Iran, Brazil, Bulgaria and USA (43 States).
- Barack Obama during his campaign said “My firmly held conviction [is] that the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable ... as President, I will recognise the Armenian genocide.” After his election he has referred to it as the Մեծ Եղեղն (great Calamity), and has mentioned that his personal views have not changed and can be found in the records, but he has never used the word genocide.

Geoffrey Robertson, in his book *An Inconvenient Genocide: Who Now Remembers the Armenians?* mentions that today countries like Australia recognise the atrocities of what they have done to the indigenous people, because in 1915 the government of Great Britain was appalled and condemned the massacres of the Armenians. The events of 1915 became a moral wakeup call to the great nations. It was the first genocide of the 20th century.

The Armenian Congregation of the Uniting Church (Willoughby, NSW), currently the only Armenian congregation of the Uniting Church, supports this proposal.