

# International Recognition of Armenian Genocide

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During and immediately after World War I, the atrocities committed against the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were public knowledge. In their May 24, 1915 joint declaration, the Allied Powers, namely Great Britain, France, and Russia had accused the Young Turk regime of crimes against humanity and civilization. In 1919 the post-war Ottoman government prosecuted a number of Young Turk conspirators of the crimes of massacre and plunder. By signing the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920, Turkey obligated itself to the apprehension of those “responsible for the massacres.” The international community did not question at the time the veracity of the reports on the extermination of the Armenians.

Developments intervening between the first quarter and the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, altered public perception and created the conditions for the denial of the Armenian Genocide. This regressive transformation in historical memory became the basis of the search by later generations of Armenians, descendants of the survivors, to seek international reaffirmation of the Armenian Genocide as a gesture of public acknowledgment of the terrible sufferings endured and of the crime committed against their forebears.

In 1923 the international community abandoned the Armenians when the European Powers agreed to the Treaty of Lausanne in which Turkey was absolved of further responsibility for the consequences of the policies of the expired Ottoman state. Turkey took license from this posture to embark upon a policy of denial, suppression of public discussion, and prevention of any official mention of the criminal treatment of the Armenians. The mood in Europe of escape from the horrors of WWI, isolationism in the US, and revolutionary utopianism in Russia, further stigmatized the Armenian survivors as witnesses of a catastrophe policymakers and the public wanted to forget or bury. World War II, however, brought the problem of mass extermination into sharp relief as the revelation of the Holocaust revived the sense of international obligation toward victimized peoples. As this sense of duty to a moral order respectful of human life and of the dignity of the individual became embodied in a number of international covenants forged under the auspices of the United Nations, Armenians began to find renewed hope that their case would receive attention again. The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide attached a label to mass slaughter and a new word entered the post-war political vocabulary: genocide. With it came the realization among Armenians that they had been victims of a crime which at the time still lacked a name.

To retrieve the memory of their forgotten genocide, Armenians worldwide in their diaspora domiciles initiated efforts for national and international recognition. These began with the introduction of commemorative resolutions in the United

States Congress in 1975 and with efforts to enter the subject on the record at the UN, which occurred with the 1985 adoption of a report on genocide by the UN Commission on Human Rights. In 1987 broader recognition was achieved with the adoption of a resolution by the European Parliament, which stated that «the tragic events of 1915-1917...constitute genocide.» In the following years, the legislatures of countries such as Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Russia, Switzerland, Uruguay and Vatican City adopted resolutions affirming the historical record on the Armenian Genocide. Acknowledgment also came through declarations by heads of states and pronouncements by legislators. Among these have been the statements issued by presidents of the United States and many members of Congress on or about April 24 extending official condolences to the Armenian people on their day of mourning, although, bowing to Turkish government pressure, US presidents to date have avoided the word genocide. These efforts have contributed to greater media attention and the education of the broader public about the legacy of genocide in the twentieth century. The continued denial by the Republic of Turkey, however, has created conditions, which in the view of many Armenians, necessitates the continuation of the search for international reaffirmation until such time as acknowledgment is made universal and irreversible.

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