

**Remarks delivered by Nancy K. Kaufman**  
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Representative Koutoujian, thank you for that very nice introduction. To you, and Representative Kaprielian, and all of you on the Committee, I thank you for inviting me to speak at this very important event. As the Jewish community prepares to celebrate Passover, the festival that speaks to us about freedom from tyranny and oppression, I want to share with you a few thoughts about what lessons we might learn from the experiences of our two communities in the last century. In the history of the world, the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be remembered as a time of some good, some real evil, and many challenges, including tragedy and transformation. Two of the most horrendous events were the genocide of Armenians, at the hands of the Turks, in the beginning of the century, and the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis during the middle of the century. It is our responsibility, as the next generation, to tell the story of our ancestors who were the victims of these atrocities. In doing so, we bear witness to the dark chapter of our particular histories. Only by doing that will we ensure that people will not forget and will learn that “never again” will not ring hollow.

We also share in common the attempt by some to deny the enormity of these events. For the Armenians, the problem of denial and deniers has worsened not only with the passage of more time, but because there has still not been a recognition by the

perpetrators, or for that matter, the worldwide diplomatic community, that the genocide ever occurred.

Thus, as my way of not letting the Armenian genocide be forgotten, I would like to bear witness – to testify, if you will – to that history. It is particularly important for us, as Jews, to speak out in support of your community’s efforts to fight denial. And, as I hope you are all aware, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston has been on record for many years in affirming that the Armenian Genocide was just that.

1915 was a time of government-sanctioned ethnic cleansings with systematic massacres of innocent people on a grand scale. We are here to remember the survivors and mark that day in history, when the world stood by, as rulers became killers, and other countries stood silent and said nothing. Not enough was learned from what happened to the Armenian people, and so the world stood by again, when systematic extermination was directed toward the Jews in Europe, just a quarter-century later.

The Armenian genocide began with a government in hard times—in this case, as a consequence of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It found a scapegoat to deflect attention from its own failures and a leader that had a plan: To “Kill every Armenian woman, child and man without concern for anything.” These stunning words were spoken by Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman leader who launched the first, and unfortunately not the last, genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the mid-to-late 1800's Armenians and Turks began to have conflicting visions of their future. Some Armenians began to call for independence from the Ottoman Empire, like the Greeks and others had already received. Meanwhile, some Turks began to envision a new Pan-Turkish empire spreading all the way to Turkish-speaking parts of Central Asia. Armenians were the only ethnic group in between these two major pockets of Turkish speakers and the nationalistic Turks wanted to get rid of them altogether. In 1876, Sultan Abdul-Hamid II became ruler of the Ottoman Empire. From 1895 to 1896, the Sultan's agents organized mass slaughters against the Armenians, pogroms similar to those being carried out by Russia against the Jews at the same time –these brutal pogroms resulted in the death of 200,000 Armenians. The Sultan unleashed a series of massacres in an effort to prevent the Armenians from rioting against his tyrannical rule.

Meanwhile, the Christian Armenians wanted change and better conditions. When a group known as “the Young Turks” came to power in 1908, there were initial feelings of happiness and hope. Unfortunately, after a few short years, the Young Turks showed their true colors when they, too, became xenophobic nationalists who wanted to eliminate the Armenian people.

Turkey was to be a place for Turkish Muslims only and leaders began exploring the idea of what we now call “ethnic cleansing.” The extermination of the entire Armenian

population was designed, programmed and performed in a very calculated manner by the leadership of the Young Turks.

By 1914, WWI had begun and the Turks saw it as the perfect time to carry out their plan. Peter Balakian, the award winning author of “The Burning Tigris” noted that the war created the ideal setting in which genocide could occur. As he put it, “it created an armed and mobilized society, a heightened sense of national security crisis, a deepened xenophobia and a sense of chaos...”

The Armenians felt they should remain neutral during the war since their homeland was surrounded on all sides by potential threats. Unfortunately, the Turks had another agenda. They chose to join the war on the Central Powers’ side with hopes that Germany would assist their planned advance into Russia at the end of the war.

The Young Turks’ plan was simple; their goal was clear. On April 15, 1915, hundreds of Armenian leaders, intellectuals and elites were rounded-up, arrested and summarily executed and this was just the beginning. Soon after, Turkish soldiers gathered the Armenian public for mass extermination.

To implement their plan, all Armenian males between the ages of 15-50 were called to the army under the pretext of sending them to the front lines. An order was also issued to confiscate all weapons. In addition, everything which might be needed by the army during the course of the war, such as clothes, mules, carts, food, etc., was seized.

With its leadership pretty much eliminated, the remaining Armenian people were composed mostly of women, children, and the elderly who were systematically told to gather for a temporary relocation and to only bring what they could carry. The Armenians were then forced by Turkish Gendarmes to walk to their deaths. These tortuous death marches killed many through starvation and dehydration, since both food and water were denied to those marching. As the marches continued, the Armenians would pass by rivers and streams but were forbidden to drink from them. Weather conditions were unforgiving and many died from exposure. When the Turks decided the death march wasn't providing quick enough results, they would then rape, murder, abuse and kidnap their victims.

The murder and devastation committed by the Turks was methodical and systematic. Early gas chambers were created by forcing people into caves, blocking the entrance and gassing the imprisoned. The Nazis improved on this technology for their design of mass murder. And in both cases, as Samantha Power so eloquently describes in her book: *The Problem from Hell*, "the international community such as it was, did little to contest the Turkish horrors. Britain and France, she explains, were at war with the Ottoman Empire and publicized the atrocities. The British Foreign Office even dug up photographs of the massacre victims and the Armenian refugees in flight...the United States, determined to maintain its neutrality in the war, refused to join the Allied

declaration on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1915 that condemned the “crimes against humanity and civilization”.

It was, interestingly enough, Henry Morgenthau Sr., a German-born Jew who had come to the United States as a ten year old boy and had been appointed ambassador to the Ottoman Empire by President Wilson in 1913, who agitated for US diplomatic intervention. Ironically, it was his son many years later who did the same during World War II with President Roosevelt on behalf of the Jews of Europe. On July 10<sup>th</sup> 1915, he cabled Washington with a description of the Turkish campaign as follows:

“Persecution of Armenians assuming unprecedented proportions. Reports from widely scattered districts indicate systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations and through arbitrary arrests, terrible tortures, whole-sale expulsions and deportations from one end of the Empire to the other accompanied by frequent instances of rape, pillage, and murder, turning into massacre, to bring destruction and destitution on them. These measures are not in response to popular or fanatical demand but are purely arbitrary and directed from Constantinople in the name of military necessity, often in districts where no military operations are likely to take place.”

After twenty-six months in Constantinople, Morgenthau left in early 1916. According to Samantha Power, he could no longer stand his impotence. “My failure to stop the destruction of the Armenians,” he said, “had made Turkey for me a place of horror—I had reached the end of my resources.” As she goes on to explain in her description of

this dark moment in history, “America’s nonresponse to the Turkish horrors established patterns that would be repeated. Time and again, says Power, the U.S. government would be reluctant to cast aside its neutrality and formally denounce a fellow state for its atrocities. Time and again though U.S. officials would learn that huge numbers of civilians were being slaughtered, the impact of this knowledge would be blunted by their uncertainty about the facts and their rationalization that a firmer US stand would make little difference.”

By 1918, at least 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children had been killed. The conclusion of World War I brought an end to the systematic plan of murder used against the Armenians. Even though miraculously some did survive, many later committed suicide, were murdered by the remaining Turks, or were found by neighboring Muslims and forced to convert.

Many of the Young Turk leaders fled, in order to escape war crime accusations and justice. A new Turkish Prime Minister came to power and condemned the Young Turks’ atrocities. The three chief organizers of the genocide were put on trial and eventually executed.

The New York-based American Committee on Atrocities Committed in Armenia stated that the Armenian massacres were “the greatest, most pathetic, and most arbitrary tragedy in history.” Eleven days after that report, on October 18, 1915, the NY Times wrote about a protest attended by thousands of people at a Theater in Manhattan.

The organizer and first speaker of the event, Hamilton Holt, was the editor of a newspaper called "The Independent" and leader of an organization called the New York Peace Society. Holt began the meeting by "deploring the greatest hecatomb known to history. The massacres perpetrated in Turkey," he said, "are the most atrocious in the history of the world, and if they are to stop we must prevail upon Christian Germany, who alone can save the Armenians. The appeal may not be listened to in Constantinople, but it can be heard in Berlin."

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, who 5 years later would create the American Jewish Congress, was the last speaker at the conference. Rabbi Wise stated that he was attending the conference "not as an opponent of Turkey, nor as a champion of Armenia, but to protest against inhumanity, whether committed by Germans against Belgians, by Russians against Jews, or by Turks against Armenians." Rabbi Wise continued by saying that "Germany and Austria could do much toward ending the Armenian atrocities, and if they did not do so, those nations may find that certain victories are more disastrous than any defeats."

Regrettably, press coverage, rallies and international aid did little to alleviate the suffering of the Armenians living under a tyrannical Turkish regime.

The Turkish government instituted a policy of denial which continues until this very day. They rejected the charges of genocide and have spent millions of dollars to further this view. In addition, they successfully threatened other countries to follow suit.

Today, it is considered treason in Turkey to refer to 1915 as genocide. The Turkish Government has threatened the United States with a removal of US military bases and a loss of safety for Americans living in Turkey if the US acknowledges the genocide.

These denials have not worked so well outside of Turkey. To honor the 1.5 million lost lives, many monuments have been built around the world. The Armenian Genocide Museum will soon be housed in Washington, DC strategically placed 2 blocks from the White House and down the street from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The 50,000 square foot museum will give visitors a place to commemorate, remember, and recognize that the Armenian genocide was the prototype for modern crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust and more recently, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur. Closer to home, we all look forward to the memorial which will be built on the Greenway.

So, why is it the Armenian genocide is often referred to as the “forgotten genocide”? Why, almost 100 years later is it so important that these atrocities be labeled “genocide”? Today’s gathering, “Deny Denial,” puts a name on what we need to do. The simple truth is that unless crimes like these are accepted as reality, punish the perpetrators and not just the top two or three criminals, and provide fair compensation for the victims and their families, then we will continue to have future genocides

without any concern by perpetrators that they will face prosecution and be brought to justice.

On August 22, 1939, two decades after the Armenian genocide, Adolf Hitler was preparing to invade Poland and thus begin his reign of terror in Eastern Europe. As Samantha Power points out in her book, he met with his military chiefs and delivered a central lesson of the recent past to justify what he was about to do to the Jews as follows:

*“The aim of war is not to reach definite lines but to annihilate the enemy physically. It is by this means that we shall obtain the vital living space that we need. Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?”*

A week later, on September 1, 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland. In 1942 Hitler restored Talaat’s ashes to Turkey, where the Turkish government enshrined the fallen hero’s remains in a mausoleum on the Hill of Liberty in Istanbul.

This brings me full circle, to why I came here today to talk about the Armenian Genocide and its relationship to the Holocaust. Think for a moment what would have happened if Turkey had been occupied by the Allies and war crimes trials had been brought to a successful conclusion? The situation would have been widely followed, major perpetrators would have been punished, and restitution would have been made to the survivors. Survivors would have then urged the world to remember the horrors they

lived through and the world would have tried to prevent such a catastrophe from happening again.

Suppose, for example, that the Nazis remained in power after World War II and there were no Nuremberg trials. The Nazis, just as the Turkish government does today, would undoubtedly have denied the accusations, and the memory of what had taken place might have faded into history. As it was, it took years for Jews who survived the Holocaust to speak out about the evil and horror they had experienced at the hands of the Nazis. It was not until the Nuremberg trials in Germany, and the Eichmann trial in Israel, that the atrocities were made public and the survivors began to finally speak out. Had those events not occurred, and the perpetrators not been publicly tried and convicted of crimes against humanity, the Holocaust might have also become a “forgotten genocide”.

As the pictures, the statistics, the witnesses, the trials, and only then the survivors, first began to paint a picture of Nazi Germany the Jewish community promised that we would “never again” stand idly by when genocide is taking place. We pledged to take action to ensure that the words “never again” were not uttered in vain. But, it HAS happened again in Rwanda, in Bosnia, in Cambodia, and right now in Darfur.

Just think, as I stand here today, 400 people are dying every day in refugee camps and villages in Sudan. Women are being raped and children are starving to death. Over 400,000 Sudanese have been killed and 2 million have been forced out of their homes in Darfur and are now living in refugee camps where many do not have enough water, food, or medical care. President Bush and Congress have officially declared the attacks in Darfur as genocide, and yet, the world still stands idly by.

When it comes to NOT standing idly by, I am reminded of the words of Martin Niemoeller, a Lutheran minister whose famous words after the Holocaust are engraved on the entrance to the Holocaust memorial in Boston:

“They came first for the Communists,  
and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a communist.  
Then they came for the Jews,  
and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew.  
Then they came for the trade unionists,  
and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Catholics,  
and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant.  
Then they came for me,  
and by that time no one was left to speak up.”

Elie Wiesel, one of the first Holocaust survivors to expose the atrocities through the written word, has made it his mission to bear witness, to tell his story. He tells us that “All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” Professor Wiesel, himself a victim of the idleness and indifference of those who stood by during the Holocaust, protests against the world’s indifference to Darfur and has asked the questions “How can a citizen of a free country not pay attention? How can anyone, anywhere not feel outraged? How can a person, whether religious or secular, not be moved by compassion? And above all, how can anyone who remembers, remain silent?” We must let the lesson that the world sadly learned by hindsight be the lesson we apply in foresight. Let us not have to ask ourselves what we could have done to stop it. Let us act to stop it—and let us start by keeping the past alive and real to the world.

As Professor Wiesel wisely said, “We know that for the dead it is too late... but it is not too late for today’s children, ours and yours.” And, it is not too late to remember the “forgotten Genocide” and remind the world that it should never happen again.

Thank you for the honor of speaking here today.