

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GENOCIDE SCHOLARS

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*Respond to: Robert Melson, Professor of Political Science Purdue University
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April 6, 2005

*Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan
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Dear Prime Minister Erdogan:

We are writing you this open letter in response to your call for an "impartial study by historians" concerning the fate of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

We represent the major body of scholars who study genocide in North America and Europe. We are concerned that in calling for an impartial study of the Armenian Genocide you may not be fully aware of the extent of the scholarly and intellectual record on the Armenian Genocide and how this event conforms to the definition of the United Nations Genocide Convention. We want to underscore that it is not just Armenians who are affirming the Armenian Genocide but it is hundreds of independent scholars, who have no affiliations with governments, and whose work spans many countries and nationalities and the course of decades. The scholarly evidence reveals the following:

On April 24, 1915, under cover of World War I, the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire began a systematic genocide of its Armenian citizens - an unarmed Christian minority population. More than a million Armenians were exterminated through direct killing, starvation, torture, and forced death marches. Another million fled into permanent exile. Thus an ancient civilization was expunged from its homeland of 2,500 years.

The Armenian Genocide was the most well-known human rights issue of its time and was reported regularly in newspapers across the United States and Europe. The Armenian Genocide is abundantly documented by thousands of official records of the United States and nations around the world including Turkey's wartime allies Germany, Austria and Hungary, by Ottoman court-martial records, by eyewitness accounts of missionaries and diplomats, by the testimony of survivors, and by decades of historical scholarship.

The Armenian Genocide is corroborated by the international scholarly, legal, and human rights community:

1. Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin, when he coined the term genocide in 1944, cited the Turkish extermination of the Armenians and the Nazi extermination of the Jews as defining examples of what he meant by genocide.
2. The killings of the Armenians is genocide as defined by the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
3. In 1997 the International Association of Genocide Scholars, an organization of the world's foremost experts on genocide, unanimously passed a formal resolution affirming the Armenian Genocide.
4. 126 leading scholars of the Holocaust including Elie Wiesel and Yehuda Bauer placed a statement in the New York Times in June 2000 declaring the "incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide" and urging western democracies to acknowledge it.
5. The Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide (Jerusalem), the Institute for the Study of Genocide (NYC) have affirmed the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide.
6. Leading texts in the international law of genocide such as William A. Schabas's Genocide in International Law (Cambridge University Press, 2000) cite the Armenian Genocide as a precursor to the Holocaust and as a precedent for the law on crimes against humanity.

We note that there may be differing interpretations of genocide - how and why the Armenian Genocide happened, but to deny its factual and moral reality as genocide is not to engage in scholarship but in propaganda and efforts to absolve the perpetrator, blame the victims, and erase the ethical meaning of this history.

We would also note that scholars who advise your government and who are affiliated in other ways with your state-controlled institutions are not impartial. Such so-called "scholars" work to serve the agenda of historical and moral obfuscation when they advise you and the Turkish Parliament on how to deny the Armenian Genocide.

We believe that it is clearly in the interest of the Turkish people and their future as a proud and equal participant in international, democratic discourse to acknowledge the responsibility of a previous government for the genocide of the Armenian people, just as the German government and people have done in the case of the Holocaust.

Sincerely,

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