

Speech by H.E. Vahe Gabrielyan  
Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia  
27.01.2008  
Holocaust Memorial Day in Barnet  
Middlesex University, Hendon

Worshipful Mayor Councillor Braun,  
Distinguished Councillors  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Imagine, remember, reflect and react" is the theme of this year's commemorations. It fits well with the essence of my message but I would add: "learn and condemn". Learn, because many people are still unaware of the awful tragedies befallen to other peoples. Condemn, because in some cases, not all of even those who are in perfect awareness, have condemned these events properly, loudly and clearly. Many of you have been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC but probably not all know about a big Museum for the Genocide and Commemoration of Armenians under construction a few blocks away in the same city. Many of those who have re-lived the horrors of the Holocaust by visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, are unaware of the similarly shocking Genocide Museum in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. And many people have not been properly educated about this tragic, appalling event because unfortunately neither the British, nor the Israeli government has officially recognized the fact as yet, despite the very evidence, in the British case, of its own parliament at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the abundance of other sources and testimony.

When you enter the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, the first picture you see is that of Adolph Hitler. It carries an infamous quote of his: "Who now, after all, speaks of the annihilation of Armenians?" an encouragement from him to his generals to go ahead with the extermination of the Jews.

As the Holocaust has become a part of the Jewish consciousness after the WWII, similarly the Armenian Genocide constitutes a part of the Armenians' national identity for over 90 years. Massacres and deportation of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey, that were first rehearsed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century killing about 300,000 people, restarted on full scale under the cover of WWI in 1915 and carried on to at least 1923. Over one and a half million Armenians perished in a centrally-organized, government perpetrated and government-run campaign of annihilation. Branded later as administrative holocaust by Winston Churchill, it had one clear and express aim, to rid Western Armenia of its indigenous Armenian population seen as a threat to the efforts of turning the collapsing Ottoman Empire into a homogenous Turkish state. There were an estimated two million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire on the eve of W.W.I. Well over a million were deported in 1915 alone. Hundreds of thousands were butchered outright. Many others died of starvation, exhaustion, and epidemics which ravaged the concentration camps and on

death marches in the Syrian deserts. I will not, however speak of the horrors of the Genocide: these are well-documented and accessible for study.

Although the State of Israel and some of the American Jewish political lobbies have yet to put the truth before other considerations in respect of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, individual prominent Jewish intellectuals and Holocaust scholars are at the forefront of raising the awareness about the Armenian Genocide and campaigning for the worldwide recognition. Elie Wiesel, Yehuda Bauer, Israel Charny and many more Jewish intellectuals continuously raise their voice against the defamation and denial of the Armenian Genocide.

The word "genocide" itself was coined by the famous Polish-Jewish lawyer and humanist Rafael Lemkin, who said he "became interested in genocide because it happened to the Armenians" and the Turkish "criminals were guilty of genocide and were not punished." And he believed that being not punished was one of the objective reasons for elimination of 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany in 1939-1945.

For those who were slaughtered, raped, driven out of their homes and lands where they have lived for millennia, recognition and apology can hardly be a consolation. But for those who have survived and are looking ahead to a new life and peace of mind and soul, genuine repentance is the only way to reconciliation and dignity. While no two tragedies can be compared, the biggest two differences between the Genocide of Armenians and the Holocaust of Jews are probably 1) that in the former case it took place in Armenians' own homeland and most of this homeland was lost and 2) the perpetrator has not repented and has made no steps to reconciliation and to a future of civilized dialogue and coexistence.

However, as everyone knows, truth will out. In 1997, the world's foremost organization of genocide experts, The International Association of Genocide Scholars, unanimously passed a formal resolution that affirmed the Armenian Genocide. Responding to a 2005 call by the Turkish prime minister for "impartial study by historians," the IAGS branded this not scholarship, but propaganda, in order "to absolve the perpetrator, blame the victims, and erase the ethical meaning of history."

An increasing number of countries, including Canada, France, Russia, Sweden, Italy, Argentina, Lebanon, Germany and others have formally recognized the Armenian Genocide; in Switzerland, it is a crime to deny it, in France it is recognised by the force of the law. The international recognition is gaining fresh momentum, including new national and regional parliaments, municipal authorities, organizations and prominent individuals. It is long the time for all democratic nations to follow suit.

Allow me to conclude with two remarks.

*First*, when I visited the notorious concentration camp in Auschwitz, I had already been to the Holocaust Museums both in Washington and Jerusalem

and thought I was prepared. I was not. I could not be. No person in sound mind can be. But I looked at the gas chambers and thought of their unsophisticated prototypes that the Young Turks used for Armenians. No need for technology and expenses then. Helpless people were driven into natural caves and the entrances were blocked by fires. Smoke then did its job. People died like trapped animals. Yet we, Armenians, are now deprived of the possibility to even visit those places or the places where Armenian mothers would throw their children or themselves into the torrents of the river Euphrates or off the cliffs in order not to be violated, killed or taken by the janissaries. Hence, we cannot even pay our tribute properly. Neither are visitors from other countries or Turks themselves taken to those places to be educated and taught the lessons of history. This is what modern humanity should be ashamed of. Speak of prevention.

*Second*, I would like to quote a conversation that the American Ambassador in Turkey at the time of WW I, Henry Morgenthau had with Talat Pasha, the minister of Interior of the Ottoman Turkey, and the chief person in charge of the massacres. This is from H. Morgenthau's book first published in 1918:

*"Why are you so interested in the Armenians, anyway?" Talat asks the Ambassador. "You are a Jew; these people are Christians. We are treating the Jews here all right. What have you to complain of? Why can't you let us do with these Christians as we please?"*

*"You don't seem to realize," Morgenthau replied, "that I am not here as a Jew but as American Ambassador. My country contains something more than 97,000,000 Christians and something less than 3,000,000 Jews. So, at least in my ambassadorial capacity, I am 97 per cent Christian. But after all, that is not the point. I do not appeal to you in the name of any race or any religion, but merely as a human being. You have told me many times that you want to make Turkey a part of the modern progressive world. The way you are treating the Armenians will not help you to realize that ambition; it puts you in the class of backward, reactionary peoples."*

These words can't sound more timely than today. 93 years after this discourse of the American Ambassador with one of the architects of the Armenian Genocide, Turkey, as at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wants to be a part of "progressive world", this time by joining the European Union, however still continues to vehemently deny the fact of the Armenian Genocide. Other genocides happen in front of our eyes. In many decades they will be the topics of conferences and commemorations because we do not act today to condemn and to prevent.

The theme that you chose as remember, reflect and react could not be better phrased.

Thank you.