The 1915 Armenian Genocide

In view of these new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization the Allied governments announce publicly to the Sublime Porte that they will hold personally responsible for these crimes all members of the Ottoman government and those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres.

- Joint Allied Statement, England, France, and Russia, May 24, 1915

Deportation of and excesses against peaceful Armenians is increasing, and from harrowing reports of eyewitnesses it appears that a campaign of race extermination is in progress...

- United States Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, July 16, 1915
In April 1915, the government of Ottoman Turkey began the wholesale deportations of its Armenian population of two million people.
The first acts of the Armenian Genocide included the execution of religious and political leaders of the Armenian community.

US National Archives
The deportations were designed to result in large-scale deaths and were regularly interrupted by massacres.
Besides the mass slaughter at killing sites, numerous persons were murdered individually, typically in order to rob them of their possessions.
Along the deportation routes and at their destinations in the Syrian Desert, Armenians were herded into concentration camps.
Without food, water, or shelter, countless Armenians died of exposure and starvation.
The perpetrators aimed at the annihilation of Armenians of all ages. An estimated 1.5 million perished between 1915 and 1923.
To complete the eradication of the Armenian people from their homeland, their churches, schools, and towns were systematically destroyed and nearly all traces of their civilization erased or obscured.
TURKEY CONDEMNS
ITS WAR LEADERS

Court-Martial Gives Death Sentence to Enver Pasha, Talaat Bey, and Djemal Pasha.

ALL THREE MADE ESCAPES

Djavid Bey and Alusa Mettssa Get 15 Years at Hard Labor for Part in the War.

CONSTANTINOPLE, July 11.—Enver Pasha, Talaat Bey, and Djemal Pasha, the leaders of the Turkish Government during the war, were condemned to death today by a Turkish court martial investigating the conduct of the Turkish Government during the war period.

Enver and his two leading associates in the Young Turk Government fled from Turkey several months ago, and their whereabouts is uncertain.

Djavid Bey, former Minister of Finance, and Alusa Musaa Klaasin, former Sheik-ul-Islam, were sentenced to fifteen years at hard labor.

The court martial acquitted Rifaat Bey, former President of the Senate, and Hachin Bey, former Minister of Posts and Telegraph.

Henry Morgenbauer, American Ambassador at Constantinople, and Sir Louis Mallet, the British Ambassador at the same place, have left no doubt in their dispatches, books, articles, and interviews of the guilt of the Young Turk leaders which has just been proclaimed with sentences pronounced by a Turkish court-martial ordered by the new Grand Vizier Damad Ferid Pasha and convened by Ahmed Abouk Pasha, the Minister of War.

It is the climax of a long series of prosecutions undertaken by the officials of the new régime to clear the skirts of the Turkish people from blame for joining in the war and for the Armenian, Greek, and Syrian atrocities and deportations. It reached its practical climax on April 12, when Kemal Bey, former Minister of Food and Governor of Diarbekr, was actually executed in Bayazit Square, Stamboul. For, in the present instance, the sentences will not be carried out so summarily. Enver, Talaat, and Djemal fled to Germany a few days before the
"The Armenian massacre was the greatest crime of the war."
- Theodore Roosevelt, May 11, 1918 (U.S. President 1901-1909)

"Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it — and like too many other such persecutions of too many other peoples — the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten."
- President Ronald Reagan, April 22, 1981
With the vast majority of adults killed or starved to death, survivors of the atrocities were mostly children.
Many young women were abducted and forcibly converted to Islam. To prevent their escape and impede their identification many of the captive women were tattooed. Their rescue became a priority at the end of World War I.
Without families and communities to care for them, thousands of Armenian children were left homeless as a consequence of the Armenian Genocide.
Denied the right to return to their former homes, survivors gathered in refugee camps across the Middle East.

Near East Foundation

Refugees

ANJ Armenian National Institute

Dedication: In honor of the exemplary figures in the United States diplomatic service whose consular reports remain a permanent testament to the horrors of the Armenian Genocide, in memory of: John R. Jackson, U.S. Consul in Aleppo; Leslie A. Davis, U.S. Consul in Harput; Oscar Heizer, U.S. Consul in Trebizond; George Horton, Consul-General in Smyrna; and in Constantinople, Gabriel Bie Ravnadal, Consul-General; Solomon Philip, Chargé d’Affaires; Abraham I. Elkus, Ambassador; and Henry Morgenthau, Ambassador. © 2015, Armenian Assembly of America

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The exhibit ICONIC IMAGES OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE is a project of the Armenian National Institute, Armenian Genocide Museum & Research Center, and Armenian Assembly of America, Washington, DC. Research and presentation: Rouben Paul Adalian, project design: Joseph Piatt, exhibit graphics: Aline Maksoudian.
The refugee camps turned into permanent settlements for Armenians.
Philanthropic organizations in the United States, Great Britain, and elsewhere raised funds to assist the survivors with food and shelter.
Relief efforts focused on addressing the needs of orphaned children for housing, education, and employment training. The largest undertaking was organized by Near East Relief (NER), a New York-based American charity.
The Armenian Genocide is recalled with memorials around the world constructed by survivors and their descendants.
The unmarked mass graves of the Armenians dot the landscape in Turkey and Syria. Der Zor, the final destination of the deportations, was the largest death camp in the Syrian Desert. A quarter million people are estimated to have been liquidated at this site. The memorial chapel dedicated in 1990 in the modern Syrian city of Deir al-Zor was deliberately damaged by the so-called Islamic State on September 21, 2014, the Republic of Armenia Independence Day.
Between the years 1915 and 1923, the vast majority of the 2.1 million Armenians living in Ottoman Turkey were uprooted from their homes through a deliberate policy conceived by the Ottoman government and implemented by its administrative machinery, including the army, police, post, interior ministry, rail system, and special agencies created for the express purpose of deporting, robbing, and slaughtering the Armenian population.

The Armenian Genocide started in the thick of World War I but continued after the war ended in 1918. It continued even after the international treaties, designed to bring peace to the world and to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes, were signed in Versailles in 1919 and in Sèvres in 1920. By 1923, by the hardships and brutalities associated with the deportations, the continuous massacres, the epidemics that raged in the concentration camp sites that lacked all sanitation, and by the pangs of thirst and starvation, 1.5 million Armenians had been killed.

Jesse Jackson, the American Consul in Aleppo, observed the entire process of deportation as hundreds of thousands were routed through Aleppo on their way from the fertile valleys of Armenia and the commercial centers of Anatolia to the parched wastes of the Syrian Desert. As early as June 5, 1915, he reported: “it is without doubt a carefully planned scheme to thoroughly extinguish the Armenian race.” On the basis of this and additional cables from other American consuls, Henry Morgenthau, U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, informed the American government on July 16, 1915, that “from harrowing reports of eye witnesses it appears that a campaign of race extermination is in progress.”

The Armenian Genocide was perpetrated by the Committee of Union and Progress, the radical wing of the Young Turk party that seized power in the Ottoman Empire. In their zeal to create a homogeneous society exclusively Turkish and Muslim, the Young Turk radicals sought to exclude the Christian populations that had long inhabited Asia Minor. Through expulsions, expropriations, and extermination, by 1923 no Christians to speak of, including Assyrians and Greeks, remained across Anatolian Turkey. The campaign was chronicled in the archives of the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, the Vatican, and the Ottoman Empire.

Writing in 1918, former president of the United States Theodore Roosevelt, described the Armenian massacres as “the greatest crime of the war.” As early as May 24, 1915, the Allied Powers, England, France, and Russia, then at war against the Central Powers, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey, had condemned the massacres as ‘crimes against humanity and civilization.’ And when in 1919 President Woodrow Wilson sent Major General James Harbord on a military mission to investigate conditions in the Near East, Harbord reported back that “the traveler in that region is seldom free from the evidence of this most colossal crime of all ages.”

Reflecting on the consequences of the Great War in his 1929 book titled The World Crisis, the future British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, wrote: “In 1915 the Turkish government began and ruthlessly carried out the infamous general massacre and deportation of Armenians of Asia Minor.” He added: “There is no reasonable doubt that this crime was planned and executed for political reasons.” Summing up what transpired in Armenia in 1915, he explained that “whole districts [were] blotted out in one administrative holocaust.”

Churchill, Roosevelt, Harbord, Morgenthau and Jackson all described in disbelief the scale of the crimes committed in 1915. Morgenthau went so far as to say: “I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915.” Churchill, however, had hit upon a word that would echo across the 20th century as governments planned and implemented ever greater crimes against humanity, many with complete impunity. In 1944, Raphael Lemkin called them genocide.

This map illustrates three prevailing aspects of the 1915 Armenian Genocide: the deportations, the massacres, and the concentration camps.