

Our modern history with genocide began in Armenia

"Who remembers now the destruction of the Armenians?"

by
Kimberly Horg-Webb
is a Sacramento
freelance writer.

This infamous question, attributed to Adolf Hitler, is inscribed on a wall of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. A bold statement argued about by scholars, it represents millions of people of Armenian descent still fighting for recognition of the murders of their family members almost 100 years ago.

Genocide Remembrance Day, held on April 24, is a day to reflect on those who died. Between 1915 and 1923, according to historical accounts, around 1.5 million Armenians were systematically killed on the orders of the Ottoman Empire.

Until the late 19th century, Armenians were living in harmony with other ethnic groups. But the Russian victory over the Ottoman Empire, which led to Russian control over a large part of Armenian territory, led to problems. Russian support of Christians within the Ottoman Empire weakened the Ottoman government's control by leading Armenians to believe they could regain independence. Armenian Christians were subject to Islamic *dhimmi* laws,

Armenian survivors say that they were forced from their homes by the Ottoman government through mass evacuations and murders.

which granted them lesser status and fewer legal rights than Muslim Ottoman citizens had under *sharia* law. Resentment between the groups escalated to conflict, abuse and violence.

Armenian survivors say that they were forced from their homes by the Ottoman government through mass evacuations and murders.

Rape, famine and murder became so widespread that, whether an intended goal or not, the result was to exterminate a large portion of the Armenian population.

The present-day Turkish government disputes many facts of the forced evacuation and mass deaths. Although the Turkish government does not dispute that the Ottoman government ordered the evacuation of Armenians, they reject calling it "genocide." Instead, the Turks allege that the deaths among Armenians at the time were the result of interethnic strife, disease and famine related to the turmoil of World War I.

For more information about the Armenian genocide:
www.never-again.com;
www.anca.org.

To sign the petition supporting U.S. Senate Resolution 106: www.petition1915.org.

Armenians continue to work to keep their memories alive. Each year on this day, thousands travel from all over the world to the genocide memorial at Tsitsernakaberd Hill in Yerevan, Armenia, to lay flowers for those who died.

American Armenians are actively pursuing efforts toward recognition of the tragedy as well. In April of 2005, more than 1,200 people gathered in front of the state Capitol to thank the Legislature for passing Senate Bill 424. The bill, authored by Sen. Chuck Poochigian and signed by the governor, marked April 24 as California's official remembrance date for the Armenian genocide. And last year, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proclaimed the week of April 22 through April 29 as "Days of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide." Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate has the Armenian genocide resolution (Senate Resolution 106) under consideration.

But genocide has been a major threat throughout the world for all of the last century, even into the beginning of this one. From the Armenian tragedy to the current situation in Darfur, a silent world is the biggest block to ending genocide. □