PASHINYAN REGURGITATES ERDOGAN

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Category: Opinions

Statement on the Continued Denialist Rhetoric of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

Lemkin Institute, 30 January 2025

At the risk of being accused of being a "Dashnak" organization, taking Russian money, and circulating "fake news" by some Armenians, including notably the Zoryan Institute, which deman ded last year that we apologize to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan after suggesting that he was engaging in cryptic genocide denial, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security once again calls attention to Prime Minister Pashinyan's recent statements on the Armenian Genocide, which further echo Turkish denialist narratives. His senseless statements ignore the decades of historical research on the Armenian Genocide conducted by Turkish, German, British, American, and Armenian scholars, among others, stand in the way of the ongoing struggle for justice for the victims of the Armenian Genocide, and create a dangerous geopolitical dynamic, especially in the context of Azerbaijan's recent genocide of Artsakh Armenians and its ongoing threats to the Republic of Armenia.

Last week, Prime Minister Pashinyan met with a group of diasporan Armenians in Switzerland, and, using characteristically enigmatic language, appeared to cast doubt on the established historical narrative of the 1915 Armenian Genocide.

The Prime Minister stated: "We must understand what happened and why it happened, how we perceived it and through whom we perceived ." He then added, "How is it that in 1939 there was no Armenian genocide agenda and how is it that in 1950 the Armenian genocide agenda emerged?"

This statement came about ten months after the Prime Minister appeared to cast doubt on the established historical narrative of the genocide on the occasion of the genocide commemoration in April 2024 and three months after Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to remove the Armenian Genocide from its list of foreign policy priorities. We view these statements and decisions as the consequence of Armenia's diplomatic and military weakness relative to its hostile neighbors in the South Caucasus. However, we must still point out the errors of genocide denialism and the threats it poses to the integrity of Armenian sovereignty, even if it is pursued in response to pressure from one or more global superpowers and regional hegemons.

By implying that basic questions about the Armenian Genocide, such as "what happened and why it happened," have not yet been adequately answered, Pashinyan's statement works to challenge the Armenian Genocide as an established historical fact. But these basic questions have driven historical inquiry into the Armenian genocide for over a century. Even Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term "genocide" during World War II, studied the Armenian case and used it as a basis for the development of his concept of genocide in the 1920s and 1930s. While there are differences amongst scholars about certain details and interpretations, the basic narrative, the whys and the whats, are not in doubt. Furthermore, genocide scholars are in consensus about the status of the

Ottoman Empire's crimes against Armenians during World War I as a clear case of genocide.

The Prime Minister apparently believes that there is a hidden political agenda behind the efforts to gain formal recognition of the Armenian genocide. The Prime Minister has not been clear about who these supposed plotters are and what they seek to gain, but he has on more than one occasion hinted at this conspiratorial interpretation of the past and present. This is one reason why his statements appear to echo Turkish denialism not only in substance but also in strategy.

Türkiye denies that its forerunner, the Ottoman Empire, committed genocide against Armenians and other Christians for myriad reasons: to avoid legal responsibility that might carry with it reparations and land claims, to buttress a nationalist narrative that paints modern Türkiye as a progressive nation-state, to support Turkish supremacist ideology, to legitimize similar empire-building projects in the present day that led to the genocide in the early 20th century, and to further dehumanize Armenians as treacherous and evil. The latter point is important, because it explains a great deal of the psychological hold that denialism has on the population in Türkiye, a state that has never learned to respect national and religious differences, instead preferring the use of hate speech and violence against minorities. As long as Armenians are viewed as treacherous and evil — responsible for the "tragedies" inflicted upon them in World War I — the Turkish people do not need to come to terms with their criminal past and adjust their sense of national identity accordingly. Therefore, Türkiye and Azerbaijan's official dehumanization of Armenians is both a continuation of the genocide of World War I and a key tool in cementing national pride while ensuring that Armenians remain silenced, delegitimized, suspect, and weak. All of this guarantees the continued impunity of these states, including the impunity to attack and invade the small independent Republic of Armenia.

Therefore, when Pashinyan suggests that the Armenian genocide recognition "agenda" emerged in politically suspect ways after 1950, he is buttressing bigoted representations of Armenians that emphasize their untrustworthy and treasonous nature. Rather than deescalating tensions between Armenia and its hostile neighbors, such language risks emboldening them to take military action against remaining Armenian-controlled territory.

It must be noted that the absence of widespread political recognition of the Armenian Genocide in 1939 (a strange year for Pashinyan to choose) can be explained by many factors, key among them the fact that the word "genocide" was only coined in 1943! But there are other reasons: Europe, Russia, and the United States – the lands where most Armenian genocide survivors ended up – were preoccupied with events that would lead to the outbreak of World War II; there was no global framework at the time for understanding atrocities or demanding recognition of them; it usually takes several decades for survivor communities to regroup and find the collective power to begin the arduous work of memorialization and recognition; and the scholarly field of Genocide Studies only emerged in the 1980s. We remind the Prime Minister that the Ottoman Empire held trials for the perpetrators of the genocide at the end of the war in which many were found guilty and hanged.

The lack of formal recognition of the genocide in 1939 was not because the event itself was unclear or unknown, but because the legal, conceptual, and institutional framework to fully describe and address such atrocities did not yet exist. Even Hitler himself knew of the magnitude of the horror of the Armenian genocide, likening it to his plans for eastward expansion.
As we stated in our previous statement on Armenian genocide denial, the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide is irrefutable, grounded in extensive documentation from a variety of sources, including Ottoman state documents, eyewitness accounts, diplomatic reports, trial evidence, newspaper articles, and survivor testimonies.

In this context, it is crucial to highlight Raphael Lemkin's role in bringing the Armenian genocide into focus. Raphael Lemkin's work in fact directly challenges the Prime Minister's argument, since Lemkin sought recognition of the crime against Armenians in international law before 1939. Lemkin coined the term genocide in 1943 in his book Axis Rule in Occupied Europe, drawing on his historical studies of mass extermination — particularly the Holocaust but also the Armenian Genocide. Crucially, he viewed the Armenian case as a defining example of genocide that directly influenced his push for legal frameworks to prevent and punish such crimes already in the early 1930s. His efforts culminated in the adoption of the Genocide Convention by the United Nations in 1948, marking a pivotal moment in international law. In the very same year, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) was introduced as a new global framework to safeguard human rights and dignity. For the first time, international law gave individuals and groups the legal tools to protect themselves against oppression and injustice by the state, limiting the power of states to abuse citizens and commit large-scale violence. Before WWII, international law recognized only states as carriers of rights. The Genocide Convention and the UNDHR allowed groups and individuals to become subjects of international law as well.

It was Lemkin's advocacy and his work defining the crime of genocide that led to the drafting of the Genocide Convention, which brought renewed global attention to the Armenian Genocide in the 1950s. The Genocide Convention only came into effect on January 12, 1951. So, rather than being a manufactured agenda, the effort towards recognition of the Armenian genocide was aligned with the natural progression of international law and the revolutionary evolution of human rights discourse after WWII. Pashinyan's framing ignores this historical reality and the foundational role the Armenian Genocide played in shaping the very concept of genocide in international law.

What especially struck us in this recent statement is the Prime Minister's attempt once again to indirectly justify the genocide (specifically by asking the question of "why it happened") and to attempt to convince Armenians to doubt their intergenerational memory, life experience, historical studies, and sensitivity to the topic ("What happened, how we perceived it and through whom we perceived it"). By casting doubt on Türkiye's responsibility for the genocide, as well as on its status and importance, Pashinyan is supporting Turkish and Azerbaijani denialist narratives once again. This is a dangerous gambit, as it (perhaps ironically) threatens to embolden Armenia's neighbors against

Armenia. It further complicates the rights of the Artsakh Armenians to seek justice for the genocide they have just experienced. Finally, it could help pave the way for future genocide against Armenians by Türkiye and Azerbaijan by erasing accountability for past atrocities and offering preemptive justification.

We implore Prime Minister Pashinyan to be more careful with his language. His vague rhetoric casting doubt on established facts about the Armenian Genocide serves no productive purpose and does not advance Armenia's interests. It is one thing for a state to decide not to pursue genocide recognition as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, which can be a strategic move, and another altogether for a state's leadership to use language and echo themes familiar only to genocide deniers. Such irresponsible statements worsen the already fragile psychological climate in both Armenia and its diaspora, pressuring Armenians to see themselves as the problem rather than the genocidal states they are forced to reconcile with under threat of another genocide. It also confuses third party states and institutions, which are left doubting how best to support Armenia. This strategy is, therefore, self-defeating. Statements like these from the Armenian Prime Minister endanger Armenian sovereignty, history, and culture, providing Türkiye and Azerbaijan with another tool to undermine Armenian identity. They are also very disrespectful to the victims of the genocide and their descendants.

The Lemkin Institute remains steadfast in its support for the fight of Armenians, both in Armenia and in the diaspora, for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Türkiye and the rest of the world, regardless of the official stance of the Armenian government. We recognize that this struggle is not only about acknowledging a past atrocity but also about seeking justice for the victims and their descendants and preventing repetition of genocidal patterns against Armenians in the future.

Moreover, the Armenian fight for genocide recognition and justice is intrinsically linked to the global effort to prevent genocide and to ensure that all genocides are recognized and addressed. The recognition of the Armenian Genocide is not only crucial for Armenians but also for the broader international community's commitment to preventing future atrocities. By supporting this cause, we contribute to the ongoing global struggle to hold perpetrators accountable, uphold human rights, and ensure that such crimes are never repeated anywhere and against anyone.

We hope that the Armenian Prime Minister will clarify his statements on the genocide and work to prevent any future familiarity between his statements and those of Armenian Genocide deniers. We will continue to advocate for Armenia's right to sovereignty and especially for greater international defense of Armenia's borders.

Comments

Hovanes Boyadjian – 2025-02-02 18:54:15
I have read over and over Prime Minister Pashinyan's statement in Switzerland and I see no denialist statement nor insinuation about the veracity of the Armenian genocide. I also read Garo Paylan's recent speech in the USA where he pleaded for unity and said that we should not forget the genocide but seriously concerned about the security of Armenia. Maybe this institute would like to cast doubts about Mr. Paylan's commitment to Armenians as you have discredited Mr. Pashinian.

Nicolai (Sr.) Romashuk – 2025-01-31 05:53:35
Sometimes we are forgetting that, after the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has shaved his beard he was reincarnated, he became a newman.

Hayorti – 2025-01-31 05:19:19
Would someone tell us why the citizens of Armenia still support this Quisling? What would it take for Armenians to topple this traitor? If obscene Pashinyan holds power through the support of foreign or domestic military-security forces, let us know. In the absence of facts, false news spreads like wildfire. For example, there is the unverified report" that Pashinyan is guarded by an elite U.S contingent.

David – 2025-01-31 05:02:58
Pashinyan rose to power righteously benefiting from the awful mistakes of corrupt rulers before him. Pashinyan will fall from power righteously because of his blunders in questioning the sanctity of the Armenian Genocide. Armenians all over the world, in Armenia and in the Diaspora, will not forgive anyone who dares to humiliate their feelings of worship to the memory of the Armenian Genocide .

Harry Avanessian – 2025-01-31 02:37:38
Nicole has been compromised and bought off long ago but his day of reckoning is coming soon