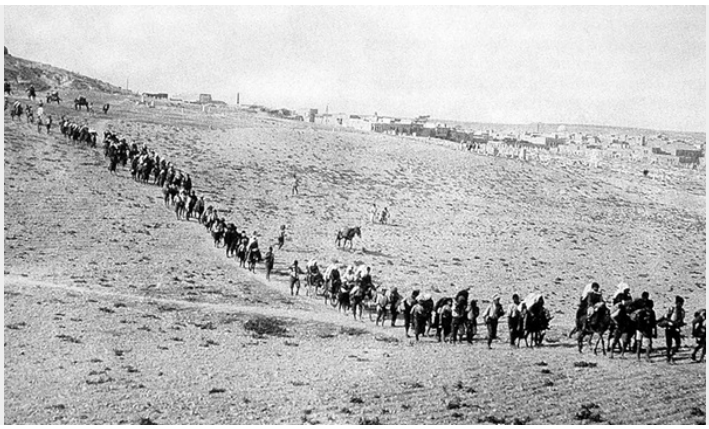
THE MACHINERY OF DESTRUCTION

Posted on April 10, 2025 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Varouj Pogharian, Bogota, 10 April 2025

A Reflection on the Armenian Genocide

As we commemorate the 110th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, it is imperative to reflect on not only the horrors of the past but also on the enduring lessons it holds for the present and the future. The Armenian Genocide stands as a stark warning of the catastrophic consequences of hatred, intolerance, and the unchecked abuse of power. Its commemoration is an opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its collective responsibility to protect vulnerable populations and to stand resolutely against hatred and discrimination in all its forms. From the Holocaust to Rwanda, Cambodia, Darfur, and most recently, the humanitarian crises in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Gaza, the echoes of the Armenian Genocide should serve as a grim reminder that failure to act decisively in the face of atrocity has devastating and far-reaching consequences.

The Armenian Relocation Decree: A Tool of Genocide

The Armenian Relocation Decree, signed by Talaat Pasha, was in force from June 1, 1915, to February 8, 1916. Cloaked in the language of national security and patriotism, the decree was a meticulously orchestrated plan designed to ensure the complete disintegration of Armenian communities within the Ottoman Empire. The forced relocations were not merely about moving Armenians from one place to another; they were an integral part of a genocidal campaign aimed at erasing the Armenian presence from the Ottoman Empire's demographic and cultural landscape. The campaign was also a state-sanctioned mechanism for the plunder of Armenian assets, as homes, businesses, and properties were systematically confiscated and redistributed.

The decree was designed to prevent Armenian survivors from ever rebuilding their lives. One of its key features was geographic isolation. Relocated Armenians were prohibited from settling within 25 kilometres of railway lines, severely limiting their access to transportation, trade, and resources. This effectively disconnected Armenian communities from one another, making it impossible for them to maintain social or economic ties. The decree also stipulated that no more than fifty Armenian households could live in any one settlement, ensuring that Armenians would be scattered in small, isolated groups incapable of forming cohesive communities. Additionally, the Armenian population in any given area was forbidden from exceeding ten percent of the local Muslim population. This ensured that Armenians would be perpetually outnumbered and marginalized, further preventing them from rebuilding the social and economic structures they had maintained for centuries.

The Death Marches: A Campaign of Annihilation

Before these restrictions could take effect, Armenians were subjected to hellish forced marches designed to destroy them physically and psychologically. The campaign of mass murder and

cultural annihilation was carried out largely through these marches. Entire villages, primarily in Eastern Anatolia, were uprooted, and their inhabitants were sent on gruelling journeys through mountains and barren deserts. Starvation, disease, dehydration, and exhaustion were constant companions, and death was omnipresent. The dead were left along the roadsides, abandoned where they fell, attracting scavengers, including brigands who looted the bodies for valuables or documents that would allow them to claim the dead person's property.

With the Ottoman military preoccupied with World War I, irregular forces—comprised largely of convicts, criminals, and brigands—were tasked with overseeing the death marches. These guards operated with impunity, knowing they had the full support of the state. They were both sadistic and exploitative, extorting the marchers by offering false promises of mercy in exchange for any remaining valuables they possessed. Compliance rarely spared the victims from brutal treatment. In many cases, the marchers were stopped at predetermined isolated and remote locations and executed. The executions were often carried out near cliffs or riverbanks, where the bodies could be disposed of easily. By outsourcing the brutality to irregular forces and local militias, the central government could maintain plausible deniability while the murder and destruction of an entire nation unfolded under its watch.

The Vulnerable: Women, Children, and the Elderly



The majority of the marchers were women, children, and the elderly, as most able-bodied men had already been separated from their families or executed. The elderly were unable to keep up with the brutal pace. Armenian women were particularly vulnerable. The guards sexually exploited them, with some offering to spare their lives—or those of their children—in exchange for sexual favours. Such promises were rarely kept, and many women were sold into slavery or forced into marriages with their captors. In some instances, Armenian girls were distributed as rewards for loyal service to the perpetrators of the genocide. The legacy of this sexual violence affected survivors and their descendants for generations.

In the aftermath of the genocide, Karen Jeppe, a Danish missionary and social worker working for the League of Nations in Aleppo, was involved in efforts to free tens of thousands of abducted women and children. In 1926, she reported that, out of thousands of women she interviewed, only one had escaped sexual assault. This harrowing statistic underscores the systematic nature of the violence inflicted upon Armenian women and girls.

Massacres and Selective Exemptions

Armenians who managed to avoid the forced marches faced the grim fate of massacre. In the city of Diyarbakir, local officials orchestrated the slaughter of hundreds of Armenians on direct orders

from the governor. A German diplomat who witnessed the massacre described it as akin to the slaughter of sheep, highlighting the dehumanization and brutality of the acts.

Despite the overwhelming brutality, a select group of Armenians—those with specific skills needed for the Ottoman war effort—were sometimes exempt from the relocations and killings. Protestant and Catholic Armenians also had a slightly better chance of survival, given that Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire's allies, occasionally protested the mass slaughter of Armenians. It was by no means a guarantee, and many Protestant and Catholic Armenians perished, as the Committee of Union and Progress leadership showed little concern for the lives of Armenians, regardless of their religious affiliation.

The Legacy and the Call to Action

The Armenian Genocide was a systematic and calculated effort to destroy a people. The methods employed—forced relocations, death marches, massacres, and sexual violence—were all part of a broader strategy to eliminate the Armenian presence from the Ottoman Empire. The international community's failure to intervene at the time set a dangerous precedent, one that has been repeated in subsequent genocides and humanitarian crises.

As we reflect on the 110th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, we must recognize the importance of vigilance and action in the face of hatred and intolerance. The international community must reaffirm its commitment to protecting vulnerable populations and preventing atrocities. The Armenian Genocide is a sombre reminder that the machinery of destruction, once set in motion, can only be stopped through collective resolve and unwavering moral courage.

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Varouj Pogharian was born and raised in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. His grandparents were from Van, Arapkir and Urfa. His family moved to Canada when he was 18. He retired from the Canadian federal government following a career that included assignments in South America. He is currently working on a historical novel, which is set in Asia Minor during the tumultuous period that spanned the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the rise of the Young Turks. His narrative is poised to explore the complexities of this historical backdrop.

Comments



Vahe Apelian – 2025-04-14 11:14:39
WHAT DO YOU SAY? The Republic of Armenia at its founding and since May 28, 1918 did not make recognition of genocide and historical Armenian lands an instrument of its foreign policy to this day and under this government as well. Do you refute that? You timidly pose an evasive question and ask: “Is betrayal the dominant trait of the Pashinyan family?” (Արդյո՞ք դավաճանությունը Փաշինյան ընտանիքի գերիշխող հատկանիշն է) I say, from Aram Manougian/Hovhannes Kachaznouni and on, the Armenian denizens who ran the ROA did not have betrayal as a dominant trait of their families, including Nikol Pashinyan and his family. SAY WHAT Noubar Serabian?



Noubar Serabian – 2025-04-13 06:16:46

While we are getting ready to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the slaughter of 1.5 million Armenians during the 1915 Genocide, let us reflect on the promise we made consisting of two words "NEVER AGAIN". We failed in delivering the promise. A Turkish tribe (Azerbaijan) that considers itself part of "One Nation Two States (Turkey, Azerbaijan) launched a blockade of Artsakh in December 2022 and lasted until September 2023. Prominent British political and religious figures described the blockade as a "...war of terror being waged by Azerbaijan, with a medieval style siege, inflicted in the 21st century and continuing into 2023, against the Armenian people in the historic Armenian land of Nagorno Karabakh [Artsakh]– relocated by Stalin in Azerbaijan. Perhaps stretched and preoccupied by the horrors in Ukraine the media's virtual silence is tragically allowing terrible atrocities to occur under the shadow of darkness." [David Alton.net] We allowed a "Genocide By Starvation" to destroy the lives of more than 120,000 Armenians. While The European Union and the "Civilized West" paid lip service to the horrors imposed by Petro-Dictator Aliyev on the hapless population of Artsakh, no so-called Christian ally of Armenia, dared to organize an "Airdrop" that could have delivered vital supplies to the starving Armenians under the Azeri siege. For more details read "The Airdrop That Can Lift The Artsakh Blockade"
https://artsakhtheinadequateresponse.blogspot.com/2023/01/the-airdrop-that-can-lift-artsakh.html
We betrayed the memory of the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, one more time when we allowed Aliyev, in September 2023, to launch his "Ethnic Cleansing" of Artsakh. More than 120,000 Armenians were forced to seek exile in Armenia while the European Union declared that Aliyev is the "Trusted Partner" of The EU. Today, we have in Armenia a government under the leadership of PM Pashinyan, who on multiple occasions declared that pursuing the international recognition of the 1915 Armenian Genocide and the return of the Artsakhtsis in exile to their ancestral land are not on the agenda of Armenia's current government. Pashinyan has been labeled by Armenian academics as "Loyal servant of the interests of Ankara and Baku, and also the humble enabler of "The Greater Turan" dream (Pan-Turkism)." Անկարայի և Բաքվի շահերի հավատարիմ ծառան, ինչպես նաև «Մեծ Թուրան» երազանքի (պանթուրքիզմ) համեստ քարոզիչը.
https://artsakhtheinadequateresponse.blogspot.com/2023/05/is-treachery-dominant-trait-of.html
Արդյո՞ք դավաճանությունը Փաշինյան ընտանիքի գերիշխող հատկանիշն է
https://artsakhtheinadequateresponse.blogspot.com/2024/09/blog-post.html



ANTOINE STEPAN TERJANIAN – 2025-04-11 21:18:09

Thank you Varouj for drawing our attention to the 10% and the 50 km rules