


PREMATURE DECLARATION OF VICTORY

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 **Editorial**, 19 May 2016

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The metaphor is not perfect, but something close to the above occurred in mid-May when Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), stated through [a blog](#) that the Armenian massacres of 1915 were (ahem) genocide. Armenian spokesmen (the Armenian Assembly of America, the Armenian National Committee of America, an Armenian sheriff in Massachusetts, and several other "community leaders") who had for years tried to persuade the ADL that there had been an Armenian Genocide, welcomed Greenblatt's announcement without reservation. The Armenian supporters of the statement believed that the Armenian community had finally, after three decades, convinced the influential and supposedly anti-racism organization--which had fought US recognition of the Armenian Genocide tooth and nail--that Turkey had committed genocide against the Armenians.

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It might sound churlish, but alas, the whole-hearted embrace of Greenblatt's statement might have been premature. There's a fly in the ointment: in fact, there are more than a half-dozen.

Before analyzing the two Greenblatt phrases ("...What happened to the Armenian people was unequivocally genocide...we would support US recognition of the Armenian Genocide"), let's consider that for three decades the revolting leader of the ADL (Abe Foxman) was the point man for the Turkish government's successful lobbying against US recognition of the Genocide. Gunslinger Foxman was unabashed in his politicking efforts on behalf of Turkish denialists. The despicable man didn't mind that his misguided posturing had made the ADL not only a virtual arm of the Israeli government's foreign ministry but had also compromised the reputation of his organization as a haven where injustice and discrimination were abhorrent. The blowhard blithely admitted to "The New York Times" (Feb. 4, 2009) that the ADL opposed a Congressional resolution because "there's too much at stake in the relationship."

On another occasion, the fat cat politico, who for many years led the 103-year-old organization, said: "...the Jewish community shouldn't be the arbiter of that history, nor should the US Congress" and then called the recognition of the Genocide "a counter-productive diversion." He didn't say what he meant by counterproductive or diversion. To crown his work on behalf of Turkey, in 2005 Foxman awarded the then-Prime Minister Erdogan the ADL's "Courage to Care" award. Two years later, because of pressure from righteous Jews, Foxman grudgingly said the massacre of the Armenians was "tantamount" to genocide. That was the "quick dry kiss on the cheek" to the Armenian lobbyists. Foxman at last retired last June and was succeeded by Greenblatt.

Considering the harm the ADL caused the Armenians for so many years, one would have expected an apology from the current ADL CEO. For all those years the hard-pressed Armenian-American community invested a great deal of time and effort in Washington to gain recognition of their genocide, but at every turn ADL led the anti-Armenian posse in the Washington Belt Way. An apology from Greenblatt for wasting so much of Armenian effort would have been the right thing to do.

Another fly in the ointment: Amazingly, the word "Turkey" doesn't appear in Greenblatt's statement. So who was the phantom genocidier? Was it spontaneous bloodletting like spontaneous combustion?

The third fly: There is no talk of compensation or reparations to the Armenians in the statement. As we have said more than once, apology and 50 cents will not get you a cup of coffee.

Writer Jack Kalpakian, in a comment to a US publication, pointed out that the ADL recognition is "far too late. Foxman and ADL did immense damage to the simple demand of the fundamental justice of acknowledgment pursued by Armenian-Americans...the ADL is too late. It lobbied against the recognition when it mattered, and it is highly unlikely that there would be recognition by the US at this stage." Kalpakian also wondered whether the acknowledgment is a ploy to "reduce friction with

the Armenian community...but it will do nothing to rebuild trust and bridges, particularly after the Israeli support for Azerbaijan in the April war." The Armenian-American writer said that the Greenblatt statement is reminiscent of a person who marches in the funeral cortege of the person he harmed.

The other fly in the ointment is the fact that the statement didn't come from the ADL National Commission. Since it was made by its CEO, it doesn't necessarily bind the organization to a solid and permanent policy. The ADL can anytime disassociate itself from the statement and declare Greenblatt's recognition was an individual belief. Some months ago President Joachim Gauck of Germany twice used the word "genocide" to describe the suffering of the Armenians during the First World War. However, this did not mean recognition of the Genocide by Germany. According to writer Luther Sahagian, "The wording doesn't require any further action or follow-through on the part of the ADL."

Another pesky fly: Greenblatt wrote that he "would support US recognition of the Armenian Genocide." "Would" (the past tense of "will") is a conditional word. According to the British Council's English language mavens, "would" is used to talk about the past or about hypothesis—things that are imagined rather than true. "Would," says the British Council, is also used for politeness. Another source of correct English says that "would" is used for unlikely situations, unlike "will" which is a definite statement. This is not an idle game of semantics. There is a huge difference between "would" and "will". Considering the importance of the statement, we are certain lawyers went through Greenblatt's blog with a fine tooth comb to protect the ADL. The ADL CEO can dissipate some of the clouds if he changed "would" to "will".

The U.S.-based "[No Place for Denial](#)" website says the ADL must recognize the Armenian Genocide unequivocally and "cease the denialist tactic of calling for further study of the Armenian Genocide." The website also wants the ADL to "cease its active opposition to U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide" and support U.S. affirmation of the Genocide, "as it does with the Holocaust".

We believe that because of the ADL's long-time Genocide denial and the bad blood this policy has created between some Armenians and Jews, the ADL CEO should issue another statement which removes the above "flies". The new statement should be sent to President Obama, to the US Senate and Congress, to the presidents of Turkey and Israel. The statement should also affirm Turkey's obligations (compensation, restitution) to Armenians.

Finally, the new ADL CEO should consider the words of Andrew H. Tarsy, former ADL regional director, who several years ago split with the organization on the Genocide issue: "I think they ought to lead the conversation about reparations for these families... the recovery of assets, land, money, items, family heirlooms. Everything that Holocaust reparation...has represented should be on the table."

