

TURKISH COUNCIL DRIPS MISINFORMATION


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Marsha Skrypuch, Brantford, 11 September 2014

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Date: August 22, 2014

For immediate release

[STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA IN REMEMBRANCE OF THOSE INTERNED IN CANADA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR](#)

Prime Minister Stephen Harper today issued the following statement in remembrance of those

interned in Canada during the First World War:

"A century ago, as a result of fear generated by the onset of the First World War, thousands of new immigrants of European origin were interned during the First World War even though there was no proof that they posed a threat to Canada.

"Many of the internees came to our shores seeking to escape oppression and to build a better future for their families, but instead found themselves imprisoned simply for having come from territory controlled by the then-German or Austro-Hungarian empires. This practice persisted even after the British government advised that most of these so-called 'enemy aliens' were in fact sympathetic to our war aims and encouraged Canada not to intern them.

"Governments have a solemn duty to defend against legitimate threats in wartime, but we look back with deep regret on an unjust policy that was implemented indiscriminately as a form of collective punishment and in violation of fundamental principles of natural justice, including the presumption of innocence.

"In Canada we acknowledge the mistakes of the past, and we learn from them. We are also steadfast in our commitment to remembering those who suffered. That is why in 2008 the Government of Canada worked closely with affected communities and committed \$10 million to the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko to establish the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund. We also included a section on the internment in our revised Citizenship Guide, Discover Canada.

"Today, the descendants of internees of Ukrainian, Croatian, German, Hungarian, Polish, and other ethnic origins, will be gathering in churches and community centres across the country to pray and to reflect on this sad moment in our history. I encourage all Canadians to take part in these events.

"I also thank the Shevchenko Foundation and the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, which coordinated the 'One Hundred Plaques across Canada' initiative, for their important roles in remembering this moment in our history and in coordinating today's commemorations.

"As we remember the past, let us also remember to celebrate the achievements of the internees and their descendants, who overcame this hardship and contributed so much to the building of our country as loyal and dedicated citizens."

[CTC Press Release Regarding Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada](#)

[in Remembrance of Those Interned in Canada During the First World War](#)

The Council of Turkish Canadians, while welcoming Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Statement of 22/08/2014 in remembrance of those new Canadians wrongfully interned in Canada during the First World War, is nevertheless sad that the PM has excluded from his list Turks from the then-Ottoman Empire, especially those living in

Brantford, Ont.

Just last month a Memorial was erected in the Mount Hope Cemetery, Brantford in remembrance of these Turks lying in the "Turkish Lot" of that Cemetery. The Mayor and City Council members were present in the inauguration ceremony attended by a large crowd of Turkish Canadian and Muslim communities.

Likewise, a Plaque has been erected in Kapuskasing in remembrance of the Turks interned in that camp during the Great War. Records also show that Turks were interned in camps such as Spirit Lake, Quebec. No survivor is known to exist from these internments.

These early Canadian Turks, subjected to wrongful treatment by the then Canadian authorities are forefathers of the present Turkish community in Canada. They deserve specific recognition similar to other victims of this mistreatment like those of Ukrainian, Croatian, German, Hungarian and Polish origins who were unjustly arrested and interned under the War Measures Act as "alien enemy."

Indeed, the CTC believes a formal apology, as in the case of Ukrainian and Japanese Canadians, is long overdue and calls upon the Harper government, with its strong commitment to moral principles, to rectify this injustice.

The Council for Turkish Canadians has posted this press release in response to the Prime Minister's statement about the 100th anniversary of Canada's WWI Internment operations. The Council's press release is riddled with inaccuracies.

"The Council of Turkish Canadians, while welcoming Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Statement of 22/08/2014 in remembrance of those new Canadians"

The majority of those interned were "enemy aliens" who were not yet naturalized thus not new Canadians. There were a few children who were born in Canada who were interned as well -- Ukrainian children at Spirit Lake in Quebec.

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Here is the PM's pertinent quote:

"Today, the descendants of internees of Ukrainian, Croatian, German, Hungarian, Polish, and other ethnic origins, will be gathering in churches and community centres across the country to pray and to reflect on this sad moment in our history. I encourage all Canadians to take part in these events."

Given the fact that 8,579 people were interned in WWI Canada (mostly Ukrainian), and approximately 135 of those were from the Ottoman Empire, including Armenians, Kurds, Assyrians, Greeks and other minorities fleeing persecution, it would have been surprising for him to mention Turks in particular, especially those living in Brantford, Ont. The internees from Brantford were not ethnic Turks.

"Just last month a Memorial was erected in the Mount Hope Cemetery, Brantford in remembrance of these Turks lying in the "Turkish Lot" of that Cemetery."

This one sentence is a masterful braiding of misinformation.

1: A cemetery marker was erected, listing the names of the deceased below a Sunni Muslim prayer and the symbol of the Turkish Republic; but that does not make the people into Turks.

2: There are no exact name matches between the list of people interned from Ottoman Turkey and the people buried at the cemetery. So in what way is the marker a memorial to those interned?

"The Mayor and City Council members were present in the inauguration ceremony attended by a large crowd of Turkish Canadian and Muslim communities."

It was not an "inauguration". It was supposed to be a prayer for the dead. Members of council were present, and they were appalled by how what was supposed to be a prayer gathering turned into a flag waving photo opportunity and an exercise in Turkish nationalism. The local Imam was also not amused.

"Likewise, a Plaque has been erected in Kapuskasing in remembrance of the Turks interned in that camp during the Great War."

There is no plaque erected in Kapuskasing in remembrance of Turks interned there. This is what is there: A single Ottoman internee, Alex Hassan, most likely an Alevi Kurd (i.e, not Muslim and not an ethnic Turk) is buried there along with other internees who died at the camp of natural causes. His headstone along with the others was restored in 2011 with a grant from [Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund](#). Some time after that work was completed, his headstone received an engraving of a star and crescent at the request of the Turkish consul. The town initially agreed to this, thinking they were being culturally sensitive. CFWWIRF has asked that the engraving be removed.

"Records also show that Turks were interned in camps such as Spirit Lake, Quebec."

135 people from the Ottoman Empire were interned in total. Some Kapuskasing internees were moved to Spirit Lake Internment Camp.

"No survivor is known to exist from these internments."

No one who lived through the First World War is still alive today, but it is patently false to claim that

there were no known survivors of the internment operations. Some internees who tried to escape did die, and a few died of disease, but nearly all survived the internment, including my own grandfather.

"These early Canadian Turks, subjected to wrongful treatment by the then Canadian authorities are forefathers of the present Turkish community in Canada."

The internees were indeed subjected to wrongful treatment but they were not ethnic Turks. They were given approximately 4,000 calories worth of food a day, they were clothed and sheltered. While they were indeed prisoners, they fared far better than Ottoman subjects who stayed in the Ottoman Empire during WWI.

"They deserve specific recognition similar to other victims of this mistreatment like those of Ukrainian, Croatian, German, Hungarian and Polish origins who were unjustly arrested and interned under the War Measures Act as "alien enemy.""

All affected groups have been recognized by the [endowment fund](#).

The Objective of the Fund

The CFWWIRF is designated for the support of projects to commemorate and recognize the experiences of ethno-cultural communities affected by the First World War Internment. Only the interest earned on the \$10 million is used to fulfill the objective of the Fund.

In 2012-2013, the [Endowment Council](#) tried very hard to engage the Turkish Canadian community, asking a representative to sit on the council, which disperses funds to worthy projects. Meetings are held monthly by conference call and in person annually. One Turkish Canadian appointee quit after a single meeting. A second Turkish Canadian appointee hung up in the middle of his second meeting and never participated again.

"Indeed, the CTC believes a formal apology, as in the case of Ukrainian and Japanese Canadians"

No affected community of the First World War internment operations ever received a formal apology and none have asked for one. The Ukrainian community, on behalf of all affected communities, asked for acknowledgement of the injustice. This has been achieved. As well, the endowment fund is restitution.

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The Council of Turkish Canadians resent Harper's recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the 100th anniversary on April 24th 2015 is the Council of Turkish Canadians' worst PR nightmare.

