UNIVERSAL CONDEMNATION OF GENOCIDE IS REQUIRED

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Category: Opinions

By Victor Dominello MP, Armenia Online, Australia

Armenia Online, launched in 2009, is the internet version of its parent weekly newspaper. It will deliver real-time news from Australia, Armenia and the greater Diaspora every day. It serves to cover community news and events.

The Armenian genocide is a heart-felt issue for the many residents of Ryde who are of Armenian heritage. But in my mind it is also a most important topic for all people who live in a civilised society. In a world that is becoming smaller and where the lines on maps are becoming less and less relevant, the concept of deliberately killing one's neighbours, friends, brothers, sisters, sons or daughters on the grounds of their nationality, their race, or their political or cultural persuasion is beyond abhorrent—it is inconceivable. However, genocide is not inconceivable, it is not unthinkable and it is not unbelievable, because it has already happened. It happened in 1915, when about 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman Government on the grounds that they were Armenians.

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Universal condemnation of genocide is required. A failure to condemn and punish the perpetrators of genocide will simply encourage evil to flourish. History has shown us that it takes very little for evil to surface. Evil is like a virulent weed: it needs only a modicum of soil to grow, and it will grow anywhere and in most conditions. One must remain vigilant to ensure that, when evil surfaces, the conditions for its growth are stunted or removed. To the extent that we can measure the progress of our civilisation, it can only be by reference to the steps that we have put in place to ensure that the dark side of our history is never repeated. The very first step in moving forward is to acknowledge the past. This was done in a very powerful way on Sunday 19 April 2009, and in the week that

followed.

On that Sunday I attended a considered address by Dr Paul Bartrop on the occasion of the Armenian Genocide Commemoration evening held at the University of Technology, Sydney, Kuring-gai campus. On the evening of 24 April 2009 I, together with a number of Ryde-based Australian Armenians, caught a chartered bus to Parliament House to attend a wreath-laying ceremony and lecture. On Sunday 26 April 2009 I attended the ninety-fourth commemoration of the Armenian genocide, organised by Ryde City Council, at Meadowbank. For me that week was powerful for a number of reasons. The Sunday address was held in a sombre setting, with photos displayed of some of the deplorable acts that took place during the genocide. The photos were in black and white and, whilst they captured only an instant in time, they will remain etched in my memory forever.

The week was also powerful as I witnessed the strength of the descendents of the survivors of the genocide, who gather together to pay respect to those lost, and to ensure that the flame of justice remains alight. What I have said should not be read as a criticism of the Turkish people. Such a construction would be offensive to me and to the tenor of the issue that I raise in this House. Indeed, to this day there are many heroic Turkish people who are also urging the recognition of the Armenian genocide. The relationship between Australia and Turkey is a very special one. It is forged in history and in blood on the shores of Gallipoli. The way in which Turkey and Australia come together each year to commemorate Anzac Day is a model expression of how, with leadership, people can unite notwithstanding past conflict.

The Armenian community in New South Wales, and in Ryde, is in good hands. It is fortunate to have the spiritual leadership of Aghan Baliozan, Primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Australia and New Zealand. The community has natural leaders amongst its numbers in Gladys Berejiklian, the member for Willoughby, and, at a local level, in Deputy Mayor Councillor Sarkis Yedellian and Councillor Artin Ekmekjian. It also has wonderful organisations such as the Armenian Chamber of Commerce, the Armenian Senior Citizens Support Group, the Ararat Scouts, Mission Armenia, the Armenian National Committee and the Armenian Youth Federation of Australia.

It is important to the many Australian Armenians in Ryde that I speak out about this issue so that they know where I stand. The world needs leaders who will take a stance on issues of principle, despite the diplomatic difficulties that may arise. For this, I applaud members of this Parliament who showed leadership on 17 April 1997 by unanimously resolving to commemorate and condemn the Armenian genocide. I endorse this resolution and call on the Federal Government to follow suit. The world needs people who believe that words matter. I ask the Australian Armenian community of Ryde to listen to these words: I will stand shoulder to shoulder with you in your goals to obtain recognition and justice arising from the Armenian genocide.