

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GENOCIDE SCHOLARS

PAST PRESIDENTS

November 3, 2009

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan
TC Basbakanlik
Bakanlikir
Ankara, Turkey

FAX: 90 312 417 0476

Dear Prime Minister Erdogan:

The recent signing of protocols by the governments of Armenia and Turkey that was brokered by leading states of the international community marks the beginning of a process that would lead to establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. Constituencies in both countries find some or all of the protocols problematic. We the former presidents of the International Association of Genocide Scholars write to you to express our concern about one of them: the establishment of a historical commission to study the fate of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire in 1915.

We are sending you this amended version of the Open Letter we wrote you in June 2005 to reiterate our objection to your insistence that there be a historical commission, in which Turkey would be involved. Because Turkey has denied the Armenian Genocide for the past nine decades, and currently under Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, public affirmation of the Genocide is a crime, it would seem impossible for Turkey to be part of a process that would assess whether or not Turkey committed genocide against the Armenians in 1915.

Outside of your government, there is no doubt about the facts of the Armenian Genocide, therefore our concern is that your demand for a historical commission is political sleight of hand designed to deny those facts. Turkey has, in fact, shown no willingness to accept impartial judgments made by outside commissions. Five years ago, the Turkish members of the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission pulled out of the commission after the arbitrator, the International Center for Transitional Justice, rendered an assessment that the events of 1915 were genocide.

And, Prime Minister Erdogan, you have repeatedly stated that even if a historical commission found that the Armenian case is genocide, Turkey would ignore the finding.

As William Schabas, the current president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, said in his letter to you and President Sarkisian, "acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide must be the starting point of

any ‘impartial historical commission,’ not one of its possible conclusions.”

Our previous letter, which was unanimously approved by the members of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, lays out the consensus among historians as to the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide. We believe the integrity of scholarship and the ethics of historical memory are at stake.

HELEN FEIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF GENOCIDE, John Jay College, New York City, feinhelen@comcast.net;

ROGER W. SMITH, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF GOVERNMENT, COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA; theseus51@msn.com;

FRANK CHALK, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, AND CO-DIRECTOR OF THE MONTREAL INSTITUTE FOR GENOCIDE STUDIES, drfrank@alcor.concordia.ca;

JOYCE APSEL, PROFESSOR OF GLOBAL STUDIES, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, jaa5@nyu.edu;

ROBERT MELSON, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, PURDUE UNIVERSITY, AND PROFESSOR OF HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE STUDIES, CLARK UNIVERSITY, melson@polsci.purdue;

ISRAEL W. CHARNY, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF PSYCHOLOGY, HEBREW UNIVERSITY, JERUSALEM,
AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE ON THE HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE,
encygeno@mail.com;

GREGORY STANTON, DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS, MARY WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, VIRGINIA, and PRESIDENT, GENOCIDE WATCH, gregoryhstanton@aol.com

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GENOCIDE SCHOLARS

12 June 2006

EXECUTIVE BOARD:

President

Israel W. Charny

Institute on Holocaust &
Genocide

POB 10311

91102 Jerusalem, Israel

encygeno@mail.com

First Vice-President

Gregory Stanton

Genocide Watch

POB 809

Washington, DC 20044, USA

IASVPA@aol.com

Second Vice-President

Linda Melvern

London, England, UK

linda@melvern.co.uk

Secretary-Treasurer

Steven Leonard Jacobs

University of Alabama

Dept. of Religious Studies

212 Manly Hall, Box 870264

Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0264,
USA

sjacobs@bama.ua.edu

Tel: 205-348-0473

Fax: 205-348-6621

ADVISORY COUNCIL:

Joyce Apsel, USA

jaa5@nyu.edu

Peter Balakian, USA

Pbalakian@mail.colgate.edu

Jerry Fowler, USA

jfowler@ushmm.org

Alex Hinton, USA

ahinton@andromeda.rutgers.edu

William Schabas, Ireland

william.schabas@nuigalway.ie

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan

TC Easbakanlik

Bakanlikir

Ankara, Turkey

FAX: 90 312 417 0476

Dear Prime Minister Erdogan:

We are sending again the letter we wrote to you on June 13, 2005 because we are dismayed that your government is still asking the Armenian government to establish a so-called objective commission to study the fate of the Armenian people in 1915. We are concerned that your request is a political ploy designed to deny the facts of the Armenian Genocide when, outside of your government, there is no doubt about the facts. Our previous letter follows:

We are writing you this open letter in response to your call for an "impartial study by historians" concerning the fate of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

We represent the major body of scholars who study genocide in North America and Europe. We are concerned that in calling for an impartial study of the Armenian Genocide you may not be fully aware of the extent of the scholarly and intellectual record on the Armenian Genocide and how this event conforms to the definition of the United Nations Genocide Convention. We want to underscore that it is not just Armenians who are affirming the Armenian Genocide but it is the overwhelming conclusion of scholars who study genocide: hundreds of independent scholars, who have no affiliations with governments, and whose work spans many countries and nationalities and the course of decades. The scholarly evidence reveals the following:

On April 24, 1915, under cover of World War I, the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire began a systematic genocide of its Armenian citizens – an unarmed Christian minority population. More than a million Armenians were exterminated through direct killing, starvation, torture, and forced death marches. The rest of the Armenian population fled into permanent exile. Thus an ancient civilization was expunged from its homeland of 2,500 years.

The Armenian Genocide was the most well-known human rights issue of its time and was reported regularly in newspapers across the United States and Europe. The Armenian Genocide is abundantly documented by thousands of official records of the United States and nations around the world including Turkey's wartime allies Germany, Austria and Hungary, by Ottoman court-martial records, by eyewitness accounts of missionaries and diplomats, by the testimony of survivors, and by decades of historical scholarship.

The Armenian Genocide is corroborated by the international scholarly, legal, and human rights community:

Eric Weitz, USA
weitz004@umn.edu

Immediate Past President
Robert Melson, USA
melson@polsci.purdue.edu

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS OF COUNCIL:

Legal Consultant
Michael J. Bazylar, USA
bazylar@aol.com

Liaison Holocaust & Genocide Programs, & Website Manager
Stephen Feinstein, USA
feins001@umn.edu

European Liaison
Eric Markusen, Denmark & USA
eka@diis.dk

Editor, Newsletter & Bulletin Board
Marc I. Sherman, Israel
marc_sherman@mail.com

- 1) Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin, when he coined the term genocide in 1944, cited the Turkish extermination of the Armenians and the Nazi extermination of the Jews as defining examples of what he meant by genocide.
- 2) The killings of the Armenians is genocide as defined by the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
- 3) In 1997 the International Association of Genocide Scholars, an organization of the world's foremost experts on genocide, unanimously passed a formal resolution affirming the Armenian Genocide.
- 4) 126 leading scholars of the Holocaust including Elie Wiesel and Yehuda Bauer placed a statement in the *New York Times* in June 2000 declaring the "incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide" and urging western democracies to acknowledge it.
- 5) The Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide (Jerusalem), and the Institute for the Study of Genocide (NYC) have affirmed the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide.
- 6) Leading texts in the international law of genocide such as William A. Schabas's *Genocide in International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) cite the Armenian Genocide as a precursor to the Holocaust and as a precedent for the law on crimes against humanity.

We note that there may be differing interpretations of genocide—how and why the Armenian Genocide happened, but to deny its factual and moral reality as genocide is not to engage in scholarship but in propaganda and efforts to absolve the perpetrator, blame the victims, and erase the ethical meaning of this history.

We would also note that scholars who advise your government and who are affiliated in other ways with your state-controlled institutions are not impartial. Such so-called "scholars" work to serve the agenda of historical and moral obfuscation when they advise you and the Turkish Parliament on how to deny the Armenian Genocide.

We believe that it is clearly in the interest of the Turkish people and their future as proud and equal participants in international, democratic discourse to acknowledge the responsibility of a previous government for the genocide of the Armenian people, just as the German government and people have done in the case of the Holocaust.

Approved unanimously at the sixth biennial meeting of THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GENOCIDE SCHOLARS (IAGS)
June 7, 2005, Boca Raton, Florida