

Turkish Prime Minister Offers Condolences to Armenians for Genocide

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Today April 24th is considered Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day by Armenians throughout the world. Yesterday for the very first time in history on the eve of the 99th year anniversary of the Armenian genocide, the Turkish government abandoned its century long official wall of denial when the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip [Erdoğan expressed his condolences](#) to Armenians around the world who lost ancestors at the hands of Ottoman Turks. It was a historic gesture welcomed by many including a handful of prominent and outspoken Turkish historians who have been encouraging the government to change its longstanding policy of denying that Turks ever killed Armenians at all. After reading his conciliatory message before the Turkish parliament, Erdoğan received a warm reception from his ministers and legislators.

Erdoğan's comments yesterday stopped short of delivering an official apology for his nation's committing genocide against the Armenians living in Turkey a century earlier during the final years of both the Ottoman Empire and World War I. The Turkish leader's conciliatory tone is seen as a first step in the right direction toward openly acknowledging the tragic events of a century before. And though very few survivors from the 1915-1917 genocide are still alive, many Armenians all over the world still feel angry with raw emotions unable to either forget or forgive the Turkish government's hard line stance of rigid denial throughout the decades.

Erdoğan's statement was issued in seven languages and widely circulated in the Turkish media. The prime minister mentioned "shared pain" inflicted on not only Armenians but Turkish people as well, making it a point to include both religions and ethnicities as victims killed during the expulsions and brutalities during "the war to end all wars." The prime minister remarked:

"The 24th of April carries a particular significance for our Armenian citizens and for all Armenians around the world, and provides a valuable opportunity to share opinions freely on a historical matter. It is indisputable that the last years of the Ottoman Empire were a difficult period, full of suffering for Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Armenian and millions of other Ottoman citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin." Making a reference to no longer holding onto their "hierarchies of pain," Erdoğan diplomatically appealed to Armenians to refrain from holding the grudge that disputes their suffering was so much worse than the other aforementioned ethnicities along with Assyrians and Greeks who also suffered their own atrocities. This point only enflamed many Armenians like Aram Hamparian, the executive director of Armenian National Committee of America, who countered that the Turkish leader's statement a mere "cold-hearted and cynical ploy" to minimize Armenians' genocidal suffering. Hamparian added that Turkey is finding itself

increasingly isolated internationally from other nations especially within its NATO alliance, and claims that Erdogan's speech was designed as merely a "repackaging" of its genocide denials.

Less than a month ago Turkey was caught with its hand in the [false flag](#) jar. A leaked tape surfaced with the Turkish intelligence chief, a general and a deputy foreign minister discussing a plan to stage a false flag attack on Turkey in order to falsely blame Syrian government forces that would then justify a military air strike on Syria. It was believed to be recorded either late last year or early this year. This kind of international embarrassment explains why the Turkish government has so vociferously been clamping down on social media. Censorship has been a feeble attempt to prevent such humiliating disclosures from leaking out to the rest of the world exposing Turkey's transparency toward military aggression against Syria at virtually all cost, of course with full stamp of approval from the American Empire.

Possessing a very rich and long history, Armenians are the first people to officially declare Christianity as their state religion in 301AD. Surrounded by Moslems, they are also the only ethnic group in the entire Middle East whose majority is Christian, with 97% identifying themselves as such. Thus over the centuries, they have historically been easy targets in the region.

It was also just last month that [eyewitness accounts](#) in Syria were reporting that mortar shells and gunfire were launched from the Turkish border toward the Armenian village of Kassab. Four weeks ago anti-Assad rebels began occupying the ancient Armenian town of 2500 residents. All but 30 of the Armenian occupants fled. A Syrian field commander in the area explained to journalists that al Qaeda insurgents initiated the attack "with clear support from the Turks."

During the three year war anti-Assad rebels have vandalized ancient Armenian Christian churches in Syria. Armenian political science [professor Ohannes Geukjian](#) from Beirut's American University stated, "Kassab is a symbol of Armenian history, language and continuity. It's very symbolic. And so with the fall of Kassab, I consider it the defeat of Armenian identity in that area." Even before the World War One-era massacres, Armenians had made a home in the nearby Syrian city of Aleppo dating back to the first century. Loss of this historical Armenian home to extremist Islamist rebels indicates a very uncertain future for these displaced Armenians.

As recently as three weeks ago there were loud [protests](#) from Armenians from across the Diaspora including such Armenian American celebrities as Kim Kardashian expressing grave concern over more Turkish efforts of ethnic cleansing. Both the Syrian opposition rebel forces and Turkey have denied violence toward the Armenians. With most of the Kassab residents temporarily relocated to the nearby town of Latakia thirty miles away, another thirty families have been reported to be refugees in the Lebanese city of Anjar. Since the anti-Assad rebels took over the town of Kassab, there has been little news coverage of the fate of both all the displaced Armenians as well as the thirty older Armenians too weak to leave the ancient Armenian community on the Mediterranean Sea.

A century ago a small portion of Armenian genocide survivors managed to stay alive despite their forced deportation across the desert from their homeland that is now Turkey to where they mostly resettled in the norther Syrian city of [Aleppo](#). Though Armenian residents have

called Aleppo their home since the first century, waves of genocide victims swelled the Armenian population in Aleppo by 1925 up to about 60,000 residents. There were 70,000 Armenians living in Aleppo and up to 100,000 in Syria at the start of the civil war three years ago. 9000 Armenians that fled from Syria during the war have sought refuge in their Diaspora homeland Armenia and have been immediately accepted as citizens of the Republic of Armenia. Due to the economic hardship of unemployment and difficulty finding adequate housing, many have since left and returned to Syria. Another 8000 refugees are reported to be living in Lebanon now.

Due to its volatile ancient history surrounded by a majority of Moslems nations, the small Christian ethnic group especially since the century ago genocide is currently spread across the globe. The estimated worldwide population of Armenians is eleven million. 3.5 million are currently living in the Republic of Armenia, including 130,000 in the disputed region of Nagorno-Korabakh that was a source of violent conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan in the early 1990's. Another [5 million](#) are disbursed on every continent with anywhere between near a million to a million and a half residing in America, predominantly in Southern California.

The annual commemoration of the Armenian genocide every April 24th brings up deep emotional memories in Armenians throughout the world. As an ethnic group Armenians have tended to be historically traditional and proud of their ancient past and culture. Though my centenarian father was still a toddler during his formative years when one third of all Armenians were being slaughtered, as a genocide survivor he grew up hearing and remembering some of the heinous crimes committed against his own family members back in the old country. And though he passed several months ago, his haunting stories of what occurred way back when still remain forever fresh in my mind. I recall a family relative who was a young adolescent girl at the time actually swallowing family jewelry to avoid the Turkish soldiers from confiscating her family's heirlooms when they invaded and looted her home. Apparently the Turks engaged in a common practice of seeking and collecting every valuable possession belonging to Armenians. As part of the systematic killing, a Turkish soldier allegedly used his saber to cut open the girl's stomach to ensure the acquisition of every last valuable.

Other stories corroborated with photographs taken at the time that have been frequently handed down from one generation to the next depicted starving Armenian victims being forced on a deportation march out of what is now eastern Turkey through the desert into Syria. Those who were too famished and weak to stay on their feet during the march as armed Turkish soldiers riding alongside on horseback prodded and pushed them, when the mostly women and children would fall to the ground, the Turks would regularly stab their victims and throw their bleeding bodies still alive to drown in the Euphrates River. Numerous accounts of the horrid scene spoke of the river running red.

The proclamation calling for extermination of all Armenians residing inside the Turkish borders issued on April 24th, 1915 proceeded in two organized phases. The first was launched on that April 24th date systematically rounded up, detained and executed the ablest-bodied Armenian males consisting of 250 patriarchal community leaders, the intellectuals, most accomplished artisans, prominent businessmen, clergymen from the Christian Armenian Orthodox church and professionals were targeted and slain. The premeditated genocide had been well thought out and organized, killing those deemed most

capable of defending their people first mostly by firing squad. This earliest offensive to massacre the most able-bodied male leaders was the cunning and largely successful Turkish strategy designed to chop off the head of its victim in order to next easily dismember the body. Thus the wholesale slaughter of the male population through massacre and forced labor generally preceded the deportation of women, children and the elderly on the death marches to the Syrian desert. In a three year period upwards of a million and a half Armenians were brutally murdered.

Despite Turkey's denial the Armenian genocide is accepted as the first modern genocide of the twentieth century, one that Adolf Hitler just two decades later would use as his blueprint model for his own Holocaust against six million Jews he killed during the Second World War. Hitler flippantly referred to the "already forgotten Armenian genocide" as his cue to proceed forth with the second genocide of the century.

Twenty-three nations have openly recognized the prolonged tragedy of the Armenian genocide, placing increasing pressure in recent years calling on the Turkish government to suspend its official "living a lie" policy of unequivocal genocide denial. Of course due to the crucially important geopolitical location of Turkey as a key NATO ally of the United States to reign supreme as the sole global superpower maintaining full dominance and hegemonic control of both the Middle East and eastern Europe right up to Russia's doorstep, America will never be among those 23 nations applying any pressure on Turkey to do the right thing, not when the US military occupies two significant military installations in Turkey.

The US maintaining its global superpower status in the strategic chessboard game of one-upmanship in the most oil rich region on earth obviously holds court over any moral principle or ethics of what might have happened to a small forgotten ethnic minority a full century ago. Incirlik US Air Force Base is located close to the ancient city of Adana near the Syrian border where the US has a persistent vested interest in fighting its proxy war to defeat the Syrian Army and the second post is Izmir Airbase in western Turkey that is utilized more pivotally for military operations in Europe.

Yesterday's conciliatory remarks by the Turkish Prime Minister mark an important footnote in Turkish-Armenian history, and perhaps at least opens a small window for further dialogue between the two nations and people. In a current world where tensions and conflicts appear to be on the rise with war looming over a number of regional hotspots, the Turkish leader's words of condolence offer a glimmer of light and hope that a spirit of forgiveness and mutual acceptance may pave the way toward much needed healing. And by this first step forward, perhaps it can set the example for more nations and more people to embrace our shared humanness and commonalities that in turn facilitates increased understanding, cooperation and peace.

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