



HART Report on the Global Forum Against the Crime of Genocide Yerevan, 22nd – 23rd April 2015

In the two days before the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on the 24th April, around 600 scholars of genocide, international lawyers, politicians, human rights workers and Armenian officials came together in Yerevan. They met to discuss the definition of genocide, the importance of commemorating and remembering past genocides, the prevention of future genocides and ways in which we can work to end the crimes against humanity that continue to plague so many around the world.

Baroness Cox and Anna Cox attended the event in Yerevan.

The timing of the event was significant – it was held in the two days leading up to the centennial memorial service of the Armenian Genocide, during which 1.5 million people were killed by the Ottoman Turks. The official day of commemoration was 24th April 2015, marking 100 years since the date generally recognised as the beginning of the systematic slaughter of Armenian leaders. However, since the 1880s there had been many attacks on Armenian communities, with the slaughter of many hundreds of Armenians, Assyrians, Ottoman Greeks and other predominantly Christian minorities. International scholars at the Forum all confirmed the appropriateness of the use of the term genocide in this context, and expressed their regret that this has not been acknowledged by Turkey and other national governments, including the UK. There was great appreciation for those governments and His Holiness Pope Francis, who have recognised the Armenian Genocide.

The Forum began with pictures and stories from the Genocide in Rwanda in 1994. These powerful images affirmed that genocide and crimes against humanity are horrific breaches of the rights to life and freedom, and all must be done to prevent future genocides. This emphasised the intention of the Forum: to discuss and denounce genocide and crimes against humanity wherever and whenever they are committed.

Day One

The President of Armenia, Serzh Sargasyan gave a warm but solemn welcome, highlighting current genocidal acts in the Middle East which demonstrate the harsh truth that genocide and crimes against humanity have not been ‘eliminated’. He went on to speak about the importance of remembering genocide, for reconciliation and prevention, stating that *“impunity is the prerequisite to the occurrence of genocide”*, and introducing the motto for the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, **‘I remember and demand’**. The demand for recognition stems from a desire for justice, to pave the way for reconciliation.

The President was keen to express the gratitude of Armenian people to the many Kurds and Turkish people who had helped save the lives of their Armenian neighbours, often at great personal risk. Sargasyan explained that *“genocide is a crime that is intended to tear a branch off the tree of civilisation”*, but that *“the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide failed to achieve what they had planned”*. The revival of life and culture of the Armenians after the genocide is proof of this.

The first day of the Forum hosted a series of panels chaired by experts, and covered a myriad of intellectual and scholarly challenges relating to genocide. In the introductory section, Luis Moreno Ocampo advocated for the need for clear guidelines on how to manage genocide. He made the point that universal recognition of the Armenian genocide is a ‘test’, as if the international community cannot agree on a genocide that took place 100 years ago, how can it reach a consensus on modern events?

Panel One: ‘Evolution of Tools of Prevention of Crimes against Humanity in International Law’

Moderated by Geoffrey Robertson, author of ‘An Inconvenient Genocide: Who Now Remembers The Plight Of The Armenians?’

Panelists: Frank Chalk, William Schabas, Israel Charny, Ragip Zarakolu, Michael Bohlander, Donna Frieze, Donald Bloxham.

The panel - comprised of world-leading experts on the crime of genocide - affirmed that the atrocities against the Armenians and other minorities do indeed amount to a crime of genocide. The term *genocide*, as defined by Raphael Lemkin in the 1940s, in fact explicitly referenced the massacres of Armenians, stating:

“Genocide: Destruction of a people in whole or in part due to ethnicity, nationality, religion, or, what happened to the Armenians in 1915 and to the Jews in 1940”.

Donald Bloxham, an historian and co-editor of ‘The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies’ argued that the fact that the crimes against humanity committed against the Armenians amounted to genocide was indisputable and not even borderline. He called it one of the more ‘complete’ genocides in terms of historical understanding of the definition.

William Shabas, professor of international law and human rights, highlighted the fact that at the time of the crime, Britain, France and Russia were the first countries to condemn the actions of the Ottoman Government as ‘crimes against humanity’, calling on them to stop these actions in a declaration made in 1915. He noted that as part of the Treaty of Lausanne, perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide were to be prosecuted and held to account. Whilst those governments who have not yet recognised these crimes as ‘genocide’ may justify this by arguing that the term was not defined then, and thus is not applicable, Shabas argued that the term ‘genocide’ can be used retroactively to apply to events in the past, present and future.

It was **Michael Bohlander,** an expert in international criminal law, who made the comparison between German recognition and apology of genocide perpetrated by the Nazis and the refusal to do so by Turkey. He highlighted the fact that events of the Holocaust are taught throughout Germany to teach future generations of the truth of their history and help to prevent genocide from happening again.

Bohlander moved beyond the Armenian Genocide, drawing attention to President al-Bashir of Sudan’s indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the lack of action by the international community. He also mentioned acknowledgment by the ICC Prosecutor of ‘unspeakable cruelty’ in Syria perpetrated by ISIL and again the lack of action. He therefore suggested that *“governments need to put their money where their mouth is, and not just where their money is”.* Bohlander indicated that other unaffected countries remain passive where access to oil, trade and other financial exchanges may be negatively impacted.

Israel Charny, Executive Director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem, proposed the creation of a world organisation led by Armenians to establish a ‘*Worldwide Union of Genocide Victims and all Caring People on Behalf of the Right to Life (R2L)*’. He emphasised the intention of genocide to eradicate the ‘other’ and listed a number of cases carried out by people of all races, religions and regions, paying particular attention to the campaigns of ISIL and other Islamist regimes currently focusing on religious and ethnic cleansing of people who do not follow their particular understanding of Islam. In an attempt to commemorate, educate and help to combat current cases and prevent mass killing in the future, Charny endorsed two resolutions proposed by the Armenian President earlier in the day: one to recognise co-victims (other minorities who were also killed in this time including Assyrians and Ottoman Greeks) of genocide, and the second to hold a day of commemoration for victims of all genocides.

Frank Chalk spoke of the need for recognition and reconciliation. He argued against animosity towards Turkish people, drawing on the work of Kerop Bedoukian, author of ‘The Urchin’. After teaching a class about the Armenian Genocide, he said, *“if at the end of this lecture, you hate the Turkish people, you have not understood what I have been trying to tell you”.* The author was himself a survivor of the Genocide, whose family was helped to survive by their Turkish neighbours. They expressed a deep hope for the possibility of reconciliation in the future.

Chalk drew on the need to ‘think as states think’ to find different approaches to encourage states to recognise the Genocide in Armenia and pressure the Turkish Government to do the same. These included the need to emphasise the avoidance of terrorism, piracy, mass displacement and organised crime which all increase in situations of mass atrocity.

Panel Two: ‘The Issue of Accountability and Elimination of the Consequences of Genocide’

Moderator: Frank Chalk

Panelists: Roger Smith, Henry Theriault, Patrick Dumberry, Cengiz Aktar, Esther Mujavayo, Yair Auron.

As highlighted in the first session, panellists argued that recognition is vital for reconciliation. It is also important for the healing process to begin for the victims genocide.

Roger Smith, an expert in the language, history and impacts of genocide denial, argued that Turkey knows the facts, but have perceived interests that take precedence over recognition. He noted the changing tactics of Turkish denial, including the recruitment of scholars to deny the genocide, threats against governments seeking to recognise the Genocide and intimidation of organisers of events such as conferences and memorials. Smith pointed out that Article 301 made using the phrase ‘Armenian Genocide’ a criminal offence in Turkey. Those who have had the courage to write about the Genocide have suffered severe repercussions, including imprisonment and murder, as in the case of Hrant Dink, who was murdered in 2007 by a 17 year old Turkish nationalist.

Henry Theriault, Chair of the Armenian Genocide Reparation Study Group, mentioned the possible risk of ‘genocide fatigue’ following the media hype surrounding the centenary, as people may be disheartened by Turkey’s continuing denial. He

suggested that the Turks may be 'riding out' these events in the hope that the Armenian Genocide will become an 'out-dated issue' by 2016. However, recognition of the genocide is not a victory of justice, but a necessary starting point for the process of justice to begin. He argued that to have the most success in receiving reparations, efforts should be made on behalf of the entire Armenian group, not just individuals (though he did point out that individuals could seek to regain stolen wealth, land and artwork for themselves). However, he acknowledged how difficult this can be for all victims of any genocide. As such, he suggested the creation of a 'global reparations movement' for all groups affected by aggression.

The issue of state responsibility, a point that has been used to justify the lack of recognition of the genocide, was tackled by **Patrick Dumberry**. He argued that state responsibility is not problematic if the state still exists. Dumberry suggested that the State of Turkey, which was officially created in the 1920s, should be considered a 'continuing state' and therefore is responsible for acknowledging and apologising for the crime of genocide committed by the Ottoman Turks. He justified this position by highlighting these key factors:

- If a state loses a large chunk of its territory, this does not mean that it is a new state, for example France did not become a new state when it lost Alsace-Lorraine.
- A change of government does not constitute a change of state as this happens in every country, particularly during elections.
- A change of name also does not constitute a new state.
- So long as the 'core' of the state remains, it is the same state. Dumberry believes that the state of Turkey was reduced to its 'core', as the historical land mostly populated by ethnically Turkish people.
- The decisive factor is recognition by other states. For example, Russia was viewed as the continuing states of the USSR, whilst others that divided were seen as new states.

Whilst Turkey may have attempted to be viewed as a 'new' state to limit backlash from the genocide committed during the Ottoman rule, Dumberry argues that this view was not shared by other states who see Turkey as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, it is Turkey that must take responsibility for the Genocide and provide for reparations.

Next to speak in the panel was **Turkish academic Cengiz Aktar**. Aktar pointed out that associating denial with Turkey was inaccurate as there is no single view from 'Turkey' because multiple groups and narratives exist, holding different opinions. In reality, he noted that many Turkish people don't 'buy' the Turkish Government's official narrative of denial and most publishing houses in Turkey had published works on the Armenian Genocide.

Aktar reiterated that academia in Turkey has many students and academics studying several aspects of the genocide. In addition, he stated that the cultural and musical heritage of Armenians was celebrated by many, and religious memory was being held as churches are being restored and new chapels built. Furthermore, many who had been forced to convert to Islam to survive are reconvert to Christianity.

He was encouraged by the positive response to a public apology campaign that had received over 10,000 signatories in 3 days and over 30,00 overall, as well as ceremonies due to be held across the country on the 24th April in commemoration of the Genocide, including one in Taksim Square. Whilst Article 305 of the Turkish Penal Code makes it illegal to use the term 'genocide', many are doing so anyway. In all, 9% (amounting to 7 million people) of the population in Turkey openly express the desire for the Government to recognise the Genocide and apologise, this is an encouraging number that will hopefully grow.

In contrast, **Yair Auron, an Israeli historian**, began his talk with regret that Israeli conferences of a similar vein to this, fail to mention the victims of other genocides choosing only to focus on the Holocaust. He highlighted the need for recognition by arguing that *'when we deny a genocide, we prepare the ground for a new one'*. Furthermore, due to a continued fight for justice and a consequent lack of closure, he noted that young Armenians today, who do not know survivors of the genocide, are nevertheless greatly weighed down by 'memory' of the genocide due to persistent denial.

He believes that many support the perpetrators because they are strong, yet as a bystander, you are part of the guilty party. He asserts that we must therefore deal with the Armenian genocide as a moral issue, and particularly placed pressure on Germany and Israel to recognise the genocide.

Finally, Auron noted that attacks against Armenians continued after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the Turkish era with churches and schools being destroyed, the murder of Hrant Dink and other abuses. Nevertheless, memory programmes in Turkey are making slow but positive progress.

With the depth of scholarly discussion, it can be easy to lose sight of the people and the lives affected by this horrendous crime. **Esther Mujawayo, a survivor of the genocide in Rwanda and specialist in post-genocide psychology**, valiantly reminded us of the people behind the definitions, laws and prosecutions with stories from the experience of her and her family. Esther described sexual violence and killings of the genocide in which she lost her husband, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings. She shared how she was fortunate but tortured by her survival, able to carry on in the early days due to the need to care for her

young children. She expressed the value of the use of symbolism to deal with grief, for example a great hope for her, was finding a flower growing in the ground where her younger sister had been killed. This flower was her hope for life after the genocide and inspired the title of her book 'la fleur de Stephanie'. From death and destruction, there is hope and life. Esther was keen to remind the audience of the need to look to the future, encouraging the Armenian community by highlighting the hope to be found in the younger generation represented by the ever helpful, welcoming and smiling volunteers who helped so excellently throughout the convention.

Finally **Ragip Zarakolu, a human rights activist from Turkey** who spent many years in prison for his activism, reminded us that following the accusations against the Ottomans in 1915 by the French, British and Russians, promised trials against the leaders of the genocide never took place.

He suggested reasons for Turkish denial in the present day included the threat of having to pay reparations and the fact that many in the international community ignore the crime in endeavours to sustain good relations with Turkey. Zarakolu mentioned the U.S. President Obama in particular as he had formerly accepted the truth of the genocide, but on coming to power, has refused to recognise the genocide on behalf of America.

Consequently, rather than acknowledging the crime, the Turkish Government carries out intimidation campaigns, including recent threats to the Pope for acknowledging the truth and pain of the Armenians and a Turkish Parliamentarian who offered an apology. Zarakolu claims that the Turkish Government 'locks the Turkish nation in a crime'.

Following each panel session, the floor was opened to the audience to give a brief statement or ask a question to the panel. One participant raised a question on the 'crime against aggression' in preventing genocide by stopping attacks before they reach the genocidal stage. Will Shabas answered that this is currently under discussion at the ICC, and will hopefully come into force in two years' time. Others used this time to share the stories of their families who suffered in the genocide and to emphasise the point that other minorities were killed alongside the Armenians.

Day Two | Plenary session: "Parliamentarians against Genocide"

Co-chairs: Patrick Devedjian (France), Nikolay Ryzhkov (Russia), Baroness Caroline Cox (UK)

Statement by H.E. Mr. Galust Sahakyan, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia

Statements by parliamentarians or parliamentary delegations

The second day offered the opportunity for the 30 parliamentarians represented at the Forum, including 22 from countries who have officially recognised the genocide, to make their own presentations. Parliamentarians came from a wide range of countries including Germany, Cyprus, Greece, Canada, Iraq and Turkey, as well as multiple international organisations such as the European Parliament and the World Council of Churches. The session was chaired by Patrick Devedjian (France), Nikolay Ryzhkov (Russia) and Baroness Caroline Cox (UK), representing the first countries to condemn 'crimes against humanity' and advocate an immediate end to the violence in 1915.

Many made the case for the need for Turkey to follow suit drawing on the need for recognition to prevent future cases. The quotation of Adolf Hitler was used multiple times to support this point, as he ordered his Death Head Units to undertake the wholesale killing of Polish people with his infamous words "[*Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?*](#)". Many genocides which have taken place since the Armenian genocide including those in Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan (Darfur) and currently Iraq and Syria were identified, with profound regret that they have not been prevented and that consequently lessons still have not been learnt.

In support of recognition and prevention, the Lebanese Parliamentarian Ghassan Moughaibar argued that '*genocides kill twice. The second time by silence.*' He said that '*rather than writing history, we want to write the present and the future*' by eradicating genocide. To support this, he suggested that those attending the forum should establish a permanent network of '*parliamentarians against genocide.*'

Many Parliamentarians shared the dates that their governments had recognised the genocide, including Uruguay, the first country to formally recognise the genocide in 1965, Cyprus, the first European country to recognise it on 24 April 1975, and others, including Canada, Russia, Lebanon, Greece, France and Italy.

In contrast, Belgium reported with sadness, the cancellation of the parliamentary discussion scheduled to discuss the recognition of the genocide due to pressure from Turkey. Nevertheless, many congratulated the European Parliament on its calls on 15th April for Turkey to recognise the genocide and others congratulated the Pope on his statement made earlier this month, *“In the past century, our human family has lived through three massive and unprecedented tragedies. The first, which is widely considered ‘the first genocide of the 20th century,’ struck your own Armenian people”*.

Baroness (Caroline) Cox put on record her deep sadness that the British Government now refuses to recognise the Genocide, saying that she believes this is shameful. However, she welcomed the recognition by Wales and Scotland, congratulating them and all who have done so.

Caroline Cox also referred to other current genocides which are not being recognised, including the Government of Sudan's policies of attempted ethnic cleansing in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States and Azerbaijan's attempt to eliminate the Armenians from their historic homelands in Nagorno Karabakh. She also argued that the Armenians of Karabakh have as much right to self determination as the people of Kosovo. In addition, Caroline Cox highlighted the importance of recognising and honouring those courageous Turkish people who risked their lives to help Armenians during the perpetration of the Genocide, as well as those who subsequently speak out in acknowledgement of the truth, sometimes paying the ultimate price, such as Hrant Dink who was murdered for doing so. She also recounted her experience of a visit to Turkey to undertake a lecture tour, during which she met many Turkish professional colleagues who openly admitted their belief in the historic reality of the Genocide and wished their Government would do so, as they hated being citizens of a nation which was ‘living a lie.’

The Global Forum culminated with the c. 600 delegates endorsing the *Yerevan Declaration of the Global Forum*, the full text of which can be found [here](#).

There is still hope that the Turkish Government will choose the path of truth and reconciliation in order to help begin the healing process for the millions of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks who lost family members, land, and cultural treasures to genocide with no justice.

In commemoration, a poignant ceremony was held on the site of the **Armenian Genocide memorial complex** (Tsitsernakaberd) on the 24th April 2015 to mark the centenary of this awful crime. A choir of children sang, symbolising hope for a future and speeches were made by the Presidents of Armenia, Russia and France and a blessing was given by Catholicos Karekin II of all Armenians. Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades and Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic were also present. The ceremony closed with the laying of flowers around the eternal fire of Remembrance and the echoes of the theme 'I remember and demand'.