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Mr. Georges P. Hébert  
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#### RE. TREATMENT BY THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT OF CITIZENS OF ARMENIAN ORIGIN

Dear Mr. Hébert:

I am writing in response to your request for information on the relationship between the Armenian people of Turkey and the Turkish Government since 1915.

The horrors that the rulers of Turkey inflicted on the Armenian people became known outside of Turkey shortly after they began in April 1915. Articles about the killings filled the pages of the American press, including the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. The United States would not enter the First World War until 1917 and American diplomats and missionaries, well represented in the cities, towns and villages of Turkey, were in a good position to observe the lethal events. The United States in 1915 was still a neutral power, pro-Allied in its economic policies and cultural loyalties, to be sure, but struggling to broker a truce between the Allied powers, on the one hand, and the Central Powers, which included Germany and Turkey, on the other.

It took less than two weeks before the American press began to describe the planned and systematic destruction of Armenians by well-coordinated gangs of government-authorized and highly organized killers, operating in conjunction with the armed forces of Turkey. On 10 July 1915, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Henry Morgenthau cabled Washington summarizing the confidential observations of U.S. consular officials and missionaries all around the country, leaving no doubt that the slaughter was coordinated by the violently nationalistic Committee of Union and Progress, which controlled the Government of Turkey. Ambassador Morgenthau wrote:

Persecution of Armenians assuming unprecedented proportions. Reports from widely scattered districts indicate systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations and through arbitrary arrests, terrible tortures, wholesale expulsion and deportations from one end of the Empire to the other, accompanied by frequent instances of rape, pillage, and murder, turning into massacre, to bring destruction and destitution to them. These measures are not in response to popular or fanatical demand but are purely arbitrary and directed from Constantinople in the name of military necessity, often in districts where no military operations are likely to take place. . . . Most of the sufferers are innocent and have been loyal to Ottoman Government. Nearly all are old men, women, all the men from twenty to forty-five are in Turkish army. The victims find themselves dispossessed from their homes and sent on foot to be dispersed in districts where they are unknown and no provisions have been made to lodge or feed them. We have in several places been refused permission to relieve their misery or to have access to them.

Canadian newspapers, too, published numerous reports on the murder of the Armenian people, now recognized as the first large genocide of the twentieth century. On 14 April 1916, La Presse published a report from Paris declaring that:

Un récit terrifiant des massacres de l'Arménie est parvenu ici. Des soldats Turcs, témoins de ces scènes d'horreur, disent avoir vu des milliers de femmes implorant leur bourreaux, à genoux, massacrées sans pitié. D'autres pour épargner à leurs enfants d'atroces tortures les jetaient dans le Tigre ou l'Euphrate.

Les Arméniens étaient conduits en exil par bandes, comme des animaux, et ceux qui essayaient la moindre résistance étaient étranglés sans pitié. Chaque jour, des prisonniers étaient lancés dans les précipices qui bordent la route, des enfants égorgés et des femmes violées et déshonorées.

Un missionnaire raconte que des femmes, des enfants et des vieillards, ne pouvant supporter les fatigues de la route, ont été liés ensemble et précipités dans un torrent où la mort les attendait.

On 24 May 1915, the Allies warned Turkish officials that they would suffer dire consequences for what they called the "new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization." This was the result of the French Government's proposal that in view of the "crimes of Turkey against humanity," the Allies should proclaim that all the members of the Turkish government who were implicated in the massacres would be held personally liable for their acts when the war ended (See American Ambassador in France [Sharp] to the Secretary of State, 28 May 1915, enclosing the French note of 24 May 1915, in U.S. Department of State, The Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, p. 981.)

Indeed, courts-martial organized by the new, pro-Allied Turkish government did get underway following the Allied victory of November 1918, but seven of the top leaders of the Committee of

Union and Progress escaped . It was the Allies' desire to build up their anti-Bolshevik alliance with Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the next Turkish leader, which brought a halt to the process and many of the detained Turkish leaders were released on 21 November 1921 as part of an exchange agreement between the British and Mustafa Kemal. It is also true that thousands of Armenians owed their lives to Turks who had helped them, among them officials who resigned in protest or were fired because they refused to participate in the deportations and killings of innocent men, women and children, but the memory of these heroes has been obliterated from the officially-sanctioned history of Turkey.

Unfortunately, Mustafa Kemal, who was privately very critical of the authors of the genocide in the previous Turkish government, felt compelled to defend their actions in public. So has every successive government of Turkey in the twentieth century. Denial of the genocide is firmly embedded in a national historical myth which denies the important role of Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, Jews and other minorities in the development of modern Turkey. What is more, the governments of Turkey ever since 1920 have embarked on campaigns to erase these groups from the historical record by eradicating their family names, misattributing their historical monuments, and distorting the teaching of Turkey's history in the schools of the land.

Clive Foss, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, has done extensive archeological work in Turkey and is an expert on ancient Armenian coinage. In his essay, "A Vanishing Nation: The Turkish View of Armenian History" he writes that the Turkish government

has been systematically changing the names of villages to make them more Turkish. Any name which does not have a meaning in Turkish, or does not sound Turkish, whatever its origin, is replaced by a banal name assigned by a bureau in Ankara, with no respect to local conditions or traditions.

The treatment of Armenian monuments, the relics of a once great civilization which contributed major innovations to Western architecture, among other achievements, are, according to Foss,

presented ambiguously, without clear identification of their builders, or as examples of the influence of the superiority of Turkish architecture. In all this, a clear line is evident: the Armenian presence is to be consigned, as far as possible, to oblivion.

The imposition of Turkish family names on Armenian families was part of a consistent policy of Turkicizing the Armenian population of that land.

In his "Foreword" to Faik Ökte's book, *The Tragedy of the Turkish Capital Tax* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), David Brown observes that following

the obligatory adoption of surnames by every Turkish citizen in 1935, pressure was brought to bear upon the minorities to adopt Turkish sounding surnames. Thus, Istanbul Jews, Greeks and Armenians were forced to give up their traditional surnames and adopt new ones.

In order to appropriately gauge the feeling engendered among the Armenian population by that development, one must bear in mind that this policy originated and was consistently applied by governments of Turkey that had refused to acknowledge the genocide of 1915 directed against the Armenian people.

Successive Turkish governments implemented the policy of erasing any memory of the Armenian people—except as bandits and traitors—from Turkish history. Thus, those who survived the planned annihilation of roughly one million Armenians from 1915 to 1918, the members of the Armenian community in Turkey, were required after 1935 to bear Turkish names which properly symbolized, for them, the effort to eradicate the history of their ancestors and the victory of those who supported that process. This development represented the triumph of integral nationalism in Turkey and buried for another 65 years the chance of forward looking Turkish leaders to develop in their country any form of modern, inclusive civic nationalism which recognized the existence and rights of minorities such as the Armenians.

Yours truly,

Frank Chalk, Ph.D.