



ARMENIA

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PRESS RELEASE

**Ambassador Martirosyan speaks at the Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide
in the City Hall, New York**

On April 23, 2004, Amb. Armen Martirosyan, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the UN, made a speech at the New York City Hall gathering commemorating the Armenian Genocide. In his speech he reflected on various aspects of genocide as a crime against humanity, and touched upon questions of the responsibility of the international community to protect people threatened by genocide and ways to avert the repetition of this crime.

Please find below the text of the speech in full.

Speech of H.E. Ambassador Armen Martirosyan, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations at the Armenian Genocide Commemoration in the City Hall

April, 23, 2004, New York

Your Eminence, Reverend Clergy
Distinguished members of United States Congress,
Your Excellency Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus, representative of a country that officially recognized the Armenian Genocide,

I thank all of you for being today among us and with us.

Professor Balakian, Professor Melson,
Dear compatriots,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organizers for making this important forum and for granting me the opportunity to address the participants. I am indeed privileged to speak in this historical hall, which has hosted many remarkable events of this great city.

We have gathered again, as we do every year, to pay our respect to the memory of the 1.5 million innocent Armenians that fell victim to the first genocide of the 20th century. We are

looking for the ways to future, but our thoughts go back again and again to the nearly century-old events of 1915 and we keep asking: “WHY?” Why did it happen to us? Why did the world keep silent when all the signs of the looming tragedy were there? Why did the great powers of the time turn a blind eye when the ethnic cleansing was being carried out in broad daylight? Why did not they bring the perpetrators to justice? Why are attempts made to try to push the memories of the Armenian genocide into oblivion, which allows for rejectionist policies not only to be contemplated but also implemented? Did we, Armenians, learn our lesson from the tragedy of our grandparents? Did the world learn from the tragedy of Armenians?

Presumably, one may say that the world has changed today. The international community adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948 out of necessity “to prevent from happening again that what had happened to Armenians during World War I and to Jews during WW II”, as Rafael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide” and co-authored the Convention put it. “Never again”, was the basic message of the authors of the Genocide Convention. Yet, about 2 weeks ago the world community was commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

It is ironic that the same questions were being asked by the international community on the reach of the international justice, the roots of violence, responsibility of the international community to protect people threatened by genocide and ways to avert the repetition of this crime against humanity. “If the international community had acted promptly and with determination, it could have stopped most of the killing. But the political will was not there,” stated UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in his message to the Rwandan Forum organized in March. When I read these words, they seemed to echo the outcry of Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, the then US Ambassador to Turkey: “My failure to stop the destruction of the Armenians made Turkey for me a place of horror, and I found intolerable my further daily association with men who, ...were still reeking with the blood of nearly a million human beings.”

During the Armenian genocide the military and political establishment of the world main actors allowed murder to take place without facing any consequences. Thus cleansing became part of the political culture, an “acceptable” way for solving problems.

The Armenian Genocide showed that it could be done: the policy of genocide by the Ottoman Turkish Government went unchecked by other powers and in time the possibility of such policy built up new brutalities. The vicious developments did not stop at Auschwitz. The Holocaust and the tragic events of WW II did not conclude the “age of genocide.” We, Armenians witnessed another attempt in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku at the end of the 20th century...

There was one lesson the international community did not learn from the Armenian Genocide: impunity, indifference and inaction pave the way for repetition of the most horrible crime against humanity. The world has witnessed Rwanda, Cambodia, Balkans.

“The silence that had greeted genocides in the past must be replaced by a global clamor and a willingness to call what has happened by its true name,” I would gladly subscribe to these words of the UN Secretary General hoping that this message of remorse for the past inaction and negligence on behalf of the international community also reflects the resolve and sound commitment to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.

Pursuing this goal the international community during the second half of 20th century has undertaken necessary steps in the field of prevention of genocide. 50 years after the adoption of the Genocide Convention, the International Criminal Court was established to prosecute those responsible for the crime of genocide, individual tribunals were established to punish the

perpetrators. Nowadays the United Nations is contemplating the idea of a special rapporteur to analyze what further steps could be taken to better equip the UN and member states to prevent genocide with resolve.

“There was a glaring and tragic lack of political will to intervene to stop genocide, especially on the part of the UN most powerful members,” is the resume of the messages repeated over and over by the speakers at the commemoration of the Rwandan genocide. 90 years after the tragic events in the Ottoman Turkish Empire we still hear the same words.

It is an awakening call. Unless the international community unanimously acknowledges the Armenian Genocide, unless it accepts its responsibility for negligence that allowed about 1.5 million innocent victims slaughtered for their ethnic belonging, unless historical justice is done and selective and politically-motivated application of the term of genocide stops, there will be no guarantee for non-repetition and we may still hear the same words for future atrocities: “If there was a political will...”

Armenian Genocide is an undeniable and incontrovertible fact. This is absolutely clear not only for us, but is acknowledged by a large number of countries that putting aside the sensitivity of their bilateral relations with Turkey officially recognized and condemned the crime of Genocide committed against the Armenian people. We are grateful to them.

It is vexing, however, that some states that exemplify democratic standards and advocate protection and promotion of human rights worldwide, when faced with the recognition of the Armenian genocide, still pursue their geopolitical interests at the expense of universal human values. However, reconciliation starts from the acknowledgement of the crime committed: avowal is as vital for the victim as it is essential for the perpetrator. I believe this moral ethics is particularly important for the present Turkey striving to become a member of the European civilization at the same time desperately avoiding of culpable pages of its own history.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Armenian legacy counts decades of centuries, during which we often had to fight against different conquerors, paying a high price for our faith, our geography, and sometimes our own mistakes. However, we have managed to come out of all the ordeals and trials of the destiny hardened in their flames and contributing to the world cultural heritage. And there would be few nations on this sinful Earth to be as grateful to the Lord as we, Armenians, for our dramatic but rewarding journey through the history.

We are given much, but the expectations are also high. We are responsible both to the memory of our ancestors and to the future generations, and we cannot evade either of them.

We have learned our lesson: **We** are the guarantee for the tragedy not to repeat itself. **We** have to build a strong nation with a competitive economy, a society based on democratic stability and respect for human rights, which is actively and constructively engaged in world affairs. The foundation is there.

For the last three years Armenia has been registering double-digit growth rates in economy and exports. Notwithstanding the recent turmoil, Armenia is still the most stable country in the region and is considered to be a reliable partner. It is steadily moving towards establishment of democratic and rule-of-law society. It is not easy. There are many challenges ahead. And as the not-so-past history shows, the most dangerous ones may come from within. They threaten to shatter the foundations of the country inevitably affecting internal stability and weakening the country's bargaining power internationally. Some would do anything to achieve their narrow

personal gains shrouding it under political stance. They even try to use the Diasporan sentiments to their advantage by manipulating the public opinion through negative and sometimes fabricated propaganda.

We have no choice but to be resolved: state-building is not an easy task and we all learn on the path to democracy. A society based on rule-of-law should be built through legal and constitutional actions. Following the law is a thorny path both for the government and the civil society. Nevertheless, it is the only acceptable and most profound one. We have to take it to build a prosperous nation to pay a tribute to the memory of the victims of the genocide and due respect to survivors who suffered through enormous hardships to lay the foundation for our future. I do think about such a future with all the hope that can come out of the warmest feelings, deep commitments and dedication towards our Motherland-Armenia.

Thank you

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