



# ARMENIA

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **MINISTER OSKANIAN ADDRESSES UN SPECIAL SESSION**

Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanian was among a select group of foreign ministers who addressed the UN 28th Special Session, on the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps. The session was held just a few days before the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, by Soviet troops, near the end of World War II.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan spoke about the role of the UN, which was founded immediately following the Second World War. The massive violations of human rights during the war were an impetus for the formation of this international institution, 60 years ago, he explained.

The Secretary General was followed by Holocaust Survivor, writer, Nobel Prize Winner for Peace, Professor Elie Wiesel, and former UN Undersecretary Sir Brian Urquhart. Elie Wiesel evoked images of the horrors that concentration camp inmates had to endure, and repeatedly expressed amazement at humanity's capacity for such evil, and for such indifference. Sir Brian, then a member of the Allied Forces that liberated the camps, stressed humanity's collective responsibility in the prevention of genocides and in bringing to justice the perpetrators.

They were followed by Silvan Shalom, the Foreign Minister of Israel, the Special Representative of Poland, Mr. Bronislaw Geremek, Vladimir Lukin, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Russian Federation, Paul Wolfowitz, US Deputy Secretary of Defense, Jean Asselborn, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, on behalf of the European Union, and Marcello Pera, Speaker of the Italian Senate.

Together with Minister Oskanian, also on the rostrum were other foreign ministers: Joschka Fischer, Germany, Michel Barnier, France, Pierre Pettigrew, Canada, Ilinka Mitreva, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as representatives of Greece, Romania, Norway, Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands and Great Britain.

The full text of the Minister's speech follows:

Statement of His Excellency  
Vartan Oskanian  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Armenia  
At the  
28th Special Session  
on the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps

January 24, 2005 New York

Mr. President  
Your Excellencies  
Dear Friends,

On behalf of the people and government of Armenia, and as a descendant of genocide survivors, I feel compelled to be here today, to join other survivors and descendants, of both victims and perpetrators, to take part in this commemoration. I am also duty-bound to urge us all to confront more effectively the threat of genocide anywhere, at any time, regardless of cost and political discomfort.

The liberation of Auschwitz is, indeed, cause for commemorative celebration. However, in this commemoration, with each uttering of the name Auschwitz, we are forced to reflect: to look back, look around, look deep, look at the other, but also look inward, at ourselves.

After 9/11 and reacting to the unusually high number of victims of a singular event, an editorialist proclaimed "We are all Americans". Sympathy, solidarity, anxiety, and indignation bound us together. How much more intense our feelings about Auschwitz and the singularity of its horror, its synonymity with the technology of death-making, its eerily ordinary commitment to efficiency, to pragmatic, effective, result-oriented administration.

After Auschwitz, we are all Jews, we are all Gypsies, we are all unfit, deviant and undesirable, for someone, somewhere. After Auschwitz, the conscience of man cannot remain the same. Man's inhumanity to men, to women, to children, and to the elderly, is no longer a concept in search of a name, an image, a description. Auschwitz lends its malefic aura to all the Auschwitzes of history, our collective history, both before and after.

In the 20th century alone, with its 15 genocides, the victims have their own names for places of infamy. What the French call 'les lieux infames de memoire' are everywhere. Places of horror, slaughter, of massacre, of the indiscriminate killing of all those who have belonged to a segment, a category, an ethnic group, a race or a religion. For Armenians, it is the desert of Deir-El-Zor, for Cambodians they are the killing fields, for the children of the 21st century, it is Darfur. For the Jews and Poles and for a whole generation of us growing up after The War, it is Auschwitz.

Mr. President,

Just as we all were, or are, or might be victims, we all were or are or might also be guilty. It is only through the engagement of those who have seen and done the unimaginable, and who have

had the dignity, the grace, the sensitivity, the decency and courage to acknowledge wrongdoing, that we may achieve the requisite collective political will and its expression.

This is not as naïve, unrealistic, idealistic as some might wish to label it, perhaps in order to dismiss it. Genocide is not about individuals who act insanely, do evil, commit crimes, perpetrate irrevocable wrongs. Genocide is the undertaking of a state apparatus, which must, by definition, act coherently, pragmatically, with structure and organization.

Thus, this is not a plea to reform human beings, but an appeal to take conscious account of the role of our national institutions and international institutions must play to insure that no one can expect to enjoy impunity.

After Auschwitz one would expect that no one any longer has a right to turn a blind eye or a deaf ear. As an Armenian, I know that a blind eye, a deaf ear and a muted tongue perpetuate the wounds. It is a memory of suffering unrelieved by strong condemnation and unequivocal recognition. The catharsis that the victims deserve, which societies require in order to heal and move forward together, obligates us here at the UN, and in the international community, to be witness, to call things by their name, to remove the veil of obfuscation, of double standards, of political expediency.

Mr. Chairman,

Following the Tsunami-provoked disaster, we have become painfully aware of a paradox. On the one hand, multilateral assistance efforts were massive, swift, generous and without discrimination. But, when compared and contrasted with today's other major tragedy, in Africa, it is plain that for Darfur, formal and ritual condemnation has not been followed by any dissuasive action against the perpetrators.

The difference with the Tsunami, of course, was that there were no perpetrators. No one wielded the sword, pulled the trigger or pushed the button that released the gas.

Recognizing the victims and acknowledging them is also to recognize that there are perpetrators. But this is absolutely not the same as actually naming them, shaming them, dissuading or warning them, isolating or punishing them.

If these observations signal a certain naiveté that overlooks the enduring structures of our political and security interests, then, on this occasion, when we have gathered to commemorate this horrible event, then allow me this one question: if not here and now, then where and when?

Mr. Chairman,

The Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana, who has been quoted here, admonished us to remember the past, or be condemned to repeat it. This admonition has significance for me personally, because the destruction of my people, whose fate in some way impinged upon the fate of the Jews of Europe, should have been viewed more widely seen as a warning of things to come.

Jews and Armenians are linked forever by Hitler. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians? said Adolf Hitler, days before he entered Poland.

Hitler's cynical remembrance of Armenians is prominently displayed in the Holocaust Memorial in Washington because it is profound commentary about the crucial role of third parties in genocide prevention and remembrance. Genocide is the manifestation of the break in the covenant that governments have with their peoples. Therefore, it is third parties who become crucial actors in genocide prevention, humanitarian assistance and genocide remembrance.

We are commemorating today, because the Soviet troops marched into Auschwitz 60 years ago. I am here today because the Arabs provided sanctuary to Armenian deportees 90 years ago.

Third parties, indeed, can make the difference between life and death. Their rejection of the behaviors and policies which are neither in anyone's national interest nor in humanity's international interest, is of immense moral and political value.

What neighbors, well-wishers, the international community can't accomplish, is the transcending and reconciling which the parties must do for themselves. The victims, first, must exhibit the dignity, capacity and willingness to move on, and the perpetrators, first and last, must summon the deep force of humanity and goodness and must overcome the memory of the inner evil which had already prevailed, and must renounce the deed, its intent, its consequences, its architects and executors.

Auschwitz signifies the worst of hate, of indifference, of dehumanization. Remembrance of Auschwitz and its purpose, however abhorrent, is a vital step to making real the phrase "Never Again".

Thank you.

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