

ROBERT M. MORGENTHAU'S REMARKS- ARMENIAN BAR
ASSOCIATION – APRIL 26, 2018

Reverend clergy, distinguished jurists, fellow honorees, sisters and brothers at the bar:

I am most grateful to you for honoring me, and the memory of my grandfather, on what would have been his 162nd birthday.

It is particularly appropriate that you do so at an event honoring public service. For while everyone in this room is aware of my grandfather's support of the Armenian people during and after the Genocide, you may not know of the impact of the Genocide upon him, personally.

His own words express it best: he said when he resigned his post as ambassador, “I had reached the end of my resources.” By then, my grandfather had witnessed the slaughter of the Armenian people. He had argued with men who had ordered the destruction of a nation, men whom he described as “reeking with blood.” And, perhaps most cruelly of all, he had endured the indifference of his own government, that last best hope on earth, which stood idly by as the horror continued.

He returned home with his son -- my father, Henry Morgenthau, Jr. And starting then, and for as long as he lived, my grandfather told all of us the lessons that he drew from the Genocide.

The chief lesson he taught is that there are, in the world, many people whose basic

human rights and very lives are threatened by despots and dictators and thugs posing as political leaders. He taught us that we have a fundamental obligation to protect those people. And the way we do that is the way you do it every day – through public service.

My grandfather's words made a big impression on me – in fact maybe *too big* an impression. When I graduated from Yale Law School and interviewed for jobs with law firms. I explained that I planned to stay for only a short while and then leave to pursue my true calling, public service.

I was promptly rejected by all of them.

Finally, a very great man with his own passion for public service, Robert Patterson, took a chance and hired me at the law firm that today bears his name. And thus, began my legal career.

I served as United States Attorney for eight years, and as Manhattan District Attorney for 35. There I came to see most dramatically the wisdom of my grandfather's teaching. I passed that lesson on to the young lawyers who came to work for me. I told them that most often, criminals victimized the powerless, the impoverished, and the disenfranchised. Our sworn duty was to protect the people we served by enforcing the rule of law -- and to set an example for all by respecting the rights of the accused.

Today, I am told that I am in retirement. But my grandfather's voice will not let me rest. For there is unfinished business before us. None of us can rest until there is universal acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide.

Recently, as you know, I suggested to our President that if he can be bold enough

to move the American embassy to Jerusalem over widespread opposition, then he could also be bold enough to call the Armenian Genocide by its true name. In that piece in the Wall Street Journal, I wrote that “a just and lasting world order cannot be built on falsehoods and equivocations.”

For us gathered here today, that can mean only one thing: we must redouble our efforts to apply the lessons of history in a troubled world. For we are told, we are, today, in a new age of dictatorship. In country after country despots tell their people that civil order can be maintained only if they forfeit their civil rights.

And in country after country, tragically, the people seem to be accepting their plight – everywhere, it seems, but in the Republic of Armenia. There, a popular uprising, led by the young, emphatically restored the rule of law. The prime minister abandoned his power grab, resigned, and told his nation, “I was wrong.”

The Republic of Armenia has honored my grandfather's memory in many ways for which I am grateful. They named a street after him. They transported soil from his grave-site to Armenia. They put his image on a postage stamp. But I doubt anything pleases him quite so much as what the children of Armenia accomplished in this past week.

As lawyers, as public servants, let us learn from those young idealists. Let us find in the Armenian Genocide, in the endurance of the Armenian people, and in the struggle for recognition, the inspiration to transform the world.

Thank you.