



# Armenian Bar Association

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## **Every Reason for the Government of Israel to Join the Global Recognition of the Armenian Genocide**

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Dear Representatives of the Israeli Government:

April 24th marked 107 years since the beginning of the Armenian Genocide. On that date in 1915, hundreds of Armenian leaders including parliamentarians, priests, and professionals in the capital city of Constantinople were rounded up with neither cause nor pretext, abruptly and permanently displaced, and ultimately murdered by Ottoman Turkish authorities. From that day forward until the early 1920s, the Ottoman government methodically orchestrated its horrific, wholesale human carnage of indigenous Armenians into the eastern reaches of the Empire. While most Armenian men were killed outright, the Ottoman government subjected hundreds of thousands of women, children, and elderly to death marches across hundreds of miles of arid and unforgiving terrain during which girls and women were ravaged, raped, burned, and starved to death. The overwhelming majority of the Armenian population in their native land was wiped away forever. Armenian homes and the Armenian homeland itself were wrongfully taken too. Most members of Armenian communities around the world today are descendants of Genocide victims and survivors.

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*In loving memory (2014)*

The Armenian Genocide provided the framework for Nazi Germany to follow in carrying out the Holocaust. Many of the means and methods of inhumane cruelty and destruction, which reoccurred during the Holocaust, were first unleashed upon the Armenians by the Ottoman Turks, under the watch of their ally, Germany. German officers serving in Turkey during World War I ultimately became the masterminds and executioners of the Holocaust. For example, the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolph Höss, served in the Ottoman Army. And, Hitler himself stated on August 22, 1939, on the eve of his invasion of Poland: "It's a matter of indifference to me what a weak western European civilization will say about me...Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

Dozens of countries around the world officially recognize the Genocide, supported by a legion of documentary evidence, oral history, and academic studies by scholars and historians. The International Association of Genocide Scholars – the leading group of experts on the Holocaust and genocide studies – unanimously adopted a resolution in 1997 that “the mass murder of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 is a case of genocide which conforms to the statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.”

More recently, United States President Joseph Biden formally recognized on April 24, 2022 (the 107<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the onset of the Armenian Genocide) that the atrocities perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire on Armenians were, indeed and in fact, a Genocide. “Each year on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian Genocide and recommit ourselves to preventing such an atrocity from ever again occurring,” President Biden wrote in his statement. The United States Senate and the House of Representatives also resolved “that it is the policy of the United States: (1) to commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance; (2) to reject efforts to enlist, engage, or otherwise associate the United States Government with denial of the Armenian Genocide or any other genocide; and (3) to encourage education and public understanding of the facts of the Armenian Genocide, including the role of the United States in humanitarian relief efforts, and the relevance of the Armenian Genocide to modern-day crimes against humanity.”

Professor Yehuda Bauer, one of Israeli’s most renowned Holocaust historians, has concluded that despite the differences between the two sets of crimes against humanity: “[I]n the murder of Armenians, we really find the closest parallel to the Holocaust.” Raphael Lemkin, who coined the word “Genocide” and was a champion of its prevention at the United Nations, stated that his early exposure to stories about the crimes against Armenians informed his beliefs about the need for international legal protection of groups, a core element in the U.N. Genocide Convention of 1948. Lemkin wrote in his autobiography, “My worries about the murder of the innocent became more meaningful to me. I didn’t know all the answers, but I felt that a law against this type of racial or religious murder must be adopted by the world.”

In 2018, in response to a request for information regarding the reasons for its prior refusal to recognize the Armenian Genocide, the Israeli government answered that this issue “has been repeatedly examined over the years and remains the same – acknowledging the suffering experienced by the Armenian people in the past tragedy and deep sympathy with the experiences of the Jewish people, however, as the issue has a clear political connection, there is no reason to take position to officially recognize tragedy as Genocide.” As part of legal proceedings in the District Court of Jerusalem (December 2018) and in the Supreme Court (February 2020) to reveal the documents and protocols of the discussions which led to the position of the Israeli government about the Armenian Genocide, the Israeli government responded that there were confidentiality issues related to “documents relating to the internal discussions on the question of recognizing the Armenian tragedy that stems from political considerations involving, among other things, Israel’s relations with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia.”

We ask that you acknowledge and empathize that the description of the Armenian Genocide as merely a “tragedy,” even if well meaning, is historically inaccurate and does not truly “acknowledg[e] the suffering experienced by the Armenian people.” Imagine for a moment if the Holocaust were described time and again as merely a tragedy, or a calamity, or a catastrophe, or a misfortune, or a massacre. We recognize that there are important red lines that you honor and enforce, primary of which is the brightest among them that nothing less than the word “holocaust” aptly defines the Jewish Holocaust. We submit and we trust what you already know, nothing less than the word “genocide” aptly defines the Armenian Genocide.

The Israeli government's failure to recognize the Armenian Genocide not only negatively affects the descendants of the Genocide, it also encourages those who deny the Holocaust as it fosters false legitimacy to deny atrocities for political purposes. Israel's important global efforts to combat continuing Holocaust denial could be easily undermined, if not characterized as hypocritical, due to its simultaneous insistence on the veracity of the Holocaust while Israel remains the only western partner of Azerbaijan and Turkey in their bold-face denial of the Armenian Genocide. Israel's short-term, perceived political expediency to please Turkey has and will continue to harm the moral standing of the State of Israel. It is high time for Israel to acknowledge and recognize the historical injustice by its true name – the Armenian Genocide.

The government of the State of Israel now has the option either to continue on the lesser road of expediency or to climb to the higher road of irreproachability. You know – and we know – the road on which you belong.

We – and the world – welcome the State of Israel's ascent.

Sincerely,

ARMENIAN BAR ASSOCIATION



Lucy Varpetian  
Chairwoman