

Anzac Day Address
Father Steven Scoutas
'St Spyridon' War Memorial Church
Saturday, 24th April 2010

The Honourable Peter Garrett, Member for Kingsford and Minister for the Environment
Your Worships, the Mayors of the City of Randwick and the City of Botany Bay
Captain Wilson representing the UNSW Regiment
Members of the Greek Sub-branch of the Returned Servicemen's League
Members of the Australian Prisoners of War Association
Distinguished Guests
Ladies, gentlemen and students

The word **genocide** was coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish law Professor of Jewish descent who sought to describe the systematic murders committed during the Assyrian massacre in Iraq, the Jewish Holocaust in Germany, and the Armenian and Greek Genocides in Asia Minor.

He formed the word 'genocide' by combining *genos-*, from the Greek word for race, with *-cide*, from the Latin word for killing. In proposing this new term, Lemkin had in mind any acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

In his writings on genocide, Lemkin revealingly detailed the fate of Greeks and Armenians in Turkey. Taking his lead, in August 1946, the *New York Times* reported:

"Genocide is no new phenomenon, nor has it been utterly ignored in the past. ... The massacre of Greeks and Armenians by the Turks prompted diplomatic action without punishment. If Professor Lemkin has his way genocide will be established as an international crime ..."

Subsequently, a **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948 as Resolution 260. The Convention came into effect in January 1951. It defines genocide in legal terms, and is the culmination of years of campaigning by Professor Lemkin.

Interestingly, all participating countries of the United Nations are merely **advised** to prevent and punish actions of genocide in war and in peacetime. The number of states that have ratified the convention currently stands at just 140.

The Genocide of Greeks

Before the word genocide came into existence in the 1940's, the destruction of Ottoman Greeks was known, by Greeks, as '**the Massacre**' (Greek: η Σφαγή) or '**the Great Catastrophe**' (Greek: η Μεγάλη Καταστροφή) or '**the Great Tragedy**' (Greek: η Μεγάλη Τραγωδία). Primary source accounts would use improvised terms, such as "annihilation", "systematic extermination", "persistent campaign of massacre" and "wholesale massacre".

Indeed, during World War I and its aftermath (1914-1923), the government of the Ottoman Empire instigated a violent campaign against the Greek population of the Empire. The campaign included massacres, forced deportations involving death marches, and summary expulsions.

In the summer of 1914 the *Ottoman Special Organization* (Teşkilat-Mahsusa), assisted by government and army officials, conscripted Greek men of military age from *Thrace and western Anatolia* into labour battalions in which hundreds of thousands died. Sent hundreds of miles into the interior of Anatolia, these conscripts were employed in road-making, building, tunnel excavating and other field work but their numbers were heavily reduced through either privations or ill-treatment or by outright massacre by their Turkish guards. This programme of forced conscription later expanded to other regions of the Empire including *Pontus*.

Horrifyingly, conscription of Greek men was supplemented by massacres and by deportations involving death marches of the **general population**. Greek villages and towns were surrounded by Turks, and their inhabitants - men, women and children - tortured, raped and massacred.

In July 1915 the Greek chargé d'affaires argued that the deportations "*cannot be any other issue than an annihilation war against the Greek nation in Turkey and as measures hereof they have been implementing forced conversions to Islam, in obvious aim to, that if after the end of the war there again would be a question of European intervention for the protection of the Christians, there will be as few of them left as possible.*"

Altogether, an estimated 1 million Greeks were killed in Pontus, Thrace, Constantinople and the remainder of Asia Minor by the Ottomans.

Some of the survivors and expelled, especially those in Eastern provinces, took refuge in the neighbouring Russian Empire. However, after the end of the 1919-22 Greco-Turkish War most of the Greeks migrated or were transferred to Greece under the terms of the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey.

The government of Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, maintains that the large-scale campaign was triggered by the perception that the Greek population was sympathetic to the enemies of the Ottoman state.

The Allies of World War I took a different view, condemning the Ottoman government-sponsored massacres as crimes against humanity. More recently, the *International Association of Genocide Scholars* passed a resolution in 2007 affirming that the Ottoman campaign against Christian minorities of the Empire, including the Greeks, was indeed genocide.

The Genocide of Armenians

The **Armenian Genocide** – also known as the **Armenian Holocaust**, the **Armenian Massacres** and, by Armenians, as the **Great Crime** (Mec Eğern), refers to the deliberate and systematic destruction (genocide) of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire during and just after World War I. It was implemented through wholesale massacres and deportations, with the deportations consisting of forced marches under conditions designed to lead to the death of the deportees. The total number of resulting Armenian deaths is generally estimated at some 1.5 million.

It is widely acknowledged to have been one of the first modern genocides, as scholars point to the systematic, organized manner in which the killings were carried out to eliminate the Armenians, and it is the second most-studied case of genocide after the Holocaust.

The starting date of the genocide is conventionally held to be April 24, 1915, the day that Ottoman authorities arrested some 250 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople. **It was just one day before the Anzacs landed at Gallipoli to commence their defence of a free world.** Thereafter, the Ottoman military uprooted Armenians from their homes and forced them to march for hundreds of miles, depriving them of food and water, to the desert of what is now Syria. Massacres were indiscriminate of age or gender, with rape and other sexual abuse commonplace.

The Republic of Turkey, the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, denies the word genocide is an accurate description of the events. In recent years, it has faced repeated calls to accept the events as genocide. To date, 20 countries have officially recognized the events of the period as genocide, and most genocide scholars and historians accept this view.

A **Council of Europe** Parliamentary Assembly Resolution, April 24, 1998 stated: "*Today we commemorate the anniversary of what has been called the first genocide of the 20th century, and we salute the memory of the Armenian victims of this crime against humanity*".

More recently, a *non-binding resolution* calling the Ottoman killing of Armenians 'genocide' narrowly passed the House of Representatives *Foreign Affairs Committee*, a key committee of the **U.S. Congress**, on March 4, 2010, by a vote of 23 to 22. Turkey immediately responded by recalling its ambassador from Washington for consultations.

So, on this, the 24th April 2010, the very day of the commencement of atrocities against the Armenian people, at this War Memorial Church of 'St Spyridon', we also mark the **95th anniversary of the Armenian genocide**, and we denounce all forms of genocide, by any nation, wherever they have been perpetrated.

The Way Forward

How do we retort to such actions that are etched in the conscience of so many generations of so many peoples? Certainly not with hatred.

Dr Booker T. Washington, educator, author and African American Civil Rights Leader, wrote: "I permit no man to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him".

Coretta Scott King, also an American educator and civil rights campaigner, widow of Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote: "Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated".

As Orthodox Christians, we are exhorted by Jesus who gave us the supreme commandment: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who treat you spitefully, and persecute you" (Mth 5:44).

Certainly, on the commemoration of this year's Anzac Day, as we pray "*for the repose of the souls of all men, women and children who died for Australia during the Two World Wars and in other Conflicts around the world*", we recognize with the deepest gratitude the supreme sacrifice by Australians in the defence of the High Ideals of freedom and democracy.

Australia is, arguably, one of the most blessed countries in the world. Our parents and grandparents came from Greece in search of a better life following the destruction of their Homeland, especially after World War II. Without a trace of arrogance, I am proud to say that Greek Australians are exemplary immigrants to this Country. They came here, merely grateful for the opportunity of making a new start. They did not ask for anything. They put their heads down, worked hard, prospered and gained the respect of the broader Australian community.

In light of recent discussions on Australia's population growth over the next 30 – 40 years, estimated originally at an additional 15 million new immigrants but recently revised to an additional 20 million, it is encouraging that the Federal Government, in its wisdom, has appointed a Minister for Population to implement this enormous and sensitive challenge. This is a welcome move because 'the Australian way of life' can very quickly change into something unforeseen.

We are united in welcoming all new immigrants and all genuine refugees to Australia, wishing them every blessing – food to eat, a roof over their head, education for their children, medical care for their families, employment opportunities and every civil right attained by the previous generations of immigrants.

Anzac Day is a reminder that freedom and democracy should never be taken for granted. This War Memorial church is consecrated to God, but is also dedicated to Australians and Greeks who answered the call to fight in common theatres of war for those ideals which have secured, for most of the world, the precious ideal of freedom.

I have had the personal privilege and honour of conducting an Orthodox Memorial Service at the Lone Pine cemetery in Gallipoli, together with teachers and students of St Spyridon College, in 1992. We wept over the graves of our heroic fallen, amongst them four young Greek Australians who lied about their age to defend Australia and everything she represents.

Greece and Australia have always been allies. The blood of their soldiers, pilots, sailors, nurses and civilians have soaked the fields of common battlefields. It is little known that Greece played an important role in the Battle of Gallipoli, supporting the Anzacs in World War I, even though an early proposal to use Greek troops to invade the Gallipoli peninsula was vetoed by Russia as its South Slavic allies would feel threatened by an expansion of Greek power and influence.

At the same time, during World War II, Australia played a major role in the Battle of Crete, an epic display of courage, heroism and camaraderie that would be forever etched in the history of Greece and Australia. It will be remembered as a turning point towards world peace.

May we always be worthy of that Anzac spirit. May we always be vigilant and grateful. Thank you for your attention.