



Armenian National Committee of America
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

February 9, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

I am writing, on behalf of Armenian Americans and human rights and genocide prevention advocates from across the United States to register our most serious protest against your inaccurate and deeply offensive recent statement mischaracterizing the Armenian Genocide as a “historical debate.” I refer specifically to your appearance at the State Department’s Town Hall meeting on the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, on January 26, 2012, during which, in response to a question about the State Department’s refusal to recognize the Armenian Genocide, you stated, “this has always been viewed, and I think properly so, as a matter of historical debate.”

We are outraged that you have called into question the veracity of the Armenian Genocide, all the more so given your record in the U.S. Senate of having formally encouraged President George W. Bush on numerous occasions to recognize the Armenian Genocide, a crime that you have described, in writing, as “a clear case of genocide.” Your recent claim is both factually inaccurate and morally offensive. It is, quite simply, disingenuous of you to attempt to hide this Administration’s surrender to Turkey’s denials behind a hollow appeal to historians. As President Barack Obama, Vice President Joseph Biden, and you stated multiple times before the start of this Administration, and as the International Association of Genocide Scholars has unanimously affirmed, the Armenian Genocide is a matter of settled history. Your shameful suggestion, that further study is needed to determine whether the Armenian Genocide was in fact a genocide, only emboldens Ankara’s efforts to derail the civil society movement toward a truthful and just resolution of this crime.

The Obama-Biden Administration - which came into office led by a President, a Vice President and a Secretary of State, all with both long records and public promises in support of American recognition of the Armenian Genocide - saw the President, within months, prominently breaking his solemn covenant with American voters, a clear and willful breach of trust, followed shortly thereafter by the Administration’s pressure to block even Congressional commemoration of this crime.

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Today, after having helped Turkey enforce its Armenian Genocide gag-rule on America, largely through our State Department's ill-advised support for the Ankara-inspired Protocols, this Administration, as regrettably illustrated by your recent comments, has gone beyond simple complicity in Ankara's campaign to erase the memory of this atrocity. Your statement is intellectually dishonest and, all too clearly, echoes the Turkish government's outright denials, a shameful position that represents a grave offense to the moral values of the American people.

Having addressed a broad range of concerns on this matter in considerable detail in our previous correspondence to you, I will, today, simply submit a formal request that you immediately lead a fundamental review of this and prior Administrations' century long failed policy of attempting to appease Ankara by compromising America's stand on a fundamental issue of human rights. I would respectfully offer the following questions as a starting point for such a review:

1) President Obama has repeatedly stated that, "I have consistently stated my own view of what occurred in 1915." These views are reflected in an extensive public record of statements, videos, and written documents. Does the Department of State consider any of these past statements by the current President to be "a matter of historical debate"? If so, which statements, and why?

— **"The occurrence of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 is not an 'allegation,' a 'personal opinion,' or a 'point of view.' Supported by an overwhelming amount of historical evidence, it is a widely documented fact."** (Senator Barack Obama's July 28, 2006 letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to express dismay over the recall of Ambassador to Armenia John Evans for recognizing the Armenian Genocide.)

— **"[T]he Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. . . . America deserves a leader who speaks truthfully about the Armenian Genocide and responds forcefully to all genocides."** (Barack Obama on the Importance of U.S.-Armenia Relations, January 19, 2008.)

— **"For those who aren't aware, there was a genocide that did take place against the Armenian people. It is one of these situations where we have seen a constant denial on part of the Turkish Government and others that this occurred."** (Video of Senator Obama during a public constituent meeting on April 12, 2007.)

— **"Nearly 2 million Armenians were deported during the Armenian Genocide, which was carried out by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, and approximately 1.5 million of those deported were killed."** (Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs, Senator Obama, Question for the Record to Ambassador-designate Yovanovitch, June 19, 2008.)

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— **“The occurrence of the Armenian genocide is a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming collection of historical evidence.”** (Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs, Senator Obama, statement commemorating the Armenian Genocide, April 28, 2008.)

— **“[T]he United States must recognize the events of 1915 to 1923, carried out by the Ottoman Empire, as genocide. . . The Bush Administration’s refusal to do so is inexcusable.”** (Senator Obama, constituent email response, dated June 16, 2008.)

2) In 2008 you stated that **“[T]he horrible events perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire against Armenians constitute a clear case of genocide,”** and that, **“[o]ur common morality and our nation’s credibility as a voice for human rights challenge us to ensure that the Armenian Genocide be recognized and remembered by the Congress and the President of the United States.”** What has changed in your understanding of the history, facts, and evidence of the Armenian Genocide since this statement that has led you to downgrade this “clear case of genocide” to “a matter of historical debate?”

3) Both you and President Obama, during your service in the U.S. Senate, formally called upon President George W. Bush to recognize the Armenian Genocide in a letters dated April 20, 2006 and April 18, 2005, both of which stated the Armenian Genocide was a **“systematic and deliberate campaign of genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire in 1915. . . The victims of the Genocide deserve our remembrance and their rightful place in history... It is in the best interests of our nation and the entire global community to remember the past and learn from these crimes against humanity to ensure that they are never repeated.”** Do you today regret or in any way seek to disavow or distance yourself or the Department of State from the principled position that you expressed in these letters?

4) In light of the priority that the President has attached to moving Turkey towards an honest reckoning with its past and your own statement that the U.S. **“will stand with those who seek to advance the cause of democracy and human rights wherever they may live,”** why have U.S. diplomats in Turkey not prominently participated in programs led by Turkish citizens in remembrance of the Armenian Genocide, or openly condemned the continued official prosecution and public demonization of writers and others who speak honestly about the Armenian Genocide?

5) You have said that, **“The struggle for human rights begins with telling the truth over and over again.”** Would the Department of State, as it did in the case of Ambassador to Armenia John Evans, discipline, penalize or otherwise take any action against U.S. diplomats or employees for speaking truthfully about the Armenian Genocide?

6) Vice President Biden - who cosponsored every resolution to commemorate the Armenian Genocide introduced in the Senate dating back to 1984 - entered the White House with a long record of working for full and formal U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Does the Department of State disagree with, disavow, or in any way seek to distance itself from the following past statements by the current Vice President?

— In 2006, while serving as the Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Biden wrote, in a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, that, **“The State Department’s own historical records provide ample evidence that the Ottoman Empire’s slaughter of 1.5 million ethnic Armenians constituted genocide. Henry Morgenthau, who served as the United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1913 to 1916, describes a brutal ‘campaign of race extermination’ perpetrated by Ottoman forces... To punish an American official for correctly describing any historical event raises serious questions about the United States’ commitment to the values of transparency and honesty.”** (Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Senator Joseph Biden’s letter, dated June 23, 2006, to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to express concern over reports that Ambassador to Armenia, John Evans, was recalled for accurately describing the Armenian Genocide as a genocide.)

— In 2007, Senator Biden publicly stated that he supported the Armenian Genocide Resolution because as a legislative champion working for its adoption, **“I have found in my experience that you cannot have a solid relationship with a country based on fiction. It occurred. It occurred... If you want to be a member of the international community in good standing, it’s got to be based upon historical fact.”** (Senator Biden interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 2007.)

7) Does the Department of State have any reason to disbelieve or dispute any of the following official reports, findings, and conclusions by State Department officials during the Armenian Genocide? If so, which statements and why?

— In June 5, 1915, U.S. Consul in Aleppo, Jesse Jackson, wrote to Ambassador Morgenthau: **“There is a living stream of Armenians pouring into Aleppo from the surrounding towns and villages, the principal ones being Marash, Zeitoun, Hassanbeyli, Osmania, Baghtche, Adana, Dortyol, Hadjin, etc. . . The [Ottoman] Government has been appealed to by various prominent people and even by those in authority to put an end to these conditions, under the representations that it can only lead to the greatest blame and reproach, but all to no avail. It is without doubt a carefully planned scheme to thoroughly extinguish the Armenian race.”** NA/RG59/867.4016/177.

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— On July 24, 1915, in a report to Ambassador Morgenthau, U.S. Consul in Harput, Leslie Davis, reported: **“Any doubt that may have been expressed in previous reports as to the Government’s intention in sending away the Armenians have been removed . . . It has been no secret that the plan was to destroy the Armenian race as a race . . . Everything was apparently planned months ago.”** NA/RG59/867.4016/269.

— In a telegram to Secretary of State Robert Lansing, U.S. Charge d’ Affaires, Hoffman Philip, wrote on October 1, 1916: **“The Department is in receipt of ample details demonstrating the horrors of the anti-Armenian campaign. For many months past I have felt that the most efficacious method of dealing with the situation from an international standpoint would be to flatly threaten to withdraw our Diplomatic Representative from a country where such barbarous methods are not only tolerated but actually carried out by order of the existing government.”** NA/RG59/867.4016/297.

— The Honorable Abram I. Elkus, who served as the United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1916 through 1917, telegraphed the Secretary of State on October 17, 1916, stating: **“In order to avoid opprobrium of the civilized world, which the continuation of massacres [of the Armenians] would arouse, Turkish officials have now adopted and are executing the unchecked policy of extermination through starvation, exhaustion, and brutality of treatment hardly surpassed even in Turkish history.”** NA/RG59/867.4016/299.

8) Would the Department of State describe the Holocaust or the genocides in Cambodia or Rwanda as a “historical debate,” or call for the creation of a historical “commission” to ascertain whether these crimes in fact took place?

9) Is the U.S. government’s decision-making process regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide influenced in any way by the Turkish government’s public threats to retaliate against such an acknowledgment?

10) If Turkey were to finally recognize the Armenian Genocide, would the U.S. government then follow Ankara’s lead and also formally acknowledge this crime?

Honest and open responses to these questions, in addition to bringing a badly needed measure of transparency to American policy on the Armenian Genocide, would also serve as a meaningful foundation for a reasoned discourse among government and civil society stakeholders about ending the era of the United States’ complicity in Turkey’s denials. More broadly, full and formal recognition of this crime - representing, as it would, a very public rejection of Ankara’s efforts to impose a gag-rule on America - would represent a meaningful step toward stopping the worldwide cycle of genocide that continues to plague humanity.

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Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We look forward to hearing from you on these important matters. We are also interested in learning of any actions you have taken in response to the recent adoption by the U.S. House of H.Res.306, which, as you know, specifically calls the Secretary of State, in all official contacts with Turkish officials, to emphasize, among other religious freedom considerations, that Turkey should return all Christian churches and religious properties to their rightful owners.

As we have several times over the past three years - we again request the opportunity to discuss the full range of our concerns with you personally during a meeting with the broad-based leadership of the Armenian American community.

Sincerely,



Kenneth V. Hachikian
Chairman