

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 15

CHAPTER 27

Relative to the Armenian Genocide.

[Filed with Secretary of State April 25, 2007.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 15, Krekorian. Armenian Genocide: Day of Remembrance.

This measure would designate April 24, 2007, as “California Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923.” It would memorialize the Congress and the President of the United States to act likewise to commemorate the Armenian Genocide.

DIGEST KEY

Fiscal Committee: no

BILL TEXT

WHEREAS, The Armenian people, living in their 3,000-year historic homeland in eastern Asia Minor and throughout the Ottoman Empire, were subjected to severe persecution and brutal injustice by the rulers of the Ottoman Empire before and after the turn of the 20th century, including widespread massacres, usurpation of land and property, and acts of wanton destruction during the period from 1894 to 1896, inclusive, and again in 1909; and

WHEREAS, The horrible experience of the Armenians at the hands of their oppressors culminated in 1915 in what is known by historians as the “First Genocide of the Twentieth Century,” and as the prototype of modern day mass killing; and

WHEREAS, The Armenian Genocide began with the arrest, exile, and murder of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals, and business, political, and religious leaders, starting on April 24, 1915; and

WHEREAS, The regime then in control of the empire, known as the “Young Turks,” planned and executed the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Armenian people from 1915 to 1923, inclusive, which included the torture, starvation, and murder of 1,500,000 Armenians, death marches into the Syrian Desert, the forced exile of more than 500,000 innocent people, and the loss of the traditional Armenian homelands; and

WHEREAS, While there were some Turks and others who jeopardized their safety in order to protect Armenians from the crimes being perpetrated by the Young Turk regime, the genocide of the Armenian people constituted one of the most egregious violations of human rights in the history of the world; and

WHEREAS, The United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., stated “Whatever crimes the most perverted instincts of the human mind can devise, and whatever refinements of persecutions and injustice the most debased imagination can conceive, became the daily misfortunes of this devoted people. I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915. The killing of the Armenian people was accompanied by the systematic destruction of churches, schools, libraries, treasures of art, and cultural monuments in an attempt to eliminate all traces of a noble civilization with a history of more than 3,000 years”; and

WHEREAS, In discussing World War I, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote that “... the Armenian massacre was the greatest crime of the war, and the failure to act against Turkey is to condone it ... the failure to deal radically with the Turkish horror means that all talk of guaranteeing the future peace of the world is mischievous nonsense”; and

WHEREAS, Winston Churchill wrote: “As for Turkish atrocities: ... massacring uncounted thousands of helpless Armenians, men, women, and children together, whole districts blotted out in one administrative holocaust—these were beyond human redress”; and

WHEREAS, Contemporary newspapers like the New York Times commonly carried headlines such as “Tales of Armenian Horrors Confirmed,” “Million Armenians Killed or in Exile,” and “Wholesale Massacre of Armenians by Turks”; and

WHEREAS, Adolph Hitler, in persuading his army commanders on the eve of World War II that the merciless persecution and killing of Poles, Jews, and other peoples would bring no retribution, declared, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”; and

WHEREAS, Unlike other peoples and governments that have admitted and denounced the abuses and crimes of predecessor regimes, and despite the overwhelming proof of genocidal intent, the Republic of Turkey has inexplicably and adamantly denied the occurrence of the crimes against humanity committed by the Young Turk rulers, and those denials compound the grief of the few remaining survivors of the

atrocities, desecrate the memory of the victims, and cause continuing trauma and pain to the descendants of the victims; and

WHEREAS, The Turkish Government has engaged in concerted efforts to revise history through the dissemination of propaganda falsely suggesting that Armenians were responsible for their fate in the period from 1915 to 1923, inclusive, and by the funding of programs at American educational institutions for the purpose of furthering the cause of this revisionism; and

WHEREAS, The Republic of Turkey has been condemned by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations for making free speech a crime by enacting Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which makes “public denigration of Turkishness ... the Government of the Republic of Turkey, the judicial institutions of the State, the military or security structures” punishable by imprisonment, and has used this device to harass, intimidate, prosecute, and imprison Turkish citizens who have written or spoken honestly about the Armenian Genocide, including Nobel Prize winning author Orhan Pamuk; and

WHEREAS, Among those charged with “denigration of Turkishness” by Turkish prosecutors for his forthright acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide was journalist Hrant Dink, and in this atmosphere of intolerance of dissent, Mr. Dink was assassinated for his views on January 19, 2007; and

WHEREAS, The accelerated level and scope of denial and revisionism, coupled with the passage of time and the fact that few survivors remain who serve as personal eyewitnesses to the indescribable brutality and torment, compel a sense of urgency in achieving formal recognition and reaffirmation of the historical truth of the Armenian Genocide; and

WHEREAS, By honoring the victims and survivors, and consistently remembering and forcefully condemning the atrocities committed against the Armenian people as well as the persecution of the Assyrian and Greek populations of the Ottoman Empire, we guard against repetition of the crime of genocide; and

WHEREAS, California has become home to the largest population of Armenians in the world outside of Armenia, including Armenian Genocide survivors and their descendants, and those citizens have enriched our state and our Nation through leadership in academia, medicine, business, law, agriculture, government, the arts, and many other worthy endeavors, and they are proud and patriotic practitioners of American citizenship; and

WHEREAS, The State of California has been at the forefront of encouraging and promoting a curriculum relating to human rights and genocide in order to empower future generations to prevent recurrence of the crime of genocide; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly and Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature of the State of California hereby designates April 24, 2007, as the “California Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923”; and be it further

Resolved, That the State of California commends its conscientious educators who teach about human rights and genocide; and be it further

Resolved, That the State of California respectfully memorializes the Congress and the President of the United States to act likewise and to formally recognize and reaffirm the historical truth that the atrocities committed against the Armenian people constituted genocide; and be it further

Resolved, That the State of California calls upon the Republic of Turkey to acknowledge the facts of the Armenian Genocide and to work toward a just resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the President of the United States, Members of the United States Congress, the Governor, and the Turkish Ambassador to the United States.