



# ARMENIAN WORLD ALLIANCE ALLIANCE MONDIALE ARMENIENNE CANADA

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## CANADIAN HOUSE OF COMMONS ACKNOWLEDGES AND CONDEMNS ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915

April 21<sup>st</sup> 2004, will be forever remembered as a notable and emotional day in the minds and hearts of all Canadian Armenians, for this is the day that finally the Members of Parliament of Canadian House of Commons voted for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide on a free vote of 153-68. For the first time ever the Canadian Prime Minister allowed the Liberal MPs to vote freely irregardless of the government's official position, though on minister was allowed to vote in favour of this motion.

The fight for this historic recognition goes back a number of years. It started with the establishment of the Armenian World Alliance (AWA) in Toronto, who today comprises of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Organization, the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party and twelve other Armenian organizations, loyal to the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. Since its inception, the AWA has defined as one of its main objectives, the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

To this end AWA has vigorously and aggressively lobbied the Canadian Government, with frequent and amicable meetings with the Cabinet ministers and MPs starting almost at its founding in January 1997.

During these numerous meetings, historical and factual documentations of the events were prepared by the ADL and presented to each and every MP. The members of AWA, and its president, Mr. Haig Misakyan, also conveyed the deep concern of the Armenian community and stressed the paramount importance of the recognition issue of the Armenian Genocide by the Canadian Government, as indeed the life of each and every family of the Armenian community has been affected by this terrible and horrific massacre.

The culmination of these efforts by the AWA was the motion prepared in collaboration with the AWA, and presented in Parliament on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999 by Mr. Jim Karygiannis, MP, to whom we convey our gratitude. This was however defeated at the time. A very strongly worded communiqué was dispatched by the AWA to the Government. Mr. Jim Karygiannis was also instrumental in sponsoring a young and brilliant historian/archivist from London England, Mr. Ara Sarafian, who had just presented the Blue Book on the Armenian Genocide to the British Parliament. Mr. Sarafian had several meetings with Canadian MPs, and deeply impressed upon them the importance of the genocide, and has since been sponsored on numerous occasions by the AWA.

Let us never forget that the Armenian Genocide was the precursor of the Holocaust, and modern day terrorism, be it perpetrated by individuals or governments.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian, the only Armenian Canadian MP, in recent years has assiduously and untiringly worked towards the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, by the Government. The AWA and all its member organizations have been supportive of all his initiatives and undertakings. He has established the Canadian-Armenian Parliamentary Friendship Group through which he has initiated business and assistance for Armenia.

Yesterday, at this very historic session in the Canadian Parliament, Mr. Assadourian, who co-sponsored the motion with Bloc MP Mrs. Madeleine Dalphone Guiral, Conservative MP Jason Kenny and NDP MP Alexa McDonough, was absolutely elated after the vote.

Foremost among the special guests were His Grace Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan, Primate of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church of Canada, and his religious and laic entourage. His Excellency Mr. Ara Papian, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia, and special invited representatives of the Armenian community, who have been supportive of Mr. Sarkis Assadourian. His Grace Bishop Galstanyan, though relatively new to this country, has demonstrated an outstanding effort in joining the efforts of the AWA organizations and Mr. Assadourian in assisting in the culmination of this triumphant and historical vote.

There was also immense jubilation and emotional tears not only among the Armenian spectators in the Parliamentary galleries, but also among a number of MPs.

After the vote a special prayer was offered in front of the Parliament Building by all the attending Armenian clergy, and representatives.



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**SPECIAL RECEPTION HOSTED BY SARKIS ASSADOURIAN  
HONOURING CANADIAN HUMANITARIAN SARA CORNING  
WHO RESCUED ORPHANS AFTER GENOCIDE**

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian, the only Armenian Member of Parliament in the Canadian Government, and Chairman of the Canadian-Armenian Parliamentary Friendship Group, issued a special invitation to a select group of organizations, who have been his supporters over the past years.

Mr. Assadourian was hosting a special reception to honour the memory of Sara Corning, a native Canadian from the province of Nova Scotia, who was responsible for the rescue of thousands of Armenian children, from the port of Smyrna (Izmir), in the summer of 1922, survivors of the Genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.

The remarkable story of Sara Corning's efforts on behalf of the orphans of Smyrna is a little known chapter of Canadian History and deserves the recognition of the Canadian Armenian Community.

The reception was held on Parliament Hill, in the Parliamentary Restaurant, on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004. His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Catholicos of All Armenians sent a special encyclical missive to the relatives of Sara Corning, which was read in both in English and Armenian by the Reverend Archpriest Zareh Zargarian, pastor of the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church of Toronto. A very amicable and pleasant reception followed, after which His Grace Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan, Primate of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church of Canada, relayed the special blessings and thanks on behalf of the Catholicos of all Armenians, and the Canadian Armenian community of Canada.

In closing Mr. Assadourian thanked his special guests, all those who were able to attend in the middle of a business week and all his supporters.

We commend Mr. Sarkis Assadourian for his thoughtfulness in organizing this special recognition of a unique individual, Ms Sara Corning, and wish him all the very best in his forthcoming endeavours.

April 22, 2004

# SAVING THE KIDS

A Nova Scotia nurse rescued 5,000 children in Turkey

**HIDDEN AWAY** in the archives of Nova Scotia's Yarmouth County Museum is a collection of photographs featuring Armenian faces. One, taken early in the 1920s, shows children arranged on a hillside, their bodies spelling out "II Corinthians: I, 8-11." The thread connecting the Nova Scotian port, Armenia and the Biblical passage is Sara Corning, born in Chegogin, eight kilometres north of Yarmouth. Her role in the heroic effort to rescue 5,000 Armenian, as well as some Greek, orphans from slaughter in the Turkish city of Smyrna (now Izmir) in 1922 won her special recognition from the king of Greece. But with the exception of the museum staff and a few family members, Corning's exploits are largely unknown.

Born in 1872, Corning trained as a nurse in the United States. She joined the U.S. Red Cross during the First World War and subsequently signed on with the Near East Relief, a U.S. charitable foundation established to assist the displaced populations of the Balkans, Asia Minor and the Middle East. In 1921, Corning arrived in a small village at the foot of Mount Ararat in Turkey to take charge of an orphanage. Years of civil strife and ethnic turmoil—in which the Turks had driven the Armenians from their homeland—had left hundreds of thousands without homes and starving. Nearly a million had died since 1915 as the Turks took revenge on the Armenians for allegedly helping the Russians during the First World War.

Corning set about her work with quiet, firm resolve, according to a distant cousin, Mary Anne Saunders, now in her 70s. Saunders, who lives in Yarmouth, recalls that as a young girl she found Corning formidable. "Her compassion," she says, "was offset by a no-nonsense approach"—a balance that



A formidable figure whose 'compassion was offset by a no-nonsense approach'

allowed Corning to tend those in desperate need, all the while in the shadow of danger.

Armenia wasn't the only country with which the Turks had a long-standing conflict. Historic tensions between Turkey and Greece increased in 1919 when the Greeks captured Smyrna, declaring that because the port city had a significant Greek population, it should be annexed. In the summer of 1922, the Turks went on the offensive and turned the tide against their invaders.

**'THEN they began to burn the city down. Many refugees [jumped into the water and] drowned rather than be burned.'**

By early September, they were poised to retake the town, and its large Greek population—along with Armenian refugees who had been fleeing the Turks—was incapable of defending itself. Corning boarded an American destroyer in Constantinople (now Istanbul) and headed for Smyrna. Once ashore, she and two others opened a clinic to tend to the sick and wounded. Turkish soldiers, now in control of the city, closed it down and told the relief workers to move on. Their second clinic met a similar fate. This time the Turkish soldiers advised the team to leave, or risk their lives. "After that, the city was looted, then they began to burn it down," Corning wrote years later in her high-school alumni newsletter. "Many refugees [jumped into the water and] drowned rather than be burned."

In the midst of the mayhem, Corning made her way to an orphanage run by an American nurse, and was amazed to find everyone safe—though she knew that could change at any moment. Guiding small groups of children (most were under 12 years old, and almost all were female) through the turmoil and the slaughter in the burning city, Corning delivered them to the harbour, where American sailors rowed them out to waiting destroyers. No record remains of the time required to evacuate the orphans, but when the operation was complete, more than 5,000 children had been rescued.

Corning travelled with the children to Greece, where she established an orphanage for those whom war, famine and disease had not only deprived of parents, but of a country. It was there that Corning arranged the children to spell out the Biblical reference that reads, in part, "For we would not have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life."

Summoning Corning to Athens in June 1923, King George II of Greece awarded her the Silver Cross Medal of the Order of the Saviour, an honour comparable to the Order of Canada. Corning worked at the orphanage until 1924, when she returned to Turkey to work in a residential training school. Upon retirement, she returned to Chegogin, where she lived in the home in which she had been raised, until her death in 1969 at age 97. The epitaph on her headstone: "She lived to serve others." M

# Armenia genocide did happen: MPs

GRAHAM FRASER  
NATIONAL AFFAIRS WRITER

OTTAWA—Parliament rejected a plea by Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham, and voted to acknowledge the Armenian genocide of 1915 and condemn it as a crime against humanity.

Dozens of Liberal MPs yesterday broke with the government and supported the motion, which passed 153 to 68 despite a personal request by Graham to the Liberal caucus to consider the consequences of the vote.

"Fantastic!" said Liberal MP Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre), who co-sponsored the motion with Bloc MP Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre), Conservative MP Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast) and NDP MP Alexa McDonough (Halifax).

Assadourian stressed the vote was not aimed at Turkey, which has always rejected the label of genocide for the killings of Armenians in 1915.

"This is establishing a historical fact that happened in the Ottoman Empire," he said. "We have to work together and build bridges. . . . After 89 years, justice has been done. It's very, very important that we acknowledge the past, that we condemn it so that we don't repeat it."

Graham issued a statement saying the government was not bound by the vote, and that its position had not changed.

"We certainly understand the will of the House, but the government's position remains that, in respect of Turkey and Armenia, we are working with them for reconciliation . . . to try and ensure good neighbourly relations," he told reporters.

Liberal MP Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent-Cartierville) said very few MPs did not think a genocide had taken place.

"Why are we afraid of calling a spade a spade?" he asked, arguing that by issuing the statement, the government was undermining the importance of Parliament.

"Canada's position is very confused," he said.

"This victory is not only for the victims of the Armenian genocide and the Armenian people, it is a victory for justice, truth, reconciliation and healing," he said. Canada joins a small number of other countries, including France, Russia, Argentina, Greece and Uruguay, in describing the events that occurred in Eastern Anatolia under the Ottoman Empire in 1915-23 as genocide. Turkey has furiously rejected the idea that the deaths and deportation of Armenians at that time can be described as such. The result followed an appeal by Graham to Liberal MPs to consider the consequences of the vote.

"I am deeply concerned that it could have far-reaching negative consequences," Graham said in a letter to Liberal MPs. "Sensitive negotiations have begun between the governments of Armenia and Turkey which will hopefully lead to the normalization of relations and the opening of the border between the two countries."

Canadian officials are concerned the vote might have an effect on several major Canadian contracts in Turkey.

Bombardier has a \$335 million contract for work on the Ankara metro, and there is an additional contract being negotiated worth \$1 billion — with 70 per cent of the work being done in Canada. SNC-Lavalin is also a contender for another project near Istanbul.

Turkish embassy counsellor Fazli Corman told Reuters that "relations with Canada will suffer as the result of adopting such a motion."

In the past, the Liberal government has insisted Liberal MPs vote against similar motions. But the Martin government, while requiring members of the cabinet to support the government's position, allowed a free vote on the motion.



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## Why shouldn't MPs acknowledge genocide?

**T**he House of Commons has caused a furor by acknowledging, in a free vote this week, that Armenians were victims of genocide in 1915. The furor is more telling than the acknowledgment. *Realpolitik* apparently dictates that truth does not exist, that each generation lives in a historical vacuum, and that pondering such issues is a matter best reserved for artists and historians rather than mere legislators. To challenge these dictates is to reveal oneself as naive and too immature for real leadership.

Yet the legislators, who voted 153-68 in favour of a private member's bill from the Bloc Québécois, were merely stating a historical fact. They were not committing Canada to monetary payments. They were not apologizing on behalf of another generation. They were engaging in a simple act of memory on behalf of victims who have descendants living in Canada, an act that is controversial only because of the Turkish government's offensive 89-year-long denial.

The genocide of as many as 1.5 million Armenians in Ottoman Turkey was the first attempt to murder an entire nation in a century riven with them. It was a blueprint for Hitler. So appalled were Canadians at the time that they bent their rigid immigration rules and permitted 100 Armenian orphans to come to Georgetown, Ont., and live with farm families. This uncharacteristic generosity toward allegedly inferior peoples was dubbed "Canada's Noble Experiment." The Georgetown Boys, as they were known, grew up and became good Canadians who raised families, paid taxes and voted in elections.

Today's Canada is a different kind of experiment. It is one in which all peoples are welcome, not so much for noble reasons as from enlightened self-interest: Give us your educated, your upwardly mobile, your ambitious. In such a country, the

hard choices of *realpolitik* become more difficult than ever. Why? Because Canada, if it is to succeed as an experiment, must be based on respect for human rights. And if this diverse country stresses human rights on the domestic scene, it can hardly deny their value in the larger world.

Prime Minister Paul Martin, in trying to give more power to backbench MPs, is allowing free votes where confidence in the government is not at issue. With this freedom comes responsibility. It may be that, in future, MPs will attempt to go further afield, in ways that might affect Canada's legitimate foreign-policy interests.

But in this case, it is hard to see what was irresponsible in this statement of principle. Genocide is a current issue for a world that just commemorated the 10th anniversary of the attempted annihilation of the Tutsi people in Rwanda. Canada has obligations beyond its borders. It was instrumental in the creation two years ago of the International Criminal Court.

In spite of scaremongering from some high-powered businesses, it strains credulity to think that Canadian firms will lose big contracts or that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's relationship with Turkey will suffer over the resolution. Should the Canada that risked its relationship with its closest ally when it spurned the United States' call to war in Iraq develop amnesia to avoid reprisals from Turkey? For the record, the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien said in 1999 that the tragedy of 1915 "was committed with the intent to destroy a national group..." That is the very definition of genocide. And Canada's relationship with Turkey survived.

Human beings are capable of the worst atrocities, but there are always some who do not forget. No foreign country, ally or not, can deny Canada the right to bear witness.