The Armenian Genocide

Palos Verdes Peninsula High School
Model United Nations

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Content Warning

This committee goes over extremely sensitive topics, including genocide, mass murder, executions, and religious and ethnic persecution. This sort of action was wrong then, and it remains wrong now. No delegate should be seen in committee, or outside of committee, promoting or supporting the genocide of Armenians or any other group regardless of country position. We ask that you put forward your best judgment as to what is appropriate and what is not. We also ask that you do not belittle or make fun of any group or person, whether they are in committee or not. There are a million ways to approach a committee and come to a solution that does not involve promoting any of the ideas mentioned above. Above all else, this should be a safe, educational, and fun time for everyone.

Topic Background

The term genocide originated in 1944 by Polish lawyer Raphäel Lemkin in his book "Axis Rule in Occupied Europe." Deriving the term from the Greek *genos*, meaning race or tribe, and the Latin suffix *-cide*, meaning killing, he based the term partially off of his study of the systematic mass killing of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and its comparison to the Holocaust in Nazi Germany.[1] Sometimes called the first genocide of the 20th century, the Armenian Genocide was a systematic mass murder of an estimated 800 000 to 1 million ethnic Armenians in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923.[2]

For over a thousand years, an estimated 2.5 million ethnic Armenians lived in Eastern Anatolia (modern day Türkiye) under the Ottoman Empire, with many more across the border in the Russian Empire.[3] Despite their numbers, Armenians made up a minority in the region, but lived in ethnically homogenous villages and towns with their own self-governing institutions. Under the Ottoman "millet" system, Christian and Jewish minority groups, such as the Armenians, were allowed a degree of self-autonomy under local rule.[4] These millets allowed for religious freedom in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire, but came with additional taxes and restrictions on service in the Ottoman military.[5]

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[1] Simon Perego, "Genocide: History and Uses of a Concept," Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe, June 23, 2020, https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/wars-and-memories/violence-war/genocide-history-and-uses-a-concept.
[2] "Armenian Genocide," Armenian Genocide | Genocide Studies Program, 2023, https://gsp.yale.edu/case-studies/armenian-genocide.
[3] Suny, R. Grigor. "Armenian Genocide." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 9, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/event/Armenian-Genocide.
[4] "Armenian Millet." Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa. Encyclopedia.com. (September 18, 2023). https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/armenian-millet.
[5] OER Project, "Armenian Genocide | World History Project," YouTube, November 22, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQrXxQ6FN3w.

However, in the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire began expanding and fighting with the Russian Empire. The predominantly-Muslim Ottoman Empire saw the majority-Christian Armenians as a potential threat, believing that they might join the predominantly-Christian Russian Empire in its fight against the Ottomans.[6] This was intensified by the fact many Armenians lived in lands controlled by the Russian Empire.[7] At the same time, the Armenians were able to develop a sizable commercial class, called the amira, in Constantinople and other major cities, composed of successful merchants and bankers.[8] This commercial success, alongside higher literacy rates, led to increasing tensions from Turks and other ethnic groups towards the Armenians.[9]

Following the 1908 Revolution in the Ottoman Empire, the "Young Turks" gained power, and began a process of "Turkification" of the Ottoman Empire, promoting Turkish linguistic, cultural, and religious identity while persecuting non-Turkish minorities.[10] Subsequently, inflows of majority-Muslim migrants from the Balkans fleeing the various wars of independence in the region only furthered this persecution.

In 1914, the Ottomans entered into the First World War on the side of the Central Powers following German demands to join and help in the fighting.[11] The entry of the Ottomans only exacerbated the previous tensions between the Turks and Armenians, especially as the Ottomans

[6] Christopher J Walker, "Between Turkey and Russia: Armenia's Predicament," *The World Today* 44, no. 8/9 (1988): 140–44, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/40396038, 140.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] "Armenian Millet." Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] "Young Turks, The," Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School, 2023, https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/faq/young-turks.
[11] Ulrich Trumpener, "Turkey's Entry into World War I: An Assessment of Responsibilities," *The Journal of Modern History* 34, no. 4 (December 1962): 369–80, https://doi.org/10.1086/239180, 369-370.

were fighting against Russia yet again. Seeing Armenians as a potential threat who could switch sides to join the Russians, a claim which was proved baseless, all Armenians serving in the Ottoman army were removed from service and moved into labor battalions in February of 1915. At the same time, the Ottoman Interior Minister told the German Ambassador that it was time to resolve the "Armenian Question" once and for all, while the ruling Ottoman Central Committee discussed plans to "eliminate the Armenian people in [their] entirety."[12] On April 24 of the same year, the Armenian Genocide began with the arrest of 250 Armenian intellectuals by Ottoman authorities.[13]

Following this event, Armenians around the Ottoman Empire were rounded up from their homes and sent out on death marches around Anatolia and into the Mesopotamian desert with little to no food or water, often to die.[14] Special units of Turkish and Kurdish convicts were created by the Turkish authorities to carry out the deportations and executions. Armenian men and intellectuals were rounded up and killed, while women and children were left to die in the desert.[15] At the same time, thousands of Armenians were thrown overboard into the Black and Mediterranean Seas to drown in a series of sea-based massacres. Hundreds of thousands would flee the Ottoman Empire into the surrounding region, while land confiscations and threat of violence prevented them from returning home.[16] While some sympathetic families and groups of varying ethnic groups, including Turks and Arabs, attempted to shelter and protect some Armenians, they were unable to stop the hundreds of thousands of deaths at the hand of Ottoman authorities.

Subtopics to Consider

Subtopic 1: Humanitarian Fallout in the Ottoman Empire and Surrounding Region

The Armenian Genocide resulted in a multitude of humanitarian issues. The genocide forced hundreds of thousands of Armenians abroad, away from their historical towns and cities into the Middle East, Caucasus, Europe, and the United States. These people would suffer greatly as they lost everything in the genocide and exodus, with many suffering in poverty and homelessness. Many Armenians faced systematic pressures from the Turkish government,

[12] Olivia Ward, "Armenian Genocide: A Timeline," Toronto Star, April 19, 2015, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/armenian-genocide-a-timeline/article_0fb2b132-a329-54ba-b39c-c0390b058b01.html.
[13] "Armenian Genocide Resource Guide," College of Liberal Arts, 2014, https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/armenia.
[14] History.com Editors, "Armenian Genocide: Facts & Timeline - History," History.com, April 26, 2021, https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/armenian-genocide.
[15] Sara Cohan, "A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide," *Social Education*, 6, no. 69 (2005): 333–37, https://doi.org/https://genocideeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/A-Brief-History-of-the-Armenian-Genocide.pdf.
[16] *Ibid*.

forcing them out of the nation or trying to kill them. Furthermore, the emotional and physical impact of the genocide, where a million Armenians died, placed a major psychological toll on the wider Armenian population.

Following the end of the First World War, the Treaty of Sèvres would dramatically reshape the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. Parts of the Ottoman Empire would be absorbed by other states, new states would be created, and the Republic of Armenia would be created from parts of Eastern Anatolia and the Russian Empire.[17] Following this, hundreds of thousands of Armenians who survived the war would be forcefully moved around Anatolia by the Turks and Allied powers. 200,000 would flee from the southern region of Cilicia, while another 150,000 would flee into Syria, while more would move in 1921 following massacres of Greeks and Armenians during the Greco-Turkish War.[18] According to a League of Nations tally, a further 120,000 Armenians were in Greece, 20,000 in Bulgaria, 2,000 in Cyprus, 12,000 in Palestine, 8,000 in Mesopotamia and 20,000 in Central Europe.[19] A further 100,000 would flee to the United States, before it imposed immigration restrictions to stop the inflows of Armenian, and other European, immigrants.[20] A majority of those in Europe and in the US would be from Western Anatolia, while those in Eastern Anatolia would remain in the region, or in the short-lived Republic of Armenia.

[17] Edita Gzoyan, "The League of Nations and Armenian Refugees. The Formation of the Armenian Diaspora in Syria," *Central Eastern European Review* 8, no. 1 (2014): 83–102, https://doi.org/10.2478/caeer-2014-0004, 85.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19] *Ibid*. 89.
[20] Monique Bolsajian, "The Armenian Diaspora: Migration and Its Influence on Identity and Politics," *Global Societies Journal* 6 (2018): 29–40, 31.

Adding onto this, there were thousands of orphaned children who lost both parents to the genocide, and were left alone to fend for themselves. Most Armenians would remain in refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, where conditions were abysmal and many died of malnutrition and disease.[21] Living in sheds made of cardboard, kerosene cans, and tin roofs, many suffered as they were unprotected from the extremely hot days and blisteringly cold nights of the region.[22] Diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and trachoma were commonplace, while food was scarce and those who worked earned meager salaries.[23]

Within the Treaty of Sèvres, Articles 142 and 144 established a Commission of Enquiry to return stolen property and investigate the humanitarian crises facing minority groups in Turkey.[24] Furthermore, it was discovered that the ruling Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had destroyed the Armenian millet system, and attacked its church, thus weakening the ability for Armenians to recover by themselves.[25] This was exacerbated by a series of laws in Turkey that prevented Armenians from returning home, with the annulment of passports and the creation of one-way passports with a notice that stated its holder "will not return to Turkey." Furthermore, many Armenians fled without any documents proving who they were, thus becoming stateless individuals.[26] This situation makes it difficult to integrate back into regular society or move freely around the world, which helped perpetuate the cycle of oppression that would come to face many Armenians. The Turkish government would refuse to issue new passports to many Armenians, while many Armenians refused to return back to Turkey, which only further worsened the situation on the ground.[27] It would take until the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which reversed the Treaty of Sèvres, for the Armenians in Syria, and the rest of the Middle East, to get citizenship, however many still remained in legal limbo, especially those outside the Middle East.[28]

On the flip side, in Syria, the relationship between the Syrians and Armenians was strained due to French rule in the region. The French authorities in the region, as Syria was a French Mandate after the First World War, had a preference for Christian minorities, including

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[21] Edita Gzoyan, "The League of Nations and Armenian Refugees. The Formation of the Armenian Diaspora in Syria," 88.
[22] Inger Marie Okkenhaug, "Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Armenian Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria, 1927–1934," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 432–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2015.1043641, 437.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] Edita Gzoyan, "The League of Nations and Armenian Refugees. The Formation of the Armenian Diaspora in Syria," 88.
[25] Simon Payaslian, "The Destruction of the Armenian Church during the Genocide," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 2 (2006): 149–72, https://doi.org/10.3138/y3j1-230u-ru33-557k.
[26] Edita Gzoyan, "The League of Nations and Armenian Refugees. The Formation of the Armenian Diaspora in Syria," 90.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] *Ibid*. 94.

Armenians, while sidelining the interests of the majority Arab Muslim population.[29] This, alongside the suffering that many Syrians already faced in the aftermath of the conflict, created a strained relationship between both groups. However both groups suffered from the same ills, which helped create a feeling of common struggle, despite the preferences of French rulers.

Subtopic 2: Rebuilding the Armenian State

The Armenian Genocide targeted more than just the Armenian people. It also targeted the institutions that the Armenian people supported, their church, their livelihoods, homes, and left many destitute. Because of this, following the genocide, the Armenian population was left without the structure and institutions that they had before, which made adjusting back to normal life difficult.

Following the First World War, there was an effort to create an Armenian state, initially in conjunction with Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Caucasus region, however this failed, and instead, Armenia declared independence on May 28, 1918 as the Republic of Armenia.[30] While gaining some international recognition following the Treaty of Sèvres, where the United States and Ottoman Empire recognized the Republic, this would not guarantee the protection of Armenia.[31] It would fight a series of wars with its neighbors over its borders, which are conflicts that continue into the modern day, and face legal troubles. The United States, under President Woodrow Wilson, would argue for a League of Nations mandate controlled by the United States

[29] Inger Marie Okkenhaug, "Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Armenian Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria, 1927–1934," 436-437.
[30] Editors of the Encyclopædia Britannica, "Modern Armenia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/place/Armenia/Modern-Armenia.
[31] *Ibid.*

over the Republic of Armenia, however this would face opposition domestically.[32] This is a major problem that the committee will need to answer, how to best help the Republic of Armenia, especially as some in government are calling for Armenia, alongside Azerbaijan and Georgia, to join the new Soviet Russia.

With the old Armenian millet system now destroyed, there was a need to work with the Armenian Church in the rebuilding efforts. That being said, the religious element played a major role in the aftermath, as the genocide also targeted the Armenian Church, one of the the oldest Christian institutions in the world. The central government of Turkey officially abolished the Armenian Patriarchate, the head of the Armenian Church, in 1916 and the Patriarch of the church was exiled to Damascus the same year.[33] Attempts internationally to protect the Armenian church during the war were unsuccessful, with nations pledging to act but no real action taken, especially after the Russian Empire left the war following the Bolshevik Revolution.[34]

While the Church was reinstated in 1919 with the help of the British, many of its leaders had been arrested, tortured, or killed in the meantime, and the practitioners scattered around the globe. Because of this, the number of Armenian churches greatly decreased from the pre-First World War levels.[35] The Armenian Church would act as a major pillar in the rebuilding of Armenian identity following its reinstatement. While losing immeasurable amounts of its clergy, and thus losing much organizational power, it served as a beacon of hope for many. In rebuilding the Armenian Church, local efforts were of paramount importance, as the major Western powers of the United Kingdom, France, and the United States were unable to commit resources to the rebuilding effort.[36] The Armenian Church was therefore rebuilt mostly by the Armenians themselves.

Despite this, in League of Nations mandates, these nations would give tacit support to relief efforts by private and religious organizations towards the Armenian population.[37] Catholic and Protestant groups played major roles in the relief efforts in French mandate Syria and in Turkey, establishing relief stations to help those in need.[38] This focus on relief effort, often from religious groups, would raise tensions, as these groups were not of the Armenian Orthodox Church. Care must therefore be taken to ensure that relief efforts do not go against the ability for the Armenian people to have a free exercise of religion.

Subtopic 3: Accountability for Genocide

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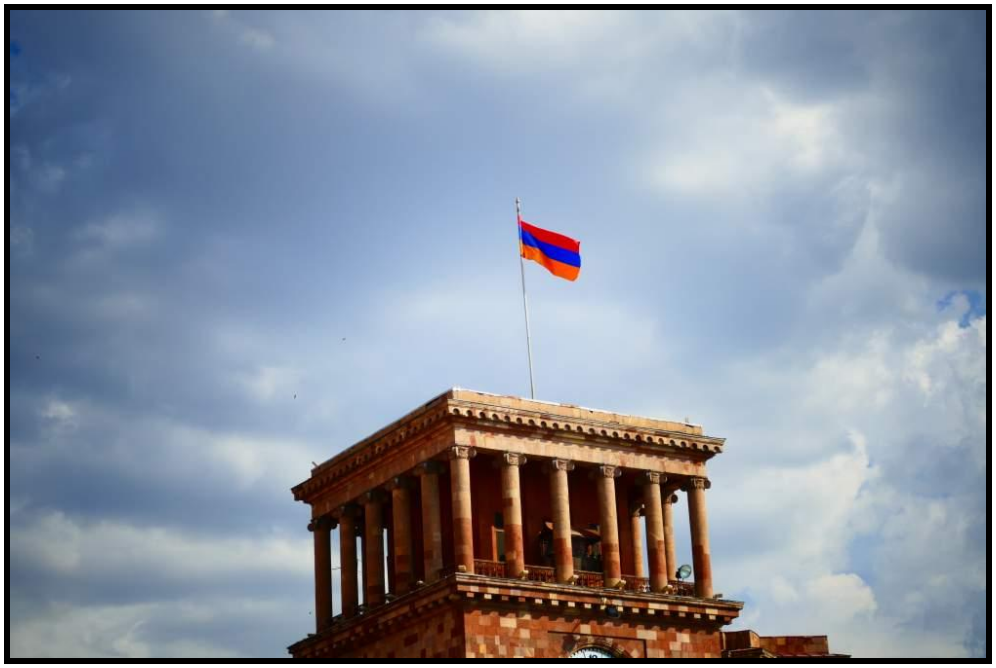
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] Simon Payaslian, "The Destruction of the Armenian Church during the Genocide," 162.
[34] *Ibid*. 161.
[35] *Ibid*. 164.
[36] Inger Marie Okkenhaug, "Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Armenian Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria, 1927–1934," 446.
[37] *Ibid*. 437-438.
[38] *Ibid*. 438.

Following the Armenian Genocide, many across the globe were calling for accountability for the crimes of the Ottoman Empire against the Armenians, and other ethnic groups who were targeted by them. At the current state of the committee, there is no international framework, tribunal location, list of perpetrators to arrest, investigation, or jurisdiction for the international community to act in response to the Armenian Genocide and other similar atrocities. It will be the goal of this committee to create these institutions, frameworks, and processes in order to get accountability for the Armenian Genocide.

However, in order to create these frameworks, principles, and institutions it's best to understand the history of international law until the end of the First World War. Until fairly recently, issues disputed between states were not dealt with legally, instead actions were resolved either by conflict, negotiation and diplomacy, or mediation by a third party (also known as international arbitration). For a while, most states preferred the first two options, as it would give them some control over the outcome. However, as time went on, there became an increasing need to move away from conflict, and the idea of international arbitration became much more prevalent. This resulted in, initially, "ad hoc" arbitration councils between two countries to resolve disputes, notably those between the United States and Great Britain shortly after American independence.[39]



The international community would only begin the creation of a larger international framework in 1899 at the Hague Peace Conference, where nations from around the globe,

[39] Editors of the ICJ, "History of the International Court of Justice," International Court of Justice, 2017, https://www.icj-cij.org/history.

including the Ottoman Empire, came together to create the Permanent Court on Arbitration (PCA). The PCA played a role in many early arbitration cases between nations at this time, however it suffered from low membership which meant that certain cases were not tried with them.[40] It is worth noting that the PCA did not have jurisdiction over issues that happened *within states*, only those *between states*.[41] Since the Armenian Genocide happened only inside Ottoman lands, and the fact that it was not committed against another state, means that there is no jurisdiction for a case to go to trial in the PCA. The existence of an international court, however, shows that there is potential for change to occur, and thus the case could be put to trial.

The second roadblock, however, is that in international law, you cannot apply a law retroactively, at least not under normal circumstances. Doing so would be the creation of an "ex post facto law," which applies the law retroactively.[42] While many nations, including the US, prohibit the creation of ex post facto laws, there is nothing against doing so internationally. Despite having no law explicitly outlining "crimes against humanity" (i.e. genocide) at this time period, many argue that one can infer such laws from the 1899 Hague Peace Conference, and from the pre-existing laws against murder, crime against peace, and war crimes.[43] Therefore, it is up to the committee to find jurisdiction in this trial as well.

Third of all, if a court is created with a legal framework to indict individuals, this arises another problem: creating a list of the individuals who were involved in the Armenian Genocide. The Armenian Genocide was perpetrated by members of the Ottoman police and military, however, creating a list of everyone involved will be a major task.[44] While thousands of individuals played a role, it will be up to the international community to determine if they want to try each individual involved in the killings, or instead only those at the top who played a major role organizing the Armenian Genocide.[45] While it may be best to try each individual involved, tracking and proving each person's complicity will take many years, especially as lawyers would need to collect evidence on each person involved, while on the flip side, charging only those on top will make the courts' job easier but guilty individuals will remain free. While in a timeframe outside this committee, the Nuremberg Trials after the Second World War chose the latter approach, charging only those in positions of power who organized the Holocaust, and not individual soldiers and members of the police.[46]

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[40] Garth Schofield, "The Permanent Court of Arbitration," *The Cambridge Companion to International Arbitration*, 2021, 349–88, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108635752.023, 354.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] Wex Definitions Team, "Ex Post Facto," Legal Information Institute, March 2023, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/ex_post_facto.
[43] Kobrick, Eric S. 1987. "The Ex Post Facto Prohibition and the Exercise of Universal Jurisdiction over International Crimes." *Columbia Law Review* 87 (7): 1515-1538. https://doi.org/10.2307/1122531. 1532-1533.
[44] Sara Cohan, "A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide."
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] The National WWII Museum. 2023. "The Nuremberg Trials." The National WWII Museum | New Orleans. The National WWII Museum. 2023. https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/nuremberg-trials.

Possible Solutions

There are a vast array of solutions available to solve the issues at hand. Here we will provide a few for each delegate to look into what some countries may or may not support. Always be sure to do more research on your individual country's position to determine which solution your country supports, and also to find alternative solutions not mentioned here that could help address the committee topic.

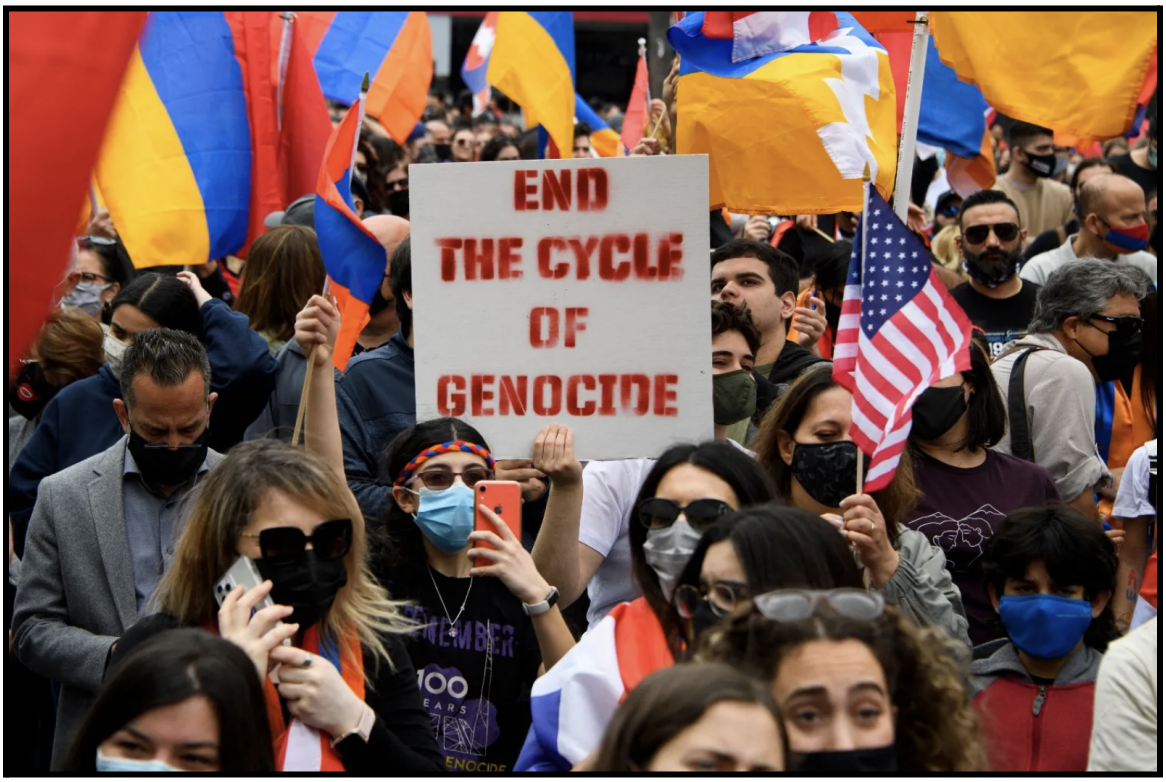
To address the waves of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) resulting from the Armenian Genocide, programs to house, feed, and clothe Armenian refugees are crucial. With a population dispersed around the Middle East, Caucasus, Europe, and the US, such programs would need to be wide-ranging, having the backing of most nations.[47] At the same time, such solutions must create institutional frameworks, either through existing organizations such as the Red Cross, or through new institutions, tailor-made to help Armenian refugees. At the same time, agreements need to be reached on the rights of refugees, protecting their rights to asylum, live and work in a different nation, receive government services in the language of their choice, and gain legal protections.

On the topic of legal protections, many Armenian refugees lack the proper legal documentation, with many living as stateless individuals. The creation of passports or other identification documents that allow stateless people to immigrate to a nation of their choosing is imperative. Such documents, which can be identity cards, stateless passports, or Nansen passports, would give Armenian refugees the freedom they need. However, creating such documentation will require the international community to come to a consensus to not only make and distribute them, but also to train border guards on how to deal with holders of such documents.

Upholding Armenian culture, sovereignty, and religion is also imperative. This therefore means the international community needs to create solutions that help rebuild the Armenian state, either directly through supporting the Republic of Armenia, or indirectly through supporting structures that uphold the Armenian diaspora. A major component of this is giving the Armenian Orthodox Church the support it needs to rebuild, reinstate relationships with the other Orthodox and non-Orthodox Churches, and regain the legal recognition that comes with being a religious institution. This can all be done through aid packages targeted to each group, alongside working with other religious leaders to directly lend monetary and material support to the Armenian Orthodox Church and the Republic of Armenia to help them rebuild.

[47] Edita Gzoyan, "The League of Nations and Armenian Refugees. The Formation of the Armenian Diaspora in Syria," 89.

On the accountability front, a legal framework needs to be established that allows for the trial of those involved in the Armenian Genocide, building off of the existing frameworks that make crimes against peace and war crimes illegal. This can be done domestically through trial based on murder charges within Turkey, or through an international court that tries an individual, organization, or nation on charges of murder, crimes against peace, and/or war crimes. It would be necessary therefore to hire investigators, judges, lawyers, and court clerks to help run a special court, while also creating a robust information catalog so that evidence can be stored and used in trial. More importantly, evidence must be preserved to show future generations what happened to the Armenians and help the international community understand that they must protect the most vulnerable in society.



Questions to Consider

1. What should the international community do to best address the humanitarian situation facing Armenians following the genocide?
2. How should the international community approach cooperating with the Armenian diaspora?
3. What role should the existing Republic of Armenia play in the regional politics in the Caucasus?
4. How should the international community address the issue of stateless and document-less Armenians who have fled their homes?
5. What framework should be created, if any, to judge individuals and/or governments on massacres and genocides such as the Armenian Genocide?
6. Does the international community have jurisdiction to try individuals and/or the Ottoman Government for their actions in the Armenian Genocide?
7. How should the international community help in rebuilding the Armenian Orthodox Church while also supporting the religious freedom of those in the region?

Further Reading

1. The Armenian Genocide (Britannica Encyclopedia)
2. Genocide (Digital Encyclopedia of European History)
3. A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide (Genocide Education)
4. Armenian Genocide Timeline
5. Permanent Court of Arbitration
6. The Settlement of Armenian Refugees in Syria and Lebanon, 1915-1939