

## Donald Riegle and the Armenian Research Center

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Mr. RIEGLE. Mr. President,<sup>1</sup> for years I and other Senators have come to this floor to call attention to the act of genocide committed against the Armenian people. Our purpose in doing so has been to ensure not only the record is clear about what happened to the Armenians but to assure that such atrocities are never allowed to happen again.

Here we are now, one more time, on the Senate floor to retell the story of one of the most tragic episodes in the history of the Armenian people or any people. It is clearly a tragedy that has scarred every Armenian family that is alive today.

We do this to remember the suffering of the Armenian people in order to ensure the accuracy of the historical record and to challenge those who would like to believe that this act of genocide never occurred.

While we consider this somber issue, I want to particularly commend the minority leader [Senator Dole] for his outstanding leadership in moving ahead with this resolution, despite strong pressure from a number of directions to drop its consideration or water down its pertinent language. So I am pleased to join him in signing the cloture motion [to try and stop Senator Byrd's filibuster]. Let us go ahead and vote; I think this is crucial.

Despite overwhelming evidence of the death of between 1 and 2 million Armenians the world has still not acknowledged the suffering inflicted on Armenians by the Turkish Ottoman Empire 75 years ago. With the passage of this resolution, humanity will be more keenly aware of the devastation inflicted on the Armenian people.

In the waning days of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish rulers began to view the growing Armenian nationalist spirit as a threat to the control of their huge domain. Literally, hundreds of thousands of Armenian men, women and children were slaughtered or starved to death in vicious attempts to quell the Armenian drive for self-determination.

The scope of the inhumanity revealed itself on the night of April 14 [*sic*, this should be April 24], 1915, when Turkish police rounded up all of the Armenian intellectuals from their homes in Constantinople, effectively silencing the voice of a generation. Not long after, in a no less reprehensible fashion, Armenians serving in the Ottoman Army were disbanded and disarmed, removing any possible protection for the Armenian minority. Powerless and overwhelmed by the cruelty of their Ottoman captors, Armenians were deported from cities and towns throughout

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<sup>1</sup> Senator Riegle addressed the Presiding Officer of the U.S. Senate.

Turkey and Asia Minor. A majority of the deportees perished when forced on long death marches to the deserts of what is now Syria and Iraq.

The end of World War I brought a short period of relief for the surviving Armenians. In 1918, the ill-equipped Armenian Army, comprised of refugees and volunteers from abroad, arose and defeated invading Turkish forces. On May 28 of that year, having thwarted the designs of their invaders, Armenians triumphantly established an independent and sovereign state. Although Turkey and the Soviet Union pledged to respect the independence of the newly formed state, 1918 concluded with the tragically successful invasion of armies from both Turkey and the Bolshevik Soviet Union. Eastern Armenia subsequently was renamed the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, while Armenians under Turkish rule continued to face butchery at the hands of their former oppressors.

These deliberately perpetrated atrocities, which virtually eliminated the entire Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire, should forever be recalled as one of the most horrific acts of genocide ever perpetrated against an ethnic community anywhere.

Unfortunately many continue to deny the indisputable testimony provided by numerous observers and survivors. At the same time, I agree with the point that those on the other side have made. That is, while we stress the importance of establishing the factual accuracy of the genocide of the Armenian people, it is important to point out that this resolution is not directed against the present Turkish Government and it is not intended to harm the deep ties between the United States and Turkey.

The genocide of the Armenian people occurred long before the current Republic of Turkey was ever created.

But there is nothing that so clearly threatens our future than the refusal to recognize the mistakes of the past. Not to acknowledge the full extent of the suffering of the Armenian people is an offense, not only to the victims of that genocide, but also to those who have survived in the generations of Armenians that followed. A half-hearted position of the United States Government to the recognition of the Armenian genocide raises a question as to whether we are committed to the spirit of the recently ratified United Nations treaty against genocide.

I think we must align ourselves firmly on the side of truth and human rights and recognize clearly and forcefully and without ambiguity the suffering of the Armenian people.

**I want to note as well that the Armenian Research and Publishing Center, the only one that we have affiliated with an American University, is located in my home state in Dearborn, MI. This is a very important center that has helped America and the world learn of the historic relationship between the Armenian and American peoples and will continue to help balance, with objective scholarship, the efforts of those who seek to alter history by denying the significance of the Armenian Genocide. [Emphasis added]**

The large Armenian-American community in Michigan—some 60,000 people—has made and continues to make a powerful and positive statement about the vitality of the Armenian people

and the validity of their cause. Moreover, as a unified group around the world, Armenians have represented a powerful symbol against persecution and oppression. Their consistent pursuit of the truth has resulted in the resolution before the Senate today which would recognize and remember the genocide of 1915-1923.

Others today who spoke before me recalled the words of others; Ambassador Morgenthau, even that of Adolf Hitler. When it was suggested to Hitler that world public opinion would be hostile if he proceeded with his so-called solution to the Jewish problem he responded, "Who, after all, speaks of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

The world has proven Hitler wrong and we have remembered the crimes against the Jewish people. And it is imperative that we do no less for Armenians. Because ignorance of history is an invitation to repeat it. And I daresay the genocides that we have seen in the years past may be, in part, due to the fact that there was too little attention paid at the time, or since, to the Armenian genocide.

So it is through the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 212 that the Senate can assist Armenians in the United States and abroad in enlightening the world to this tragic act of genocide and in so doing assure that history does not repeat itself.

I think to those who suffered directly at that time and to those who are part of the bloodline that flows from that time forward to today, that we have an obligation to see that these facts are put out in to the clear light of day. Some may not like it. It may challenge some centers of power here or there.

I think it is very important that we get the historical record out here, that it be in the clear light of day, that we put the issue to a vote and put the Senate on record.