

S U M M A R Y

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***Assyrian Genocide in the Ottoman Turkey
and the Adjacent Turkish Territories
/the end of 19th and the first quarter of 20th centuries/***

Assyrians are one of the oldest nations in the world whose ancestors stood at the cradle of the world civilization. They made a great contribution to the development of world culture. About two and a half thousand years have passed since the fall of the Assyrian kingdom /605 B.C./. The descendants of the Assyrians, continuing to live on their historical land in ancient Betnahrain, which occupies the territory between the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea and Lake Urmia, were consistently oppressed by Persians, Arabs, Mongols, Ottoman Turks and Kurds. Now this long-suffering people have refuged on the boundaries of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, in a limited territory of The Upper Mesopotamia.

Before World War I a number of Assyrian villages could be found in the Eastern parts of Ottoman Turkey: in Hakkari /vilayet of Van/ and on the territory of Erzurum, Diyarbekir, Sebastia, Kharberd, Bitlis vilayets, as well as in Urmia /Iran/ and Mosul /Iraq/. About one million Assyrians with common language, culture and national customs lived there. By their religion Assyrians were divided into Nestorians, Catholics, and Orthodox, and socially they were divided into two large castes - ashirets /independent tribes/ and ruyas /dependent people/. They were mainly engaged in agriculture and cattle-breeding. At the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries the

political, military and clerical leader of the Assyrians in Turkey and Iran was patriarch Mar-Shimoun Benjamin.

1895-1896 witnessed the Assyrian massacres carried out by Sultan Abdul Hamid II in Diyarbekir, Hasankeyef, Sivas and other parts of Anatolia, by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Over 55,000 Assyrians from 245 villages were killed as a result of these slaughters. Another 100,000 Assyrian women were forced into Turkish and Kurdish harems. Turkish troops sacked the remains of the Assyrian settlements. Assyrians were raped, tortured and murdered.

At the beginning of the 20th century national minorities of Ottoman Turkey pinned their hopes on Young Turks. They waited impatiently for the promised freedom. But instead they were either physically exterminated or forcedly Islamized. At one of the secret conferences a Young Turkish ideologist doctor Nazeem said, "The massacre is indispensable. All non-Turkish elements must be exterminated whatever their nationality is".

English historian R. Stafford fairly observed, "It would be a great progress for the Turks if they could show that regardless of what happened to the Armenians, another Christian community of Turkey is quite satisfied with its fortune". And what was their fortune?

The facts show that on the eve of World War I the Russian command made a request for help to Mar-Shimoun Benjamin, and in response to it the latter promised an army of 40,000 to the Russian consul of Van - Termen. This caused the destruction of 98 villages by Turks. Massacres of Assyrians and Armenians took place in Diyarbekir, Bitlis, Adana, Urfa and other places.

According to a "Baku" report dated back to September 1914, some 30 Assyrian villages were scorched out and 200

Assyrians were burned alive. 12,000 Ottoman soldiers sacked the village of Aynvardo in Tur-Abdin and killed all its population. This attack resulted in a fight lasting 2 months and 6 days as the Assyrians fought back. Reports about the attack on Midyat tell of blood flowing down from the roof gutter of each house. In Seyerd Assyrians were rounded up like cattle and made to walk for days under harsh weather conditions. Women, children and the elderly, were beaten, raped and constantly abused. Those who were no longer able to walk were killed.

Djeveded Bey /governor of Van/, who had a “butchers” regiment of 8,000, did his “job”. Newspapers reported about attacks on the villages in the mountains of Hakkari and about murder of all the Assyrians in 30 settlements in Gjavar region.

A priest from Diyarbekir, abbot Jozef Naayem testified that on April 8, 1915 terrible massacres took place: they gathered men above 16, beat, tortured, killed them, and afterwards put turbans on their heads and photographed them in order to prove the world that Christians oppressed Moslems.

During World War I Armenians as well as Assyrians underwent massacres and deportation. Unfortunately, the massacres were also carried out by a country that considered itself neutral - Iran.

In 1915 the progress of Russian forces in the South enabled Young Turks to untie themselves from their promise “not to disturb” non-Turkish population.

Eyewitnesses told about the attack on the elderly with spears and swords in the village of Gardienne, about churches burnt, women raped and captured, and about the slaughter of those refusing to convert to Islam.

In January 1915 a police detachment under the command of Khan Kachal encircled and destroyed the Assyrian village of Gulpashan. After the seizure of Dilman the population of the nearest 20 villages was exterminated. 750 people were beheaded

in the Assyrian village of Havtevan. The only way to survive was to emigrate. This anguishing escape from Iran to Mesopotamia was accompanied by heavy human losses. "The scene of the tragic deportation of a small rejected nation drew my attention. I am speaking about the Assyrians", - an English eyewitness testified.

During World War I a real genocide, according to measures of international law, took place in Ottoman Turkey and adjoined countries, where about 1,000,000 Assyrians used to live.

In 1919 the periodical "French Asia" observed, "The massacres of Assyrians resemble the massacres of Armenians. And as very little has been spoken about these people with 250,000 victims, all the world should be informed about it".

The fall of The Ottoman Empire evoked hopes of getting autonomy among Assyrians. Several Assyrian delegations took part in Parisian Conference in 1919. The delegation from Constantinople headed by lawyers Sayid Antuan Namek, Rustem Nedjebi and doctor Jean Zebuni was the most active one. They came out in favor of the idea of establishing first an autonomous and then an independent Assyrian state. According to this program vilayets of Diyarbekir and Mosul, Urfa, Der-Dzor, the province of Seyerd /vilayet of Bitlis/, the harbor of Alexandret in the Mediterranean Sea and the territory near Shade-ele-Arab /the Persian Gulf/ were to be included in the state. But instead of these aspirations the Sevr Pact gave the Assyrian people only "a protection guarantee" /and only in case autonomous Kurdistan is established/.

The Lozan Conference in 1923 put an end to all their illusions. Here the Assyrian matter wasn't even auditioned. At the time of that very conference Turkish authorities exiled 20,000 Assyrians from Turkey to the boundaries of Iraq, to the so-called "Brussels line". The League of Nations didn't take any

measures to settle the Assyrian matter, or to help these people. And what is more, on December 26, 1925 the League of Nations transferred Hakkari to Turkey and Mosul to Iraq, bringing to naught the hopes about the Assyrian autonomy. The Assyrians became aliens on their own historical land.

The tragic events of 1933 resulted in Assyrians' emigration to all over the world. On May 7, 1945 during a speech at the UN General Assembly the clerical leader of the Assyrians Mar-Shimoun made an unsuccessful attempt to receive the support of the Great Powers for settling the Assyrian matter.

The international decree should not be to eliminate Assyrians from history. They should not be considered as a nation that disappeared from the face of the earth with the collapse of their empire. Assyrians hope that Turkey concealing such a past will have to objectively evaluate its history so that future misdeeds can be prevented.

Today the fact of the international recognition of their genocide during World War I is very important for the Assyrian people.