

Speech by the Prime Minister of Armenia

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Delivered at the 'The Ultimate Crime, the Ultimate Challenge: The Genocide and the Human Rights' International Conference

(Yerevan, April 20-21, 2005)

Distinguished participants of the international conference,

Dear guests,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Armenia as well as on behalf of the State Commission for Organization of Commemoration of the 90th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide I welcome all the participants and guests who responded to the State Commission's invitation and participated at the conference. This once again proves that today more than ever the Genocide, as the ultimate crime against humanity and as a universal challenge to humankind preoccupies the whole progressive world community.

This conference, entitled "An Ultimate Crime, An Ultimate Challenge: The Genocide and the Human Rights" is actually the continuation of the international information campaign aimed at foreseeing, preventing, stopping and punishing for Genocide. I am happy to see here people from different parts of the world, who have raised their voices of condemnation at different forums against the heaviest crime against humanity: Genocide. In this sense it seems appropriate for me to mention the following statement by the distinguished participant of the conference Yehuda Bauer, made in the German Bundestag during the 53th commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1998: "The Armenian Genocide was conducted with the technological and bureaucratic means available at that time. The same means were

used by the Nazis against Poles and Jews.”

It is not a coincidence that today's conference in Yerevan is being conducted under the 'Recognition, Condemnation, Prevention' motto, which means that had there been early recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century, then mankind might have been spared similar tragedies.

The Armenian Genocide, which was planned and conducted at the state level in the Ottoman empire, ninety years ago, is the most cruel and tragic page of the history of Armenian nation, and the horrible aftermath we still feel today.

The Genocide, which was conducted in 1915-1923 took the lives of 1.5 million innocent victims, the spiritual and material assets created by the Armenian nation during millennia were destroyed, those who escaped death were dispersed all over the world, suffering the heaviest of refugee hardships.

Decades later, let me once again on behalf of the Armenian nation and the Government of the Republic of Armenia express our deep gratitude to all those countries and nations, who gave shelter to thousands of Armenians, who supported them in undergoing heavy deprivations and who helped to begin their lives and create a new future in these countries.

The Armenian Genocide with its heavy consequences also caused horrible damage first to the Armenian identity, when a huge part of our nation was denied the right to live together in their historical homes. As a result, our Diaspora compatriots have made huge efforts to preserve their national identity.

In general the issues included in the agenda of the conference have one common feature: the condemnation of the Genocide as a crime, and a deep preoccupation with the preservation of the

common values of human rights, freedom and justice.

It is not a secret that the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide has been the test of the Armenian-Turkish relationship. This is aptly described in the agenda of the conference as ‘divided by history, unified by geography’.

The Government of the Republic of Armenia has announced and still confirms its readiness to establish normal relationships with Turkey without any preconditions. Meanwhile any initiative of establishing diplomatic ties with Turkey ends up with various unacceptable preconditions put ahead by the latter. In fact the gradual rehabilitation of the trust that has been shaken between Armenia and Turkey, would enforce the further development of regional security and cooperation, the resolution of current conflicts in South Caucasus and the establishment of peaceful coexistence.

Armenia fully agrees with those opinions by the political circles in Europe, according to which a country seeking a full membership in the European Union at least is obliged to be able to reconcile with its own past by recognizing the own crime.

It is important for us to see Turkey freed from the heavy burden of the past, freed from its policy of denial. But contemporary Turkey as the successor state of the Ottoman empire by denying the fact of the Armenian Genocide pushed itself out from the process of self-redemption and coming to terms with own history, choosing instead to remain a state with the psychology of denial as state policy, and also remaining the only country to seek membership in the EU, without ridding itself of the ethnic intolerance and the feeling of ethnic incompatibility.

While consistently trying to achieve the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide we push ahead not only

the violated rights of our nation, rehabilitation of dignity and justice, but we also make a significant input to the struggle of the whole civilized world against this crime, thus supporting the establishment of a comprehensive regime of international law and morality.

We are sure that the struggle against this crime is the duty of every state, international institution and the whole world community.

History is an integrated dynamic process, where the past, the present and the future are inseparably linked with each other.

Occasionally proposals are made to forget the past and to move ahead. We answer: moving ahead with whom? Are we to move ahead with a Genocide perpetrator? Are we to move ahead with the successor-state of a country, which conducted Genocide against its own citizens? Are we to move ahead with the country, which intentionally conceals the historical truth? During the last nine decades there has not been a political force, media organization or public movement in Turkey to express regret for a Genocide conducted against a whole nation, to treat the destruction of Armenians as disrespectful and a shame for the name and reputation of the Turkish nation. And the truth and attempts to label historical realities by their appropriate names, made by individual representatives of intelligentsia have been publicly criticized by the state.

We call upon Turkey: restore historical justice and the damaged rights of our nation, and let us, indeed, move ahead securely and without mutual distrust and without complexes.

As the descendant of a Genocide survivor from Mush, I have often experienced the feelings of the rare survivor of our huge family. Even after this, I am ready to begin a dialogue with any Turkish politician or any representative of Turkish public, if they will have enough courage to honestly consider their own history. The upcoming generations need this more than we do.

Even after living through such a disaster, the Armenian nation found the capacity to once again rise, to establish statehood in one of the corners of its historical motherland, and to strengthen an independent state, to contribute to the creation of cultural values of humanity. This has been the response of the survivors to the perpetrators of the Genocide.

Distinguished conference participants,

I am hopeful that this international conference will become another important step to coordinate our efforts against the crime of Genocide, to unify the potential and the resources of the international community and to go through the 21st Century with the realization of our desire to live without this formidable crime.

In conclusion let me once again state the following: nations of the world, be alert, because a Genocide always can reoccur if we do not unify our efforts and if we do not struggle together against similar challenges.

Thank you.