



Culture  
Heritage  
History  
Language

Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota  
Established 1980

## MinneHyeLites

No. 142 Special Edition

# Armenian Genocide Centennial Commemoration Special Edition

This year marks the centennial commemoration of the beginning of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire. Four different groups in the Twin Cities got together to share ideas on how to commemorate this special anniversary. These groups were: the Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota (ACOM), St. Sahag Armenian Church, World Without Genocide (WWG) at William Mitchell College of Law, and the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (CHGS) at the University of Minnesota. Together and separately, we held several events to commemorate this anniversary. A couple of outside groups scheduled events as well. This special edition of MinneHyeLites is dedicated to documenting all of these events.

### The Tents of Witness at St. Sahag Armenian Church



On Saturday, March 29, and Sunday, March 30, ACOM displayed the World Without Genocide's "Tents of Witness" in the basement of St. Sahag church. With

Christie Nicoson of WWG as our guide, several members of ACOM and St. Sahag put up ten tents, each one representing a genocide that occurred somewhere in the world during the last century. The genocides which were represented were Armenia, the Jewish Holocaust, American Indian, Argentina, Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, North Korea and Rwanda. The tents were designed to be replicas of a standard refugee tent which might be set up by

the United Nations to house people in distress. Each tent was decorated by representa-

tatives of the corresponding nationality. On the outside were painted the national colors, flags, maps, or images of the people or country.

The inside of the tent contained the statistics about the genocide. When did it occur? How did it happen? Who did it? How many people died? What was the result? How did the world respond?

On Saturday, only about 8 to 10 people attended the display. On Sunday however, 40 to 50 people attended. All in all, it was a worthwhile effort.



## Richard Hovannisian at William Mitchell College of Law

On April 14, Richard Hovannisian gave a talk called “Memory, Denial, and Recognition.” Here is a description of that event written by Ellen J. Kennedy, Ph.D., Executive Director, World Without Genocide at William Mitchell College of Law.



Richard Hovannisian, a descendant of Armenian genocide survivors, is one of the world’s foremost scholars of the Armenian genocide. On April 14, he spoke at William Mitchell College of Law, sponsored jointly by World Without Genocide and ACOM, in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Professor Hovannisian began a program at UCLA that has resulted in more than 800 recorded oral histories of Armenian genocide survivors. More than 400 of these testimonies are now archived at the Shoah Foundation at the University of Southern California. These testimonies provide irrefutable direct evidence of the events of the genocide.

He spoke movingly about his own struggle as a child of survivors at a time when there were no books, no efforts to educate the general public, and no strategies to combat the Turkish government’s activities to suppress knowledge of the genocide. The government, he stated, acted intentionally to stifle and deny the memory for a generation to eliminate any claims of Turkish responsibility for restitution or compensation.

With the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide,

however, this began to change, as Armenians, particularly those of the second generation, began to explore their own histories and the stories of their parents and grandparents.

A key difference between the Jews and the Armenians, according to Prof. Hovannisian, is that Jews were already a diasporan culture before the Holocaust. As

the truth of the Holocaust became known, Jewish refugees in the US connected with long-established Jews who were able to use many resources to recount the catastrophe. The Armenians who came to the US, however, were on their own. It has taken several generations for the films, books, and scholarly research to break the silence.

Professor Hovannisian concluded his remarks with a moving video interview of an Armenian survivor who was taken as a child and raised in a Turkish family. He does not know who he really is, and to see this older man struggle with the basic definitions of identity – one’s name, family, and place of origin – was very poignant.




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## Billboards

Father Tadeos, Pastor of St. Sahag Church, arranged sponsorship to fund two billboards in the Twin Cities commemorating the centennial of the Armenian genocide. Each billboard was on display for approximately a month, ending around April 24.



## Days of Remembrance: From the Armenians to the Holocaust



by Ellen J. Kennedy

The City of Edina held a special event on Sunday, April 19, to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II and the Holocaust. The program, held at Edina City Hall, began with a discussion by Ellen Kennedy of two similar patterns of denial – Turkey’s ongoing denial of the genocide of the Armenians, and the increasing virulence of Holocaust denial.

Twenty-one countries around the world have called the Armenian catastrophe *genocide*; 43 states in the US, including Minnesota, have done the same. However, the US government has never taken this step.

In April, fifteen US senators, including Senator Marco Rubio and Senator Elizabeth Warren, signed a bipartisan letter urging President Obama to attend the main memorial event in the Armenian capital, Yerevan, on April 24, “to send a powerful message that the United States recognizes the magnitude and full meaning of the Armenian Genocide.” President Obama did not attend that event as we know, and the US government continues to defer to geopolitics by withholding the word ‘genocide’ despite President Obama’s campaign promises.

The tragic consequence of individuals and nations standing by in the face of an ever-increasing threat of violence was made real by Dora Zaidenweber, a writer and survivor

of the Holocaust. She gave eloquent testimony to the reality of the Holocaust as she recounted her personal story of incarceration in a Polish ghetto, imprisonment at Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and liberation. Her personal experience is the most powerful attack that can be brought against deniers. As we know, however, Holocaust survivors will soon be like Armenian survivors – with us only in memory, and perhaps in manuscripts and films of their stories.

The final part of the program was a short play called ***Upstanders: Saving Armenians and Jews***. This play was written by World Without Genocide and performed by students, staff, and board members. The play highlighted men and women who acted with great courage to save Armenians during the genocide, people such as the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau, Sr., the brave Armenian fighters at Musa Dagh, and the Turkish governor Celal Bey. The play also spotlighted Armenians who survived the genocide and, thirty years later, saved Jews who were endangered during the Holocaust. There are 26 Armenians who are immortalized at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem, for saving Jews; by comparison, there are only four Americans.

There were nearly 150 people at the event including the Mayor of Edina, members of the Edina Human Rights and Relations Commission, and many people from ACOM and St. Sahag Church. As one attendee who is not Armenian said, “The Armenian genocide was never mentioned in school. Why don’t we learn about these tragedies?” The yearly ***Days of Remembrance*** program in Edina is part of Minnesota’s annual designation of April as Genocide Awareness and Prevention Month.

## Reception at Westminster Presbyterian church

Phil Asgian, a member of ACOM, arranged to have a display commemorating the centennial of the Armenian genocide at Westminster Presbyterian Church, in downtown Minneapolis. Westminster hosted a commemorative exhibit in the Great Hall, presented by its Social Justice Ministry Team to remember the victims of the Armenian genocide, to share the impact of Armenians in MN through the story of one of the earliest Armenian immigrant families, and to remind viewers of the lessons of prejudice and indifference in our world today, especially around the issues of immigration and Christians in the Middle East. The Westminster exhibit opened on Sunday, April 19, and a reception was held on Monday, April 20.



## Movie "The Cut" at St. Anthony Main theater

This year, the Minneapolis Film Festival included a movie about the Armenian genocide called "The Cut," directed by Fatih Akin, who is of Turkish descent, but born in Germany. Several local Armenians attended the opening night on Monday, April 20, or the second showing the following night. "The Cut" tells the story of an Armenian man, Nazaret Manoogian and his family, who are caught up in the actions of the Armenian genocide. He and his twin daughters survive but are separated. The movie shows his attempts to find his daughters.

## Bedros Der Matossian Lecture

(extracted from the CHGS newsletter)



On April 23-25, the Center for Holocaust and Genocide studies, along with the Human Rights Program Institute for Global Studies, and the Ohanessian Chair, marked the centennial of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 with a series of

events. This included a keynote by Middle East scholar Bedros Der Matossian, an international student conference titled "One Hundred Years of Genocide: Remembrance, Education, Prevention," a teacher workshop on World War I and the Armenian Genocide, as well as a guided tour of Bdote, a sacred Dakota site at Ft. Snelling State Park led by Professor Iyekiapiwin Darlene St. Clair.

The three-day program was opened by the Arsham and Charlotte Ohanessian Lecture, also serving as keynote for the international student conference, delivered by Professor Bedros Der Matossian, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His talk was titled "The Armenian Genocide Historiography on the Eve of the Centennial: From Continuity to Contingency," and gave a comprehensive overview of the different approaches to studying and interpreting the Armenian Genocide, highlighting the importance of multi-causal interpretations and micro-historical approaches to understanding the emergence and execution of the genocide.



## **CHGS Student Conference at U of M**

*(extracted from the CHGS newsletter)*

The international student conference on April 24 addressed the topic of one hundred years of genocide from different aspects, and saw student presenters from Armenia, Hungary, the UK, and US. It was moderated by Bedros Der Matosian and U of M professors Joachim Savelsberg, Barbara Frey, and Alejandro Baer. First, Angel Amirjanyan and Varduhi Gumruyan delivered their presentations on the psychological effects of genocide and post-traumatic stress in Armenia via Skype, identifying a clear thread of trauma as inherited. Both scholars spoke of the still notable effects of the genocide, even in their generation, manifesting in lack of confidence, inferiority complex, and hesitance to interact with Turkish youth. Both presenters also noted the importance of engaging in a dialogue about the past, and making connections with their Turkish counterparts, in order to minimize tension between the two communities. They also noted, however, that in order for healing to occur, a clear recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide on behalf of Turkey must happen. Peter Kranitz presented on the fate of Armenian refugees in Constantinople, including the problematic "repatriation" of displaced Armenians to the new Soviet Republic from former Ottoman territories.

The second session addressed Armenian and Turkish relations after the genocide. Vahram Ayvazyan spoke about the discrepancies between official state and unofficial, civic society, NGO discourse on the genocide and ways of

moving forward, noting that the former is at times inflexible. Torkom Movsesyan raised the question of whether having international judicial bodies tackle the issue of the Armenian Genocide might help mediate the situation, and motivate Turkey's recognition of the past events. Gevorg Petrosyan gave a presentation on Turkey's current policy of genocide denial, carried out through the "Shared Pain" discourse, which does not recognize the Armenian Genocide as such, but rather wraps it in with other World War I tragedies, as merely a casualty of the war, among others.

The conference did not just address the Armenian Genocide, however. Lindsay Blahnik talked about the effects of punitive and restorative justice on social cohesion following the Rwandan Genocide, while Tom Dunn informed the audience about the problematic British intervention in the Sierra Leonean Civil War. Finally, Rebecca Shnabel presented on the problematic power relations associated with the translation process, as exemplified by Elie Wiesel's *Night*, wherein the original was significantly abridged and modified to be less disturbing to a post-World War II readership. The conference was wrapped up by presentations by Kayla Nomina, speaking on the possibility to determine causal agents of genocide, and the potential for prevention; and Joe Eggers, who presented a comparison of the Native American and Armenian genocides, looking at the role of nationalism in both contexts.

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### **Religions and Genocide**

World Without Genocide is holding a Summer Institute for high school and college students on August 11-13 this year. The institute is titled "Religions and Genocide." The program information includes the following statements:

"Genocide is defined as the intent to exterminate, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group."

"The Nazi extermination of Jews was not the first time a religious group has been singled out for violence. Before the Jews it was Christian

Armenians who lived in a largely Muslim country."

"Explore why religious groups are targeted, how to prevent this conflict, and how to advocate for laws and policies to prosecute perpetrators."

Part of the program will involve recreating the trial of Soghomon Tehlirian in Berlin in 1921, a young Armenian genocide survivor, for killing Talat Pasha, one of the leaders of the Ottoman Empire who directed the genocide.

## World War I and the Armenian Genocide Teacher Workshop at U of M

*(extracted from the CHGS newsletter)*

A Teacher Workshop on World War I and the Armenian Genocide was held on Saturday, April 25. Sessions led by Bedros Der Matossian and U of M faculty, staff and community members illustrated various historical perspectives in Europe and the colonies at the imminent approach of World War I.

Overall, the three-day events highlighted the lasting traumatic effects of genocide, even several generations on, but also saw potential in new ways of dealing with the past, including recognizing micro-histories, establishing cultural exchanges, considering different and at times uneasy ways of approaching justice and reconciliation. While the conference also showed that each genocide is a unique event, some parallels were evident, even in contexts seemingly as distinct as US-Native American and Ottoman-Armenian relations.

## Khatchkar dedication at St. Sahag Armenian Church

A ceremony to dedicate the Khatchkar was held on Sunday, June 7. The blessing was performed by the Very Reverend Father Simeon Odabashian, assisted by Father Tadeos. The dedication ceremony was followed by a dinner.



## Blood Drive at St. Sahag

On, April 26, the Armenian Genocide Centennial Blood Drive was held at St. Sahag Armenian Church. The drive was a cooperative effort with the American Red Cross. The goal of the blood drive was to honor Armenian Martyrs by giving the gift of life through a blood donation. Armenians, friends of Armenians, and neighbors took part in the event. The Red Cross received 13 units of blood while attracting 4 new donors. Thanks to all those who participated in the event as well as those who attempted to donate but were deferred. The American Red Cross appreciates these efforts, as do we from the Armenian Genocide Centennial Committee.

## Museum of Russian Art

St. Sahag Armenian Church, in conjunction with the Museum of Russian Art, sponsored a display of Armenian genocide pictures and articles at the museum from Saturday, June 20, to Monday, June 22. A reception was held to commemorate the display on June 20.



## Ecumenical Church Service at St. Paul Cathedral

On April 18, the St. Paul Cathedral was the site of an Ecumenical Prayer Service dedicated to “the Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide and All Martyrs of Faith.” The service was co-hosted by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, the Minnesota Council of Churches, and St. Sahag Armenian Church. Prayers and readings were presented by representatives from several local churches and by the Very Reverend Father Aren Jebejian, representing the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.



## Armenian Genocide Commemoration program at St. Sahag

On Friday, April 24, ACOM and St. Sahag Armenian Church held their annual commemoration program. This year we had presentations by Alejandro Baer, the director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota, Amy Klobuchar, the senior senator for Minnesota, Steve Hunegs, the director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, Betty McCollum, U.S. congresswoman for Minnesota, and Tim Walz, U.S. congressman for Minnesota. Musical interludes were provided by Max Lundgren on his cello.

country and, as such, outside powers could not interfere. Lemkin created the term "genocide" to apply to this action and worked to get anti-genocide laws passed by the United Nations.

Alejandro Baer talked about how, at the trial for the killing of Talat Pasha by Soghomon Tehlirian, a young lawyer named Raphael Lemkin was astonished to find out that the killing of the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire was not a crime. It was considered to be an internal action of a

Amy Klobuchar talked about Minnesotans who volunteered to fight against the Ottoman army to help the Armenians. She talked about the scars which are carried down through the generations of survivors of genocide. She quoted Peter Balakian as saying "The denial of genocide is the final stage of genocide."

Steve Hunegs called for everyone to demand that the Armenian genocide be recognized as a genocide. He thanked the other speakers for their work in this area. He discussed the lives of



Armenians and Jews in Minnesota and their many similarities.

Betty McCollum called for the acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide by those who did it. Forgiveness cannot be given unless the perpetrators admit what they did. She called for the U.S. to formally recognize the genocide, and for Turkey to formally acknowledge it.



When Tim Walz was a high school history teacher, he spent a lot of time making sure that his students knew about the Armenian, Jewish and other genocides and could understand why they happened. He stated that the U.S. should return to its roots and do what is right by recognizing the Armenian genocide, and demand that Turkey admit its part. He very strongly stated that this is far more important than being silent in order to maintain an air base in Turkey.



A reception was held after the program. A large number of people stayed for over an hour to discuss all of the presentations.



People at the Commemoration service



Reception

