

HONOURABLE SENATORS..... I AM HONOURED TO RISE TODAY TO SECOND THE MOTION OF MY COLLEAGUE SENATOR MERCHANT CALLING ON THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA TO RECOGNIZE THE CHRISTIAN PONTIAN GENOCIDE AND DECLARE MAY 19 A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

COLLEAGUES, I ASK YOU TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING FROM THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF GENOCIDE AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT RUTGERS:

“They began singling out all able-bodied Greek men, forcibly conscripting them into labor battalions which performed slave labor for the Turkish war effort. Greek children were stolen and forcibly assimilated into Turkish society. Greek villages were brutally plundered and terrorized under the pretext of internal security. Indeed, as with the Armenians, the Greeks were generally accused as a disloyal and traitorous “fifth-column,” and eventually most of the population was rounded up and forcibly deported to the interior.”

THERE IS NO DOUBT THE ACTIONS I’VE JUST DESCRIBED TO YOU FIT THE LEGAL DEFINITION OF GENOCIDE AS IT APPEARS IN ARTICLE 2 OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE

INDEED, THOSE SAME ACTIONS AGAINST ARMENIANS HAVE BEEN RECOGNIZED AS GENOCIDE BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY.

HOWEVER, WHILE THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IS WIDELY KNOWN AND ACKNOWLEDGED, THE PONTIAN GENOCIDE, WHICH OCCURRED CONCURRENTLY, REMAINS OBSCURE.

IT IS HIGH TIME FOR THAT TO CHANGE HERE IN CANADA, AS IT HAS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS.

ANDRE GEROLYMATOS FROM THE STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION CENTRE FOR HELLENIC STUDIES AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY HAD THIS TO SAY OF BOTH THE ARMENIAN AND PONTIAN GENOCIDES:

“The Ottoman genocide of the Armenians and Pontic Greek Orthodox was aimed specifically at Christian minorities in an effort to create an ethnically cleansed state.”

PRIOR TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR, AS THEIR ANCESTORS HAD FOR MILLENIA, 700 THOUSAND GREEK ORHTODOX LIVED IN THE BLACK SEA REGION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE OTHERWISE KNOWN AS PONTOS.

DURING THE WAR, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE EMBARKED ON A COURSE OF REPREHENSIBLE ACTS THAT LED TO THE GENOCIDE OF THE PONTIANS, AS THEY DID WITH THE ARMENIANS.

AS MR. GEROLYMATOS STATES, “The genocide was conducted sadistically to instill terror in the minds of the surviving minorities in the Ottoman Empire.”

THE GENOCIDE INCLUDED MASS RAPE, WANTON DESTRUCTION, AND TORTURE FOR THE SAKE OF TORTURE REGARDLESS OF GENDER OR AGE.

CHILDREN WERE RAPED, OFTEN IN FRONT OF THEIR PARENTS, BEFORE THE ENTIRE FAMILY WAS EVENTUALLY PUT TO DEATH. HUSBANDS, WIVES AND CHILDREN WERE OFTEN BRUTALLY TORTURED PRIOR TO EXECUTION.

AS WAS THE CASE OF THE ARMENIANS, THE OTTOMAN REGIME CARRIED OUT ITS EFFORTS TO EXTINGUISH THE PONTIC GREEKS IN STAGES.

AT THE ONSET OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, AS WAS THE CASE WITH THE ARMENIANS, GREEK ORTHODOX PONTIC MEN WERE FORCED INTO THE TURKISH INTERIOR TO WORK IN LABOUR BATTALIONS.

IN JANUARY OF 1916, US CONSUL-GENERAL IN THE NEAR EAST, GEORGE HUTTON, DESCRIBED THE START OF THE DEPORTATIONS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX PONTIANS FROM THE BLACK SEA IN A REPORT, WRITING:

These unfortunate human beings came through the city of Marsovan by thousands, walking for the most part during the three-days' journey through the snow and mud.

(As intended by the Ottoman authorities), thousands fell by the wayside from exhaustion. (They came into the city) always under escort of Turkish gendarmes.

BY NOVEMBER 1916, THE AUSTRIAN CONSUL REPORTED THAT REFET BEY, A SENIOR OTTOMAN OFFICIAL, HAD TOLD HIM, “We must finish off the Greeks as we did the Armenians....”

WHERE THERE WAS A DEVIATION FROM THE TREATMENT OF THE ARMENIANS TO THAT OF THE PONTIANS WAS A CHANGE IN

TACTICS. IT SEEMS THE OTTOMANS HAD LEARNED FROM THE INTERNATIONAL OUTRAGE OVER THEIR ACTIONS AGAINST THE ARMENIANS. TRAGICALLY, THE LESSON WAS NOT ONE OF RESTRAINT BUT RATHER ONE OF LEARNING TO CARRY OUT THE ATROCITIES AWAY FROM PRYING EYES.

IN HIS REPORT, US CONSUL-GENERAL HUTTON DESCRIBED THE TREATMENT OF THE PONTIANS AS,

“...even more radical than a straight massacre as such the Armenians suffered before.”

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, LIKE HUTTON BEFORE HIM, AUSTRIAN CHANCELLOR HOLLWEGG ALSO NOTED THAT THE OTTOMANS HAD CHANGED THE TACTICS EMPLOYED IN EXTERMINATING ARMENIANS AND WERE INSTEAD FORCING THE PONTIANS TO THE INTERIOR TO ALLOW THEM TO BE KILLED WITHOUT ATTENTION FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

AND THE OTTOMANS SUCCEEDED KILLING A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE PONTIC PEOPLE. THE BODY COUNT OF THE GENOCIDE OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX PONTIANS WAS 350 THOUSAND MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

350 THOUSAND PEOPLE OUT OF 700 THOUSAND. HALF THE POPULATION, EXTERMINATED.

WE **MUST** DECLARE THEIR TRAGIC FATE GENOCIDE.

NOT ONLY HAVE THE GHOSTS OF THE PONTIC GREEK ORTHODOX EARNED THE RIGHT TO CONFRONT THEIR MURDERERS BUT TO PARAPHRASE THE WORDS OF A WISE MAN,

“Those who forget the tragedies of the past are doomed to repeat them.”

AND INDEED, THE WORLD CHOSE TO IGNORE THE GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS AND PONTIANS, AND WE WERE FORCED TO CONFRONT THE NAZI HOLOCAUST OF EUROPEAN JEWS AS A RESULT.

WE IGNORED RWANDA AND ARE NOW DEALING WITH GENOCIDES, LIKE THAT OF THE YAZIDIS, BEING CARRIED OUT BY ISIS.

IN ASKING PARLIAMENT TO RECOGNIZE THE PONTIAN GENOCIDE, WE AREN'T ASKING CANADA OR CANADIANS TO SIT IN JUDGEMENT OF OTHERS. AND WE AREN'T SEEKING TO UNDO ACTIONS OF THE PAST.

ON THE CONTRARY. IT IS ABOUT ACKNOWLEDGING, AND HEALING AND EDUCATING AND IN SO DOING, PREVENTING SUCH ATROCITIES FROM HAPPENING AGAIN.

BEING THE UPPER CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT, THE SENATE OF CANADA IS IDEALLY SITUATED FOR LEADING THE WAY IN TAKING A PRINCIPLED STAND IN RECOGNIZING THE CHRISTIAN PONTIAN GENOCIDE.

AS THE INDEPENDENT HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT WE ARE LESS INFLUENCED BY OR BEHOLDEN TO POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY. THE SENATE CAN AND MUST LEAD THE WAY FOR THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA AS A WHOLE IN TAKING A JUST POSITION ON THIS IMPORTANT MATTER.

RECOGNITION OF THIS GENOCIDE IS NOT AN ATTEMPT AT RETRIBUTION BUT RATHER AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF UNDENIABLE HISTORICAL FACTS THAT IS A CRUCIAL FIRST STEP IN TRUE RECONCILIATION.

THIS IS CERTAINLY TRUE FOR NATIONS WHO WANT TO BE ACCEPTED AS MODERN DAY DEMOCRACIES. THERE IS PERHAPS NO GREATER EXAMPLE OF THIS THAN MODERN DAY GERMANY.

IMAGINE GERMNAY'S PLACE IN THE WORLD TODAY HAD THEY NOT ACKNOWLEDGED THE ATROCITIES THAT WERE COMMITTED BY THEIR NAZI PREDECESSORS.

RECOGNIZING AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR DARK CHAPTERS IN OUR HISTORY, IS NOT ABOUT JUDGEMENT OR PUNISHMENT. AND IS NOT ABOUT TRYING TO UNDO THAT WHICH CAN NOT BE UNDONE.

IT IS ABOUT RECONCILIATION.

WITH OUR OWN HISTORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, CANADA KNOWS THIS ALL TOO WELL.

ON JUNE 11, 2008, PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER STOOD IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, AND SAID THE FOLLOWING....

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

WHILE MR. HARPER AND HIS GOVERNMENT DID NOT DIRECTLY HAVE A HAND IN INFLICTING THIS TERRIBLE TRAGEDY UPON OUR FIRST NATIONS, THEY DID RECOGNIZE IT WAS TIME FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY.

PRIME MINISTER HARPER WENT ON TO SAY.....

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country.

THAT HISTORIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND APOLOGY PAVED THE WAY FOR THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION WHICH WAS STRUCK IN 2009 AND CHAIRED BY OUR COLLEAGUE HERE IN THE SENATE, THE HONOURABLE MURRAY SINCLAIR.

THE COMMISSION PROVIDED A ROADMAP TO RECONCILIATION BETWEEN CANADA AND HER FIRST NATIONS THAT WAS FORTHRIGHT IN ITS ASSESSMENT OF WHAT WAS DONE TO CANADA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE FOR GENERATIONS.

WHILE THESE THINGS MAY HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT FOR US TO HEAR AND TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR, WE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO DO SO IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD.

ADMITTING WRONGDOING SOMETIMES TAKES COURAGE AND STRENGTH BUT IT SHOWS A WILLINGNESS TO LEARN FROM ONE'S FAILURES.

DARK, UGLY CHAPTERS IN OUR HISTORY CAN NOT BE DENIED, ESPECIALLY IF, AS A NATION, ONE WANTS TO REMAIN WORTHY OF ONE'S PLACE IN THE WORLD, AS DID GERMANY.

MODERN DAY TURKEY'S UNWILLINGNESS TO EVEN RECOGNIZE THE CHRISTIAN GENOCIDES OF THE ARMENIANS, ASSYRIANS AND PONTIANS IS NOT BECOMING OF THE SIGNIFICANT STATUS THEY ENJOY IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

BUT COLLEAGUES, EVEN IF TURKEY ITSELF WILL NOT RECOGNIZE THESE GENOCIDES, WE AS PARLIAMENTARIANS, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY AS CANADIANS, MUST STAND UP AND BE COUNTED IN DENOUNCING GENOCIDE, PAST AND PRESENT.

JUST AS WE ACKNOWLEDGED OUR OWN DARK HISTORY, WE MUST NOW RECOGNIZE THE GENOCIDE OF THE PONTIC CHRISTIAN GREEKS.

WE, AS A PARLIAMENT MUST JOIN WITH OUR INTERNATIONAL COUNTERPARTS LIKE AUSTRIA, THE NETHERLANDS, SWEDEN, AUSTRALIA AND IN THE UNITED STATES - FLORIDA, MASSACHUSETTS, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK AND EVEN THOSE HERE AT HOME - TORONTO, HAMILTON AND OTTAWA, IN RECOGNIZING THE ACTIONS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AGAINST THE PONTIANS AS GENOCIDE AND DECLARE MAY 19 A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE.

