



SARA CORNING CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION

45 Hallcrown Place, Toronto, ON M2J 4Y4 | www.corningcentre.org | info@corningcentre.org

Unit Title

Justice and the Armenian Genocide

Lesson Title

Recognition

Developers

Levon Sarmazian, OCT; Karina Nagiar Hasserjian, OCT; Daniel Ohanian, CPhil

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- learn what *recognition* means within the context of justice for the Armenian Genocide.

Materials

- Zack Beauchamp: “Germany Just Voted to Recognize the Armenian Genocide. Turkey Is Furious.”
- Turkish Human Rights Association: letter to the German consul general of Istanbul
- Atom Egoyan: “Until Erdogan Calls It ‘Genocide,’ Armenian Reconciliation Won’t Happen”
- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: statements on Armenian Genocide Memorial Day

Background for Teachers

The Armenian Genocide began in 1915 and continued through 1923, in a number of locations and stages. Throughout, Armenians and Western countries, including Canada, filled their newspapers with reports of what was happening. When the Ottoman Empire officially lost the First World War in 1918, the Allied powers pushed for Ottoman military officers to be tried for their wartime crimes, and many were found guilty.

With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, an official policy of collective amnesia was instituted. The genocide could no longer be discussed openly. Outside of Turkey, knowledge about it slowly faded away for some forty years, until the 1960s.

Because justice was never done and once outright genocide denial began in Turkey,¹ activists made it their mission to have the genocide openly recognized, to have organizations and countries formally proclaim that they remembered the Armenian Genocide.

The purpose of this lesson is to teach about the importance and intricacies of genocide recognition. It does so by using a newspaper article about Germany, the Ottoman Empire’s wartime ally; an open letter written by the Turkish Human Rights Association; a

¹ The Corning Centre has [several lesson plans](#) about genocide denial that you might consider using.



SARA CORNING CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION

45 Hallcrown Place, Toronto, ON M2J 4Y4 | www.corningcentre.org | info@corningcentre.org

letter to the editor published in the *Globe and Mail*; and two statements by a Canadian prime minister made on Armenian Genocide Memorial Day (April 24).

Assessment Strategies

- Observation
- Question and answer
- Individual work
- Group work

Activity 1

Students read the assigned materials and answer the following questions.

Zack Beauchamp: “Germany Just Voted to Recognize the Armenian Genocide. Turkey Is Furious.”

- As an ally of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, what is the significance of Germany recognizing the Armenian Genocide compared to other countries?
- What was the Turkish government’s reaction to Germany’s recognition?
- What role might German recognition play in influencing the Turkish government and Turkish citizens to recognize the genocide?

Turkish Human Rights Association: letter to the German consul general of Istanbul

- Why is it important that a Turkish rights group is thanking Germany when the Turkish government is on the offensive?
- How is it beneficial for a Turkish rights group, rather than one from another country, to encourage Turkish recognition?

Atom Egoyan: “Until Erdogan Calls It ‘Genocide,’ Armenian Reconciliation Won’t Happen”

- Why is it important for the author that the events of 1915–1923 be labelled *genocide*?
- Why is it so difficult for Turkey to use the word *genocide*?
- What role would Turkish recognition play in reconciliation with Armenia?

Ways to complete this activity

- Individually: This activity can be done individually, where students read the texts and answer the questions on their own. Once completed, you can review the questions and ask for students to answer out loud. Students can also submit the activity for you to review for completion and understanding.
- In groups: This activity can be done in groups, where each group is assigned one text and its corresponding questions. They can jot their answers on chart paper and then present them to the entire class.



SARA CORNING CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION

45 Hallcrown Place, Toronto, ON M2J 4Y4 | www.corningcentre.org | info@corningcentre.org

Activity 2

In this activity, students are asked to draft the Canadian prime minister's statement for Armenian Genocide Memorial Day (April 24). They use past statements to formulate their own.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: statements on Armenian Genocide Memorial Day

- What is similar and different about these two statements?
- Why is it important for prime ministers to make such statements?
- If you were tasked with preparing this year's official statement, what would it say? Why?



Germany Just Voted to Recognize the Armenian Genocide. Turkey Is Furious.

By Zack Beauchamp | @zackbeauchamp | zack@vox.com | Jun 2, 2016, 1:46pm EDT



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Adam Berry/Getty Images

You'd think that the German parliament, of all parliaments, would be able to vote to commemorate a genocide without stirring up a controversy.

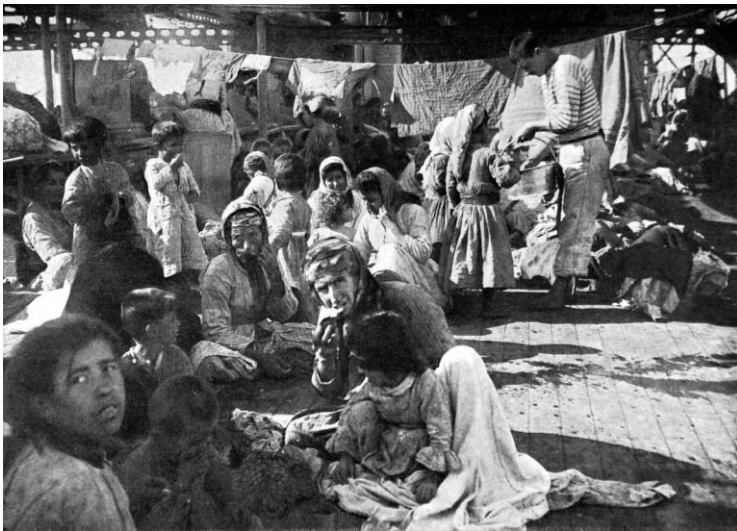
Yet Thursday morning, when the Bundestag passed a resolution labeling the 1915 slaughter of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire a "genocide," the Turkish government reacted with fury. Turkey recalled its ambassador from Berlin, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened to take more steps to punish Germany. ["We will do whatever is necessary to resolve this issue,"](#) he warned ominously.

This issue could not be more fraught. Recognizing the Armenian genocide is, for Turks, a grave insult – essentially, it links their nation's creation to a crime of monumental proportions. They've embarked on a decades-long, surprisingly successful campaign to block the international community from recognizing it. Yet for Germans, recognizing the genocide is crucially important to coming to terms with their own history of mass slaughter.

The vote also comes at a critical time in German-Turkish relations, as the two countries are absolutely vital in resolving the Syrian refugee crisis. So this isn't just an academic dispute between the two countries; the stakes are real for the entire European continent.

Why the Armenian Genocide Is So Controversial

To understand the German-Turkish controversy, you need to understand the Armenian genocide itself – and the political controversy that erupted in its aftermath.



Armenians in 1915, on the deck of a French cruiser that rescued them from genocide. (Photo12/UiG/Getty Images)

In 1908, a military coup – led by the so-called “Young Turks” – took control of the Ottoman Empire, which at the time was reeling from a series of disastrous wars. Their goal was to revive the nation, partly through liberal reforms and partly through unifying the country around Islamo-Turkic ethnic nationalism.

“There was a policy of Turkification by the young Turks dating back to 1908,” Hrach Gregorian, a practitioner in residence at American University, tells [PBS](#). “The Armenians were viewed as a threat to Turkish identity and Turkish security.”

So during World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was buckling even further under the pressure of the conflict, the Young Turks launched a campaign to rid the country of its 2.1 million Christian Armenians, who lived in the [region] of Anatolia.

“The genocide occurred when state authorities decided to remove the Armenians from eastern Anatolia in order to realize a number of strategic goals,” University of Chicago historian [Ronald Grigor Suny](#) writes. It was “initiated at a moment of near imperial collapse when the Young Turks made a final, desperate effort at revival and expansion of the empire that they had reconceived as more Turkic and Islamic.”

The scale of the slaughter, which took place over the course of two years, was horrific. “More than a million Armenians were exterminated through direct killing, starvation, torture, and forced death marches,” the [International Association of Genocide Scholars](#) explains in a 2006 letter. “The rest of the Armenian population fled into permanent exile.”

That this slaughter took place, and that it was a targeted campaign of genocide, has been established beyond any reasonable doubt. “The documentation on the Armenian Genocide is abundant and overwhelming,” as the genocide scholars’ letter puts it.

Yet the official policy of the Turkish government since basically forever has been to deny that the Armenian genocide happened. The government contends that it was a civil war between Turks and Armenians, and that the Armenians fled when the Turks emerged victorious.

“I think, for the Turkish government, there are three factors that prevent it from acknowledging and apologizing,” [Gregorian says](#). He continues:

The first is, it’s a shameful act and no government wants to admit to it. The second is, there is some concern about reparations and land claims. And the third is, there are – there are substantial nationalists, right-wing nationalists in Turkey that are violently opposed to such acknowledgment.

The Turkish government doesn't just deny the genocide – it puts immense diplomatic pressure on other countries to avoid acknowledging the historical reality. And because strategically important Turkey wields more influence on world powers than does small, relatively unimportant Armenia, this strategy has basically worked.

A scant [20 countries](#) formally recognize the Armenian genocide, with both [Israel](#) and the [United States](#) among the holdouts. When the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to recognize the genocide in 2010, the Obama administration successfully worked to block the resolution, arguing that it would imperil US-Turkish relations.

“The Obama administration strongly opposes the resolution that was passed by only one vote by the House committee and will work very hard to make sure it does not go to the House floor,” then-[Secretary of State Hillary Clinton](#) said.

Why Germany Voted – and Why It Matters Right Now



Supporters of the vote wave German and Armenian flags outside the Bundestag. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images)

Given this context, a major power like Germany voting to recognize the Armenian genocide is a huge deal. But Germany matters more than most, owing to both its own dark history and the critical importance of German-Turkish relations.

The vote to recognize the genocide passed the Bundestag overwhelmingly. Modern Germany exists, in part, on a foundation of collective guilt: a sense of responsibility for the Holocaust and an understanding that Germany must acknowledge its own culpability to heal as a nation. Yet until now, Germans had not, collectively, owned up to their role in the Armenian genocide – which ultimately served as [a source of inspiration](#) for the Nazis.

“For many German politicians,” reports the [BBC](#)’s Damien McGuinness, Tuesday’s vote “was about dealing with not just Turkey’s difficult 20th century history, but also Germany’s.”

“At the time, the German empire was a military ally of the Ottomans, and is accused of knowing about the massacres and not doing anything to prevent them. So for many Germans this resolution is about facing up to German historical guilt – something modern Germany is founded upon,” McGuinness writes.

Cem Özdemir, a German Green Party MP of Turkish descent and a fierce critic of Turkey’s government, was the driving force behind the resolution. He initially tried to bring the issue to a vote on April 24, 2015 – exactly 100 years after the genocide began. But German Chancellor Angela Merkel kept delaying it out of fear of irritating Turkey, only buckling under a [groundswell of pressure](#) from inside her own ruling coalition earlier this year.

Ironically, Merkel's obstructionism may have ended up making the timing worse for her. Turkey is a key point of entry to Europe for refugees from countries like Syria, so Merkel and other European leaders need Turkish cooperation to address the crisis.

In March, Merkel successfully brokered a deal between the European Union and Turkey, in which Turkey would allow the EU to [send refugees back](#) to Turkey in exchange for \$6.7 billion in aid payments and several other goodies, like waiving visa requirements for Turkish citizens.

Merkel, the de facto leader of Europe's response to the refugee crisis, needed this deal a lot more than Turkey's Erdoğan did. The refugee crisis is putting huge strains on European countries, dividing the EU and giving rise to dangerous levels of [far-right extremism](#). Erdoğan has figured this out, and is using the deal as leverage to make the EU hostage to Turkish whims. He has routinely threatened to annul the agreement in order to quiet European criticism of his [dangerous consolidation of power](#) at home.

"Since the deal he has pressed ahead in his quest to become an autocrat, rejecting European criticisms with threats to scupper the refugee deal and let hundreds of thousands of refugees make their way to Greece again," [the Economist](#) writes. "This has exposed Mrs Merkel to criticism in Germany that she has sold out to a dictator."

Indeed, in April, Merkel agreed – at Erdoğan's request – to [prosecute a German comedian](#) who had read a poem criticizing Erdoğan. It's an illiberal prosecution that's borderline inconceivable in a world without the refugee crisis, which shows just how much influence Turkey wields in Berlin at present.

The Armenian genocide vote, then, is not just about history. It's also about German legislators telling Turkey to [s****] itself: that it doesn't wield a veto over German policy just because Germany needs its help with the refugee crisis.

The critical question, then, is how serious Turkey is about its threats against Germany. If Erdoğan doesn't cancel the refugee deal, his repeated threats to cancel it over lesser slights will increasingly be seen as mere bluffs. If he does cancel the deal, he'll lose all the benefits from the deal and kick off a diplomatic crisis with infuriated EU states.

The ball is in Erdoğan's court.

#

source: <https://www.vox.com/2016/6/2/11839830/germany-vote-armenian-genocide>

İNSAN HAKLARI DERNEĞİ
HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION
KOMELEYA MAFÉN MIROVAN



Turkish Human Rights Association's Letter to German Consul

In June 2016, after the German Bundestag passed a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide and taking historical responsibility for the German state's role in it, the Turkish government and press expressed outrage towards Germany and the German people. The Turkey-based Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği) wrote to the German consul in Istanbul to apologize for the behavior of Turkish authorities and media.

The Human Rights Association is a non-governmental and independent voluntary organization. Founded by 98 human rights activists in 1986, the association today has 28 branches, 4 representation offices, and 10,938 members. The oldest and largest human rights association in Turkey, its sole and explicit objective is to work for human rights and freedoms.

8 June 2016

Consulate General of the German Federal Republic
İnönü Caddesi No. 10
Gümüşsuyu, İstanbul

Dear Dr. Georg Birgelen, Consul General of Germany,

As the Human Rights Association, Istanbul Branch, Committee against Racism and Discrimination, we address you this letter to denounce and express shame for the extremely racist verbal and written attacks by the Turkish authorities, the media, and various nationalist elements of society, against Germany and the German people, following the German Parliamentary decision that recognizes the Armenian Genocide.

As human rights defenders and activists against racism, we appreciate the fact that the German state has condemned the Holocaust by all means, created places for Holocaust memorialization in all areas of life, variously memorialized the crimes of the Nazi regime, established an educational system that insists on historical truth rather than denialist history, and made these permanent as state policy. On Dec. 7, 1970, German Chancellor Willy Brandt kneeled before the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial and apologized to the Jewish people, thereby vividly demonstrating to the world what states must do with regard to crimes against humanity. Without a doubt, Germany was able to arrive at this point as a result of the endless efforts of human rights defenders, thinkers and writers, politicians, and all influential individuals of the public sphere. For we see every single day how difficult it is both for the state and for society to rid themselves of *all kinds of racism*. It is moreover impossible for a crime against humanity such as genocide to be atoned for, restituted, or redressed; nevertheless, all steps in this direction are conditions of being a society, and being human.

A natural, if belated, consequence of this state policy, the German Parliamentary decision of June 2, 2016, is exemplary in showing the approach that the world must take with regard to crimes against humanity committed by states, in that in its decision to “remember and commemorate the genocide against Armenians and other Christians in the period 1915–1916,” it has not only recognized the premeditated, systematic genocide perpetrated in Anatolia and Asia Minor, but also clearly stated that Germany was also responsible.

Opposed to this exemplary stance is the attitude in Turkey, which condones the crime. The insults and discourses of racial hatred directed toward Germany, German MPs, and the German people, as well as the actions in which such discourses were used, constitute crimes in the countries that enforce the standards of international law. Even more extreme racist insults and threats against German MPs of Turkish origin lay bare the dire situation in Turkey in terms of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

As human rights defenders in Turkey, we see these attacks by state authorities, the media, and nationalists as evidence that these crimes against humanity can always recur in this country. We believe that these discourses and actions are attacks on the will of elected representatives, on democracy, human rights, and universal law, not only in Germany but in all countries that have taken or will take a stance against the official view in Turkey.

We thus salute the German Parliament on the occasion of its decision and announce to the public opinion in your country that we deem the hatred and hostility against Germany and the German people to be hostility toward democracy and human rights.

Yours sincerely,

Human Rights Association
Istanbul Branch
Committee against Racism and Discrimination

#

source: <http://studyofgenocide.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/isg53rev.pdf>

Until Erdogan Calls It ‘Genocide,’ Armenian Reconciliation Won’t Happen

ATOM EGOYAN

April 24, 2014

Opinion | Special to The Globe and Mail

Atom Egoyan is a Canadian stage and film director

A week ago, AGOS – the leading Armenian language newspaper based in Istanbul and whose founder Hrant Dink was assassinated in 2007 – asked several prominent Armenians to write an open letter to the ‘people of Turkey’. Amongst letters from Serj Tankian and Arsinée Khanjian (available to read online), I wrote the following words, “Your government has allowed you to indulge in denial for a century.” Rather than help move things forward, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s statements on Wednesday are a manipulative attempt to perpetuate the state denial of the Armenian Genocide.

We are one year away from the centenary of this haunting date. While Mr. Erdogan refers to events around 1915 as “inhumane”, he makes no reference to the inhumanity of continued denial and how this has effectively perpetuated the violence of the horrific act. I write in my open letter that ‘there is nothing more seductive than the dream of reconciliation’, but that without recognition of the Armenian Genocide by its perpetrators “the crime remains a raw wound on the very land it was committed upon.”

Rather than appease this poisonous situation, Mr. Erdogan’s words escalate his government’s denialist tactics and obstructs the possibility of any justice for the Armenian Genocide. He expresses his wish that “the Armenians who lost their lives in the context of the early 20th century rest in peace, and we convey our condolences to their grandchildren.”

What he doesn’t state is that the ‘context of the early 20th century’ is the context of a state-orchestrated act of mass murder. With yesterday’s statements, the context has suddenly become all too modern and alarmingly toxic. In William Faulkner’s famous words, “the past is never dead. It’s not even past”. Mr. Erdogan uses the relativist argument that there were deaths on all sides. Equating the deaths of Ottoman soldiers in the First World War with the elimination of Turkey’s Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian populations is simply outrageous.

I have no idea if the letters written in AGOS this past week in any way precipitated the tenor of Mr. Erdogan’s statements, but it is clear that Turkey is nervous about the year ahead. While it continues to press for the setting up of an historical commission to probe events around the killings, I stated in my letter that there is no need for any commission to reveal a truth that every serious scholar of genocide and holocaust already understands to be true. The Armenian Genocide is a fact. On this day, April 24, Armenians around the world commemorate this fact.

While we long for “Turks and Armenians establishing compassion and mutually humane attitudes among one another” (Mr. Erdogan’s words), we understand that this can never happen without absolute clarity and acknowledgment of the crime. We will never accept using terms like ‘relocation’ (also Mr. Erdogan’s word) as a euphemism for mass killing.

In my open letter to the Turkish people, I state that I am “exhausted by my anger, exhausted by your government’s vehement denial, exhausted by my inability to move on. Yet there is little choice but to accept this exhaustion in the face of its alternative.”

It may sometimes be difficult to understand the weight of this burden to remember, to understand how easily this whole matter would disappear in light of myriad other human rights violations that the world is facing. But these were my grandparents, these are the ghosts of my people, and this is my history. When Mr. Erdogan disingenuously offers his condolences to ‘their grandchildren’ he’s talking to me.

And this is precisely what I find so upsetting about yesterday’s comments. It’s extremely tempting to move on, but as my letter to the Turkish people in AGOS states, “I have made a promise – like so many other Armenians – and it would haunt me to the end of my days to break this promise. I have made a promise to remember things that no one wants to speak of.”

What Mr. Erdogan made clear on Wednesday is the need for resolve. On this day, Armenians remember a genocide that began 99 years ago. It will continue as long as the perpetrator denies responsibility for the crime. Nothing could be simpler. Nothing could be more complex.

#

source: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/until-erdogan-calls-it-genocide-armenian-reconciliation-wont-happen/article18182273/>



JUSTIN TRUDEAU, PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

Statement by the Prime Minister on Armenian Genocide Memorial Day

April 24, 2020

Ottawa, Ontario

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today issued the following statement:

“Today, we join Armenian communities in Canada and around the world to commemorate and honour the memory of victims of the Armenian genocide – a dark period of history that we must never forget.

“On this solemn day, we pay tribute to those who unjustly suffered and lost their lives as a result of this tragic period. We also honour their descendants, including Canadians of Armenian heritage who have contributed so much to strengthening our country.

“As we recognize the strength and spirit of the Armenian people, we also look forward with hope to a future of peace and mutual respect.

“Hatred and violence must never again be met with indifference. Today, we reaffirm our commitment to building a world where everyone can feel safe from discrimination and persecution, no matter who they are, where they are from, or what they believe.”

#

source: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2020/04/24/statement-prime-minister-armenian-genocide-memorial-day>



JUSTIN TRUDEAU, PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

Statement by the Prime Minister in Observation of Armenian Genocide Memorial Day

April 24, 2019

Ottawa, Ontario

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today issued the following statement:

“Today, we join Armenian communities in Canada and around the world to honour the memory of the victims of the Armenian genocide, a dark chapter in human history which must never be forgotten.

“Although more than a century has since passed, the memory of those who unjustly lost their lives and suffered reminds us that we must never respond to hatred or violence with indifference.

“As we observe this solemn day and pay tribute to the strength and spirit of the Armenian people, we also look forward to a future built on peace and mutual respect.

“The Government of Canada pays tribute to the victims of this tragedy and reaffirms its commitment to strive for a world in which nobody – regardless of faith or ethnic background – fears discrimination or persecution because of who they are.”

#

source: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2019/04/24/statement-prime-minister-observation-armenian-genocide-memorial-day>