



# SARA CORNING CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION

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## Unit Title

Justice and the Armenian Genocide

## Lesson Title

Reconstitution

## Developers

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will

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

## Materials

- Armenian National Committee of America: “Return of Churches—Overview”
- Rupen Janbazian: “Land-Locked: The Necessity of Open Borders in Armenia”

## Background for Teachers

Genocide destroyed Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire and scattered most of the survivors. By 1930, most survivors had settled in the [Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic](#) inside the USSR (today’s [Republic of Armenia](#)), France, Syria, Lebanon, and the United States. These genocide survivors were psychologically traumatized by their experiences, as were their children. For many of their descendants today, the genocide is a source of both strength (because of what their ancestors overcame) and victimhood (because of what their ancestors went through). The legacy of the Armenian Genocide is still with us. So, this lesson asks How can this harm be repaired? How can the long-term viability of Armenian life be secured?

Justice requires that the perpetrator group (the Republic of Turkey and the descendants of the murderers) create the conditions for this long-term viability. The first text, by the Armenian National Committee of America, shows that this is not being done by focusing on religious life. It discusses the abandoned Armenian churches in Turkey, which have been destroyed intentionally and through neglect, and the continued persecution of Christians. (Official statistics don’t exist, but it’s safe to say that there are less than 75,000 Christians in Turkey today. Armenians are essentially a Christian people, whether by conviction or just culturally.)

The second text focuses on today’s Republic of Armenia, roughly half of whose citizens descend from genocide survivors. It shows that Turkey is continuing to undermine the long-term viability of Armenian life by focusing on an economic issue: the closure of its border with Armenia.



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## Assessment Strategies

- Observation
- Question and answer
- Group work
- Exit card

## Activity 1

Students read the assigned materials and answer the following questions.

### Armenian National Committee of America: “Return of Churches—Overview”

- Who has been committing the crimes described in this piece? Why? What have the repercussions been?
- How can returning these churches to Armenians help reconstitute the vitality of Armenian life so long after the genocide ended?

### Rupen Janbazian: “Land-Locked: The Necessity of Open Borders in Armenia”

- Why is the status of this border so important to the Republic of Armenia?
- How is this blockade contrary to the principle of reconstitution?

### 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 its corresponding questions. They can jot their answers on chart paper and then present them to the entire class.

## Activity 2

Students choose three of the following sentence starters and submit their responses on exit cards. Exit cards allow you to gauge each student’s understanding of the material at the end of a lesson. They contain valuable feedback about information and skills that need to be revisited in future lessons.

- I noticed ...
- I wonder ...
- I was reminded of ...
- I think ...
- I was surprised that ...
- I’d like to know ...



## ARMENIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF AMERICA

### Return of Churches – Overview

The territory of present-day Turkey, encompassing the biblical lands of Anatolia and Mount Ararat, is home to many of early Christianity's pivotal historical events and holy sites – yet today is nearly devoid of indigenous Christians.

Before 1915, the territory of modern-day Turkey was home to large, indigenous, and vibrant Christian communities, comprised of millions of Armenians, Greeks, Pontians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Catholics. The Christian population in Turkey has been nearly eradicated through genocide and persecution. In the past century, over 1,500,000 Armenian Christians and hundreds of thousands of other Christians were murdered and many more exiled from their homelands. Today, the persecution and dispossession of Christians continues. They account for less than 0.1% of Turkey's population. Of the over 2,000 Armenian churches which existed in the early 1900s, less than 40 remain open and active today. Christians are not free to properly train clergy in Turkey and the Ecumenical (Greek Orthodox) and Armenian Patriarchates are prevented from formally owning and transferring property.

### Early Christianity in the Lands of Present-Day Turkey

The Ottoman Empire, during its World War I-era genocide against Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians, systematically destroyed its ancient Christian population and wiped out nearly all of the ancient religious and cultural heritage on its territory – much of it dating back to the time of Christ. Its successor state, the Republic of Turkey, has continued this process through acts of destruction, desecration, and disregard – imperiling the very existence of Christian communities and the remaining legacy of early Christianity on these Biblical lands.

According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the serious limitations on freedom of religion that the Republic of Turkey continues to impose, “threaten[s] the continued vitality and survival of minority religious communities in Turkey.”

The following are key points about the rich legacy of early Christianity on the territory of present-day Turkey:

- The territory of present-day Turkey, encompassing the biblical lands of Anatolia and Mount Ararat – the famed landing-place of Noah's Ark – is home to many of Christianity's pivotal events and holy sites. This legacy long predates the arrival of Turks in Anatolia.

- The Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew traveled to Armenia and throughout the surrounding region to preach and establish communities of faith in the 1st Century. ...
- The first foundational councils of the Christian Church, such as the Council of Nicea [in today's Iznik], were convened on the very territory of present-day Turkey, long before Turkish armies invaded these Christian lands.
- It was in the city of Antioch [today's Antalya], on the Mediterranean coast, in which followers of Jesus were first called Christians.
- The Seven Churches of the Apocalypse, cited in the Book of Revelation, are located in modern-day Turkey.
- The city of Tarsus, now in south-central Turkey, was the birthplace of the Apostle Paul, whose Epistle to the Ephesians, the 10th book of the New Testament, was addressed to believers in Ephesus [today's Selçuk], a city on present-day Turkey's Mediterranean Sea coast.
- The Catholic Church recognizes Ephesus, in present-day Turkey, as the city to which the Apostle John took the Virgin Mary to spend the last years of her life.

### **Persecution of Christians in Turkey**

Before 1915, the territory of modern-day Turkey was home to a large, ancient, and vibrant Christian population, comprised of millions of Armenians, Greeks, Pontians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, and other Christian peoples. The Christian population in Turkey was decimated during the Armenian Genocide starting in 1915, during which well over 1,500,000 Christians were murdered, many because they refused to renounce their Christian faith. Today, Christians account for less than 0.2% of Turkey's population and those who even discuss or write about the Armenian Genocide are subject to criminal prosecution (Article 301).

Christians in Turkey face continued persecution and threats. Church property is routinely confiscated through discriminatory laws. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), "Over the previous five decades, the [Turkish] state has, using convoluted regulations and undemocratic laws to confiscate hundreds of religious minority properties, primarily those belonging to the Greek Orthodox community, as well as Armenian Orthodox, Catholics, and Jews. ... The state also has closed seminaries, denying these communities the right to train clergy."

- In 2012, the USCIRF listed Turkey as one of its 16 countries of particular concern, along with Iran, Sudan and North Korea. The previous three years before, USCIRF listed Turkey on its "watch list."
- Christians cannot legally train clergy in Turkey and the Ecumenical (Greek Orthodox) and Armenian Patriarchate are prevented from formally owning and transferring property.

- The Turkish government recently selected the Armenian community's religious leader against the wishes of the community.
- Of the over 2,000 Armenian churches, which existed in the early 1900s, only 38 remain open and active today.
- Although there have been a few public announcements vowing the return of some religious property, as the USCIRF reports, "ad hoc announcements have not resulted in systematic changes in constitutional and legal structures that would remedy violations of religious freedom for non-Muslim minorities," some of which are on the verge of "virtual disappearance."
- In 2009, Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Christian Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, appeared on CBS's 60 Minutes and reported that Turkey's Christians were second class citizens and that he personally felt "crucified" by a state that wanted to see his church die out.
- The USCIRF also wrote, "Turkey fails to legally recognize religious minority communities, such as the Alevis, the Greek, Armenian, and Syriac Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, and the Jewish community. Furthermore, Turkish officials meddle in these communities' internal government and education and limit their worship rights."
- Christians in Turkey face continued persecution and threats and are prohibited from even praying in their own churches. In August 2010, such prohibition was caught on video, when children were prevented from praying at the Church of the Holy Cross in Akhtamar Island. See video: <http://www.huliq.com/1/822-policeman-turkey-breaks-armenian-childrens-prayer>.
- The Halki Theological School, a Greek Orthodox Seminary that was used as an international religious center, has been forcibly shut down by Turkey for over three decades despite repeated protests from the United States and Christians from around the world. The School was the primary training center for educating future Greek priests and its closure is having serious detrimental effects upon the Greek Orthodox faith.
- Although in 2007, the Turkish government finally restored the Church of the Holy Cross on Akhtamar Island, one of the most sacred Armenian churches, which had been left to decay for over 90 years, it turned this holy site into a museum and refused to return it to the Armenian Church. Religious services are forbidden, except for one day a year, devastating the Armenian community that wants to use the Church for religious services.
- Several prominent Christian figures have recently killed in Turkey in recent years. In June 2010, the head of the Catholic Church in Turkey Italian Bishop Luigi Padovese was brutally murdered and nearly decapitated a day before he was to visit with the Pope, who was to highlight the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. Padovese's murderer received a

reduced sentence, after unsubstantiated accusations against the Bishop for alleged provocation were raised by the defendant. Before his murder, Bishop Padovese had been petitioning for the status of the Church of St. Paul in Tarsus, Turkey to be changed from a museum into a functioning place of regular worship. Even though his appeals were echoed personally by the Pope, Turkey refused the request.

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source: <https://anca.org/return-of-churches-overview/>

## Land-Locked: The Necessity of Open Borders in Armenia

Rupen Janbazian | December 23, 2014

*Rupen Janbazian is the former editor of The Armenian Weekly. His writings primarily focus on politics, human rights, community, literature, and Armenian culture. He has reported from Armenia, Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh), Turkey, Canada, the United States, and Western Armenia. He has served on the local and national executives of the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) of Canada and Hamazkayin Toronto, and served as the administrator of the Armenian National Committee (ANC) of Toronto. Janbazian also taught Armenian History and Creative Writing at the ARS Armenian Private School of Toronto, and has worked on several translations.*

*Special for the Armenian Weekly*

The historically positive relationship between Israel and the Republic of Turkey has been strained since the 2008-09 Gaza War and the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid. More recently, following U.S. pressure on both sides, a failed attempt of reconciliation between the two nations began in early 2013, with little to no development.<sup>1</sup> Relations between Israel and Turkey hit a new low in October 2013, with the scandal over alleged Turkish involvement in the exposure of Israeli special agents in Iran.<sup>2</sup> While military, strategic, and diplomatic cooperation between the two nations were once accorded high priority by both parties, Turkey's legal challenge to Israel's blockade of Gaza has shown that relations may never be fully restored.

One of the most interesting aspects of Ankara's claim that Israel was acting unlawfully in Gaza was the fact that it inadvertently highlighted the illegal blockade that Turkey has imposed on neighboring Armenia for the past two decades. In 1993, the Republic of Turkey joined Azerbaijan in implementing a blockade in response to the Nagorno-Karabagh War. Although Turkey did not directly take part in the conflict, it sided with Azerbaijan because of ethnic ties and continues to enforce the damaging blockade that cannot be justified under international law. This act assumes a total air, rail, and road blockade of Armenia with no exceptions, even for shipments of humanitarian assistance.<sup>3,4</sup> Approximately 80 percent of the length of Armenia's borders is closed, including all roads, rail lines, and pipelines from Turkey and Azerbaijan into Armenia.<sup>5</sup> This has crippled the Armenian economy and hindered the nation's growth and prosperity over the past two decades.

The Republic of Armenia is a land-locked country with very few natural resources and relies on trade with neighboring nations to develop and progress. The blockades imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan have created a difficult situation within the country, as the cost of transport to Iran and Georgia is consistently on the rise. Concern regarding the expansion of international trade to land-locked countries was first brought up in the United Nations in February 1957, during the 656<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the General Assembly. Recognizing the need to provide corresponding transit possibilities to land-locked countries for the development of international commerce, Resolution 1028 (XI) "invites the Governments of Member States to give full recognition to the

land-locked Member States in the matter of transit trade and, therefore, to accord them adequate facilities in terms of international law and practice in this regard.”<sup>6</sup> In 1969, the Republic of Turkey acceded to the Convention on Transit Trade of Land Locked States of 1965.<sup>7</sup>

The convention’s first principle stated that “the right of each land-locked State of free access to the sea is an essential principle for the expansion of international trade and economic development.” The third principle of the convention assumes the right to free access to the sea for land-locked countries, stating, “In order to enjoy the freedom of the seas on equal terms with coastal States, States having no sea coast should have free access to the sea.” Moreover, the fourth principle of this convention states that “goods in transit should not be subject to any customs duty,” and that “means of transport in transit should not be subject to special taxes or charges higher than those levied for the use of means of transport of the transit country.” Although Turkey has acceded to the Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States, the Republic of Armenia has not. It is perhaps in Armenia’s best interest to sign onto this important convention to better position itself and protect its rights as a land-locked nation.<sup>8</sup>

The blockade imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan has often wrongly been referred to as an embargo or as trade sanctions on Armenia. However, in terms of international law, the economic blockade and diplomatic boycott are directly against the principle outlined in the United Nations Charter requiring the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

This principle, calling for the peaceful settlement of disputes, is also mentioned in the “Accession Partnership with Turkey” adopted by the EU Council. Moreover, the international community has on several occasions called on Turkey and Azerbaijan to lift their blockades. The UN Security Council, for example, has explicitly referred to and voiced concern over the economic blockade imposed by Azerbaijan against Armenia. On Jan. 29, 1993, the president of the UN Security Council made a statement (S/25199) expressing “deep concern at the devastating effect of interruptions in the supply of goods and materials, in particular energy supplies” to Armenia and to the Nakhichevan region of Azerbaijan and called on governments in the region “to allow humanitarian supplies to flow freely, in particular fuel.”<sup>9</sup> In late 2000, the European [Parliament] adopted [a resolution] (C5-0036/2000) concerning the report on Turkish progress towards candidacy for the European Union, which called on the Turkish government to re-establish normal diplomatic and trade relations with Armenia and lift the ongoing blockade.<sup>10</sup>

It’s important to note here the significance of Armenia’s remaining open borders. Armenia shares a small yet very important border with neighboring Iran, along the Araks River. Yet, its border with Georgia is even more significant and vital, since the main land, rail, and seaborne transportation routes, which allow Armenia to connect with the outside world, all pass through Georgia. It is assumed that approximately 70 percent of Armenia’s foreign commodity circulation is achieved through Georgian territory, via the Georgian rail system and the ports of Batumi and Poti.<sup>11</sup> Following the 2008 South Ossetia war, which prompted concerns over the stability of energy routes in the Caucasus, it became even more clear that the Republic of Armenia cannot rely solely on its existing open boundaries, and must work towards opening the remaining length of its borders.

It is also important to note the significance of certain international programs that aim to facilitate travel and increase security within the borders of the South Caucasus. For example, the Integrated Border Management Systems in the South Caucasus (SCIBM) aims to “facilitate the movement of persons and goods in the South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, while maintaining secure borders, through enhancing inter-agency, bilateral, and



regional border management cooperation both within and among the countries of the South Caucasus region as well as between the countries, EU Member States, and other international sectors.”<sup>12</sup> ...

Normalizing relations with Turkey is part of the Republic of Armenia’s national security strategy, officially adopted in 2007. Armenia’s security is threatened and its development hampered as a result of the “unnatural character” of bilateral relations and the closed border by Turkey, it states. Furthermore, “the absence of normalized relations adversely affects the stability of the region as a whole and impedes the development of regional cooperation.”<sup>25</sup> The World Bank suggests that if the blockade were to be lifted by just Turkey, Armenia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could increase by 30 to 38 percent, and its exports could easily double.<sup>26</sup>

Considering that more than three-quarters of the length of Armenia’s borders are closed, and accepting the fact that the closed borders have been damaging for the Armenian economy and threatening to Armenia’s national security—delaying the country’s development and prosperity over the past 20 years—it is vital that the illegal blockade be lifted by Turkey, and that the borders to Armenia be opened. What is most important, however, is that the process is done in such a way that the Republic of Armenia does not make any serious concessions, such as the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the legal rights of Karabagh citizens. At the same time, it is important for the Republic of Armenia to actively engage in and support the Integrated Border Management Systems in the South Caucasus (SCIBM), since the program works within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), functions with international law standards, and is in accordance with the UN Charter.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Sanders and Christi Parsons, “Obama Facilitates Reconciliation between Israel and Turkey,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 2013, <https://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-xpm-2013-mar-22-la-fg-obama-mideast-20130323-story.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ivan Watson and Gül Tüysüz, “Turkey Rejects Claims It Blew Israeli Agents’ Cover,” *CNN*, 17 October 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/17/world/meast/turkey-israeli-intelligence-leak/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “Addressing Turkey and Its Blockade on Armenia,” Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Occasional Paper 1, Autumn 1994.

<sup>4</sup> One exception to this policy came in the winter of 1993, when Turkey opened its borders to humanitarian aid, which provided Armenia with energy supplies. Although Turkey allowed for some humanitarian aid to pass through its territory, this did not prevent then-Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel from giving all the diplomatic support he could to Azerbaijan, especially in the United Nations.

<sup>5</sup> Tatul Hakobyan, “Georgia to Remain Vital Transit Route for Armenia,” *The Armenian Reporter*, 13 November 2009.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1028 (XI), “Land-Locked Countries and the Expansion of International Trade,” 20 February 1957, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/207733?ln=en>.

<sup>7</sup> Ara Papian, “The Blockade by Turkey: An Utter Violation of International Law and Borne Obligations,” *Azg Daily*, 3 April 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 822, 30 April 1993, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/822\(1993\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/822(1993)).

<sup>10</sup> European Parliament, “Turkey’s Progress towards EU Accession,” document A5-0297/2000, 17 November 2000, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P5-TA-2000-0511+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

<sup>11</sup> Hakobyan, “Georgia.”

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Development Program, “Towards Open, but Secure Borders in the South Caucasus,” <https://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/successstories/towards-open--but-secure-borders-in-the-south-caucasus.html>.

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<sup>24</sup> “Azerbaijani Organization Condemns Pressure on Turkey to Open Borders with Armenia,” *Trend News Agency*, 24 November 2014, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/2336256.html>.

<sup>25</sup> “National Security Strategy,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 26 January 2007, <https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/Doctrineeng.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Evgeny Polyakov, “Changing Trade Patterns after Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus,” Policy Research Working Paper 2593 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/19673>.

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source: <https://armenianweekly.com/2014/12/23/land-locked-necessity-open-borders-armenia/>