



SARA CORNING CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION

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Unit Title

Justice and the Armenian Genocide

Lesson Title

Responsibility

Developers

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Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- learn what *genocide* means; and
- learn what *responsibility* means within the context of the Armenian Genocide.

Materials

- United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect: “Definitions—Genocide”
- Hermann Hoffmann-Fölkersamb: “Report to the German Embassy in Constantinople (November 8, 1915)”
- Rouben Adalian: “Mehmet Talaat”

Background for Teachers

The lawyer [Raphael Lemkin](#) created the word *genocide* in the 1940s to describe events that had taken place in the past and that he hoped to prevent in the future. It’s therefore important not only to understand what the word means today but also to what past events it can be used to describe. Lemkin himself pointed to the “Armenian massacres” as an example of what he meant by *genocide*.

The first text gives a commonly accepted definition of *genocide*, according to the United Nations. (Various jurists and scholars have used other definitions, but this is a commonly accepted one.) In short, genocide is the attempt to eliminate all or part of a “national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”

The second text is an English translation of a report originally written in German in 1915. The author, Hermann Hoffmann-Fölkersamb, was the German vice-consul in Alexandretta (today’s [Iskenderun](#), in Turkey). The German and Ottoman empires were allies during World War I (1914–1918). In this report, we see an official who is convinced of the criminality of what he is witnessing; he reports his observations to his superiors and writes about Germany’s official complicity, but he holds back from denouncing his superiors openly.

These first two texts help students understand what the term *genocide* means and how it’s useful for discussing the Armenian case. Also, the report gives students an opportunity



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to identify the people responsible for carrying out the Armenian Genocide and those who allowed them to do it. The German connection gives teachers an opportunity to discuss the ethical responsibilities of bystanders and witnesses when injustice is being done, for example by honing in on Hoffmann's revealing claim that "allowing is not the same as approval."

Rouben Adalian's encyclopedia entry is about Mehmet Talaat Pasha, the chief architect of the genocide. (Most Ottoman Muslims didn't have last names. *Mehmet* was his first name, *Talaat* was his middle name, and *Pasha* was his title. He went by *Talaat* rather than *Mehmet*.) Here, we get a more top-level perspective on someone responsible for the genocide not by killing people with his own hands but by organizing the effort from afar.

If you need a refresher on the history of the genocide, we recommend our booklet [Canada and the Armenian Genocide](#) and Professor Uğur Üngör's essay "[The Armenian Genocide, 1915.](#)"

Assessment Strategies

- Observation
- Question and answer
- Group work
- Writing prompt
- Class discussion

Activity 1

Students read the assigned materials and answer the following questions.

United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect: "Definitions—Genocide"; and Hermann Hoffmann-Fölkersamb: "Report to the German Embassy in Constantinople (November 8, 1915)"

- Since the word *genocide* did not exist in 1915, what words were used in this report that justify its use today?
- Who are identified as the perpetrators of the genocide? What was Germany's role?
- If a trial were to be held against the perpetrators today, what value would this report bring to the case?

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 the UN text and one part of Hoffmann's report. Each group can answer the questions



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with the material it has, jotting its answers on chart paper and then presenting them to the entire class.

Activity 2

Begin the lesson with a whole-class discussion about the people responsible for the Armenian Genocide. Read or share Rouben Adalian's encyclopedia entry about Mehmet Talaat Pasha, then ask students to answer the following question: If you had the chance to sit with Talaat, what questions would you ask him?



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON GENOCIDE PREVENTION AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

DEFINITIONS—Genocide

Background

The word *genocide* was first coined by Polish lawyer Raphaël Lemkin in 1944 in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. It consists of the Greek prefix *genos*, meaning *race* or *tribe*, and the Latin suffix *cide*, meaning *killing*. Lemkin developed the term partly in response to the Nazi policies of systematic murder of Jewish people during the Holocaust, but also in response to previous instances in history of targeted actions aimed at the destruction of particular groups of people. Later on, Raphaël Lemkin led the campaign to have genocide recognised and codified as an international crime.

Genocide was first recognised as a crime under international law in 1946 by the United Nations General Assembly ([A/RES/96-I](#)). It was codified as an independent crime in the [1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) (the Genocide Convention). The Convention has been ratified by 149 States (as of January 2018). The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has repeatedly stated that the Convention embodies principles that are part of general customary international law. This means that whether or not States have ratified the Genocide Convention, they are all bound as a matter of law by the principle that genocide is a crime prohibited under international law. The ICJ has also stated that the prohibition of genocide is a peremptory norm of international law (*or ius cogens*) and consequently, no derogation from it is allowed.

The definition of the crime of genocide as contained in Article II of the [Genocide Convention](#) was the result of a negotiating process and reflects the compromise reached among United Nations Member States in 1948 at the time of drafting the Convention. Genocide is defined in the same terms as in the Genocide Convention in the [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#) (Article 6), as well as in the statutes of other international and hybrid jurisdictions. Many States have also criminalized genocide in their domestic law; others have yet to do so.

Definition

[Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#)

Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Elements of the crime

The [Genocide Convention](#) establishes in Article I that the crime of genocide may take place in the context of an armed conflict, international or non-international, but also in the context of a peaceful situation. The latter is less common but still possible. The same article establishes the obligation of the contracting parties to prevent and to punish the crime of genocide.

The popular understanding of what constitutes genocide tends to be broader than the content of the norm under international law. Article II of the [Genocide Convention](#) contains a narrow definition of the crime of genocide, which includes two main elements:

1. *A mental element*: the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such"; and
2. *A physical element*, which includes the following five acts, enumerated exhaustively:
 - Killing members of the group
 - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
 - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
 - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
 - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

The intent is the most difficult element to determine. To constitute genocide, there must be a proven intent on the part of perpetrators to physically destroy a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Cultural destruction does not suffice, nor does an intention to simply disperse a group. It is this special intent, or *dolus specialis*, that makes the crime of genocide so unique. In addition, case law has associated intent with the existence of a State or organizational plan or policy, even if the definition of genocide in international law does not include that element.

Importantly, the victims of genocide are deliberately targeted - not randomly – because of their real or perceived membership of one of the four groups protected under the Convention (which excludes political groups, for example). This means that the target of destruction must be the group, as such, and not its members as individuals. Genocide can also be committed against only a part of the group, as long as that part is identifiable (including within a geographically limited area) and “substantial.”

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source: <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>



Armenocide

The Armenian Genocide during the First World War
Documents from State Archives

Report to the German Embassy in Constantinople (November 8, 1915)

Hermann Hoffmann-Fölkersamb, German Vice-Consul in Alexandretta. Translated by Linda Struck. Condensed and edited by Daniel Ohanian.

Alexandretta, 8 November 1915

I have the honour of reporting to the [German] Imperial Embassy [in Constantinople] the following on the situation regarding the deportation of the Armenians during the month of October, based on observations I was able to make during my presence in Aleppo while deputising for the Imperial Consul [Walter] Roessler.

During the month of October, the deportation ... had spread to the Armenian population of the whole of Anatolia, as far as the outskirts of Constantinople and Smyrna. The only ones who were not affected were the citizens of Constantinople (from whence, however, numerous “suspicious” persons appear to have been deported), of Smyrna, and of Aleppo. The Armenian population of Aleppo seem to owe the fact that they are still here mainly to the resistance of those local circles who would suffer great financial losses if they disappeared. ... Up until today, staff and orphans of the German institutions in Marasch were spared from deportation and, as it seems, also those in Harunie (in the Province of Adana) and Beirut. Those in Urfa were not exempted. There is no reliable news about the institutions in north-eastern Anatolia. ...

It can be regarded as an established fact that in the actual Armenian Provinces (quite apart from the war zone near Van), the deportation has been accompanied by the massacre of the adult male Armenians, but also partly of the whole population of Armenian towns and villages.

The statements made by the survivors of such deported convoys are concordant with each other in such a way that a prior agreement to this effect is out of the question. The worst seems to have happened in the Province Diarbekir, of which the Governor Reschid Bey, according to verbal reports made to me by the Imperial Vice-Consul Holstein (in Mosul) during his short visit to Aleppo in October, has declared publicly that he will tolerate no Christian in his Province. The government [in Mosul] has tried in vain to deny this statement. According to Vice-Consul Holstein’s personal knowledge, gained during his journey from Mosul to Aleppo, the people have been exhorted by gendarme patrols from Diarbekir and Mardin to “finish off” the Armenians. ...

The nearest destination up to now for the deportees arriving from the north and north-east were the stations Tell-Abiad, Rass-el-Ain and (for Aintab and Marasch) Aktsche-Koejuenli on the Baghdad Railway, then Aleppo. ... By the end of October, according to official government reports, about 40,000 deportees had collected there.

The government is providing no shelter whatsoever for these collection camps. ... As far as health is concerned, there are no facilities whatsoever. In particular, there are no latrine contrivances at all, not even

the most primitive. There is not even a hole in the ground provided for this purpose. ... The enclosed photographs ... only give a faint idea of this hellhole which the authorities use as a dumping ground for the sick, but also to accommodate the healthy. ... The number of deaths among the deportees in Aleppo increased during the month of October from 120 to 200 a day. Since the middle of the month, typhoid fever has spread rapidly. ...

In this respect, there is not much difference between the deportation of the Armenians and their extermination. ... Eyub Bey, the former commissioner for the deportations in Aleppo (and who still holds a responsible position there today) is well-known for the statement with which he rejected expenditures for the use of orphans: You still do not understand what we want: we want to obliterate the Armenian name for good and all. That this is the intention of the executioners, is easy to recognise by their methods of implementation. ...

According to reports from Turkish friends, the Turks are not oblivious to the great economic losses they are suffering as a result of the annihilation of the Armenians and to the difficulty of replacing them with Muslims. ...

The Armenians themselves are, of course, generally convinced of our complicity, even of our instigation. Even where in exceptional cases it is clear and recognised that our attitude of allowing is not the same as approval, but rather the regrettable result of sensitive political relations, the Germans are still viewed as a complicit party because they had given the Armenian people a false sense of security. A calm-thinking Armenian clergyman (a Protestant) once said to me, "We were willing to remain loyal. Until the deportations began. If we had started at that point to resist the beginning extermination of our people, we would have been in command of the situation and not doomed to ruination as we are today. But all our German friends in Marasch, Haruniye, Urfa, Malatia and Ma'muret-ul-Aziz urgently advised us to submit ourselves and then nothing would happen to us. Believing in them, we followed that advice and the fact that we relied on the German influence proved catastrophic for us."

If the deportation of the Armenians would really lead to their total annihilation, then these Armenian opinions would be irrelevant. But, even if the deportations continue for several months, a considerable fraction of the Armenians will still remain, whether by virtue of the fact that due to the toughness of the race, a number of them may manage to pull through all the dangers life presents to them, or due to the versatility of the Armenian intelligence, through which they may find ways and means to save themselves, or because they are spared from deportation at all, such as the above-mentioned railway employees, the population of the above-mentioned cities, and individual rich people in other towns (e.g., Adana). In particular, the most influential elements will most likely survive deportation. The same applies to the approximately 25,000 Armenians who, according to Armenian reports, have converted to Islam in the north-eastern Provinces in order to save themselves, also servants and children picked up in the streets, etc.

All these people will, of course, be deeply embittered towards Germany, even those who owe their lives to our intervention (railway employees). ...

Hoffmann

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source: [http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/\\$\\$AllDocs-en/1916-01-03-DE-001](http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/$$AllDocs-en/1916-01-03-DE-001)

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GENOCIDE

Mehmet Talaat

Rouben Paul Adalian

Mehmet Talaat Pasha (1874–1921) (also known as Talaat Bey) was the principal architect of the Armenian Genocide. Born in Edirne (Adrianople), Talaat became a telegrapher at a young age. He was active in the Young Turk movement seeking to overthrow Sultan Abdul Hamid (Abdulhamit) II. He joined the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and quickly emerged a leader in the secret organization. His profession gave him access to the principal means of communication in his era and his assignment as Chief Secretary of Posts and Telegraphs in Salonika (now Thessaloniki, Greece) placed him at the hub of Turkish revolutionary plotting. After the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, Talaat became one of the most influential politicians of the Ottoman Empire. In 1909 he was appointed Minister of the Interior and then Minister of Posts. By 1912 he was Secretary General of the CUP, which the following year seized complete power in the Ottoman Empire. The 1913 coup saw the rise of the so-called Young Turk triumvirate consisting of Talaat as Minister of the Interior, Enver as Minister of War, and Jemal as Minister of the Marine.

Talaat was one of the main advocates of the Turkification of the Ottoman Empire. As Minister of the Interior, he assumed primary responsibility for planning and implementing the Armenian Genocide. He employed the system of provincial administration subordinate to his direct authority as the main instrument for carrying out the deportations. The 1915 orders for the eviction of the Armenians from their homes carried his signature, much as subsequent orders clarifying the originally disguised intentions of the deportations as annihilation also bear his name. Talaat personally supervised the process and his ability to operate a telegraph machine enhanced his capacity to carry out the policies of his government through direct and secret communications to other CUP cohorts specifically assigned provincial administrative posts to receive and carry out the orders. This method of operation circumvented the machinery of the central government and permitted a handful of CUP fanatics to subvert the state in order to carry out their criminal conspiracy. The organized and scheduled depopulation of Armenians from one town after another carried out with complete surprise and minimal cost, their systematic liquidation once moved to remote locations, and the methodical plunder of their properties demonstrated Talaat's capacity for calculated cruelty and only increased his power and prestige in the CUP. Talaat went so far as to expressly order the destruction of young Armenian orphans. In February 1917 Talaat became Grand Vizier, earning him the title Pasha. He resigned his post in October 1918 as the empire neared total defeat.

Aware of the consequences he faced because of the declared intentions of the Allied Powers to hold him and his associates responsible for the extermination of the Armenians, Talaat fled to Germany where he lived under an assumed name. During the tribunal convened in Constantinople by the post-war Ottoman government, Talaat was tried in absentia, found guilty of capital crimes, including massacre, and was condemned to death. Whereas Germany refused to extradite him, Talaat was identified and gunned down in Berlin in 1921 by Soghomon Tehlirian,

an Armenian whose extended family had disappeared from its native town of Erzinjan. Talaat's assassination caused a furor, and Tehlirian's trial became a major media event exposing the knowledge of the German government about the Armenian massacres, which had been kept from the German public during the war. The jury, hearing the eyewitness testimony of German officers, acquitted Tehlirian. As for Talaat's remains, they were returned to Istanbul in 1943 by Nazi Germany and given burial with full honors.

References and Recommended Reading

Dadrian, Vahakn N. (1986) The Naim-Andonian Documents on the World War I Destruction of Ottoman Armenians: The Anatomy of a Genocide. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 18(3), 311–360.

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source: *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, 531–532. Edited by Israel W. Charny et al. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999.