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ARMENIA

THE CASE FOR A FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE



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Appendix 3

The Turkish Genocide Against the Armenians and the United Nations Memory Hole

The process of pushing the Turkish Genocide down the United Nations memory hole can be traced through the proceedings of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. There was a discussion in 1972 of a preliminary report on genocide (E/CN. 4/1101-E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/332). In 1973, at the 26th Session, the Special Rapporteur submitted a further report on the Study of the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Paragraph 30 contained the following reference in the historical section of the study.

Passing to the modern era, one may note the existence of relatively full documentation dealing with the massacres of Armenians, which have been described as 'the first case of genocide in the twentieth century'. (E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/L.583 dd. 25 June 1973)

The reader will appreciate the extreme tact of the reference. No mention is made of the role of the Ottoman Empire in this genocide. It is as if the genocide happened of itself.

The meeting of the Sub-Commission in the following year reports discussion of the draft study in the Commission on Human Rights.

... many speakers considered that the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission, in preparing the final version of the study on the subject-matter, should avoid references to specific incidents that had taken place in the past, before the contemporary notion of genocide had been elaborated. It was pointed out that there was the dangerous pitfall of confusing the crime of genocide with the eventual consequences which might occur as a result of a given war and of making such parallels without taking into account the historical and socio-economic background of the past events. In that connection all speakers urged the Special Rapporteur to delete, in the final version of his report, paragraph 30 of his progress report, submitted to the Sub-Commission at its twenty-sixth session (E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/L. 583). Some speakers expressed the view that, although many studies prepared by the Sub-Commission contained historical introductions that helped in the understanding of contemporary situations, reference to events

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that had given rise to controversial explanations and evaluations in different publications should be avoided.

At the meetings in 1975, the matter was discussed further, one of the members contributing the observation that the 1915 incidents between Turks and Armenians constituted a historical fact, but in a civilized international community, consideration should also be given to the desire of a state not to be defamed on account of its past acts, which had been perpetrated by a previous generation and were probably regretted by the present generation (E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/SR. 736).

In 1978, the Special Rapporteur presented the final report. The historical section had been collapsed down to the Nazi genocide. The Turkish genocide had disappeared down the memory hole. Representatives of non-governmental organizations and members of the Sub-Commission protested. However, the final responsibility for the study rests with the Rapporteur, and he replied as follows:

Concern had been expressed that the study on genocide might be diverted from its intended course and lose its essential purpose. Consequently, it had been decided to retain the massacre of the Jews under Nazism, because that case was known to all and no objections had been raised; but other cases had been omitted, because it was impossible to compile an exhaustive list, because it was important to maintain unity within the international community in regard to genocide, and because in many cases to delve into the past might reopen old wounds which were now healing. That procedure seemed to him to be only logical. He had not abandoned his responsibilities and, if the Sub-Commission considered that the historical chapter of the study should include all cases, he suggested that it should take a formal decision to review the chapter and to include, for example, the Armenian case. He would, however, need to have the necessary evidence. (E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/SR. 822)

No such decision was taken. But at the meeting of the Human Rights Commission in the following year, there was an active campaign to re-insert reference to the genocide against Armenians: and the Rapporteur was asked to take account of the statements made to the Commission, and other communications on the subject. So it seems that the Turkish genocide against the Armenians may be restored to the memory of the United Nations.

A curious footnote to this episode is provided by a former representative of the U.S.A. on the Commission. When the Turks had lobbied for the deletion of reference to their genocide, the instructions to the U.S. representative were to take a neutral stand, since the U.S.A. was trying to get the Turks to eliminate their poppy crop, used in the export of heroin to the United States (Hoffman, 1978: 18).

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