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Armenia Marks Genocide Anniversary



Opposition supporters at the Genocide Memorial

YEREVAN -- Hundreds of thousands of people silently marched to the hilltop genocide memorial in Yerevan on Thursday to pay their respects to more than one million Armenians massacred in Ottoman Turkey from 1915-1918.

An incessant stream of people of different ages walked up to the Tsitsernakabert hill overlooking the city and laid flowers around its eternal fire throughout the day. It marked the 93rd anniversary of the arrests of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals in Constantinople that were followed by the mass killings and deportations of Armenians from eastern regions of the crumbling Ottoman Empire.

As always, the annual remembrance of genocide victims began at Tsitsernakabert with a prayer service led

by the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicos Garegin II.

The April 24 commemoration was also used by opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosian and his allies for rallying more than 10,000 supporters in downtown Yerevan despite heavy police presence in and around Liberty Square, the scene of massive opposition demonstrations staged in the wake of the recent presidential election. Ignoring police orders to keep to the sidewalks and chanting anti-government slogans, crowd marched to the Tsitsernakabert hill where it was joined by Ter-Petrosian. Although the latter headed to his nearby house after laying flowers at the genocide memorial, most of the opposition supporters did not disperse and walked back to the city center.

Armenian Ombudsman Challenges Regime Version Of Post-Election Crackdown

YEREVAN -- Armenia's top state official in charge of human rights protection on Friday again challenged the official version of deadly post-election violence in Yerevan and, in particular, government claims that opposition protesters carried weapons and fired at security forces.

Ombudsman Armen Harutiunian also echoed international calls for an independent investigation into the March 1 clashes that left at least ten people dead and more than 160 others injured.

Harutiunian questioned the official theory in the immediate aftermath of the worst street violence in Armenia's history, prompting harsh criticism from then President Robert Kocharian. The latter ordered troops into the capital and declared a 20-day state of emergency to quell the opposition campaign for a re-run of last February's disputed presidential election.

Harutiunian stood by and elaborated on his critical statements in a 80-page report that detailed the dramatic events of March 1. The report says that the Armenian police have so far failed to publicize any evidence of the use of

firearms by the protesters.

Law-enforcement authorities say two of the victims, both of them interior troops servicemen, died of severe wounds caused by an explosive device and a bullet allegedly fired from the crowd. They say dozens of other soldiers and police officers were also shot and wounded in pitched battles with Ter-Petrosian supporters.

The ombudsman said that investigators have not yet explained the precise circumstances of the death of at least eight civilians, most of whom had fractured skulls. The authorities insist that security forces fired only into the air. Harutiunian pointed in that regard to an amateur video clip that shows a group of heavily armed and masked troops firing in front of them. He also described as "suspicious" the fact that the looting occurred hundreds of meters away from the epicenter of the protest and that shops and other businesses located within the barricaded area were left intact.

The ombudsman's report stresses that the deadly clashes were sparked by

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ACA Takes Part In Armenian Genocide Observance On Capitol Hill Speaker Pelosi Renews Call For Genocide Affirmation

WASHINGTON, DC -- Armenian Council of America members from California, joined compatriots from East Coast at the annual Armenian Genocide Observance on Capitol Hill, organized by the Congressional Armenian Caucus on April 23, 2008. Over 200 Armenian Americans attended the observance on Capitol Hill where House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was joined by more than a dozen of her House and Senate colleagues in urging the passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution (HR-106).

Receiving a standing ovation upon her arrival, Speaker Pelosi noted that she keeps a copy of the front page of the October 11, 2007, issue of The New York Times, which features a photo of Armenian Genocide survivors attending the House Foreign Affairs Committee markup of the Armenian Genocide Resolution (H.Res.106). The Speaker stated that the Committee, despite intense pressure from the Turkish Government and personal pleas by President George Bush, and Administration officials, the resolution passed by a 27 to 21, a statement that was appropriate to the values of the American people and a step closer for the House of Representatives reaffirming the historical truth of the Armenian Genocide.

Speaker Pelosi reaffirmed her commitment to this critical human



ACA representatives with Congressman Joe Knollenberg

rights issue.

"It is long past time for the President and Congress to formally recognize the Armenian Genocide," Pelosi told the crowd gathered at the observance event on Capitol Hill. "If we ignore history we are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past."

"On this anniversary we must remember the victims and survivors of the Armenian Genocide," she continued. "We must provide the leadership to ensure that his human tragedy is not repeated."

Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) stated the US Congress needs to recognize the Armenian Genocide as fact for the sake of preventing future genocides by establishing the responsibility in future generations to never let it happen again.

"Denial is the child of repetition,"

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President Bush Declines To Mention Genocide In His Last Message

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. President George W. Bush again declined to describe the mass killings and deportations of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey as genocide on Friday as he commemorated the 93rd anniversary of "one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century."

"As we reflect on this epic human tragedy, we must resolve to redouble our efforts to promote peace, tolerance, and respect for the dignity of human life," Bush said in his annual address to the Armenian community in the United States. "The Armenian people's unalterable determination to triumph over tragedy and flourish is a testament to their strength of character and spirit."

"We welcome the efforts by individuals in Armenia and Turkey to fos-

ter reconciliation and peace, and support joint efforts for an open examination of the past in search of a shared understanding of these tragic events," he added.

Armenian-Americans were quick to express their disappointment with Bush's continuing refusal to call the slaughter of an estimated 1.5 million Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire a genocide recalling his 2000 pledge to recognize the genocide if elected president.

Bush has avoided using the politically sensitive term throughout his presidency, anxious not to antagonize Turkey.

Following is the full text of the message:

Statement By The President On Armenian Remembrance Day

On this day of remembrance, we honor the memory of the victims of one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century, the mass killings and forced exile of as many as 1.5 million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. I join the Armenian community in America and around the world in commemorating this tragedy and mourning the loss of so many innocent lives.

As we reflect on this epic human tragedy, we must resolve to redouble our efforts to promote peace, tolerance, and respect for the dignity of human life. The Armenian people's unalterable determination to triumph over tragedy and flourish

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