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An Open Letter Concerning Historians Who Deny the Armenian Genocide:  
October 1, 2006

As the major organization that studies genocide, we write this letter to address the issue of professional scholars who support the Turkish government's position that what happened to the Armenians in 1915 was not planned by the Ottoman government and did not constitute genocide.

Scholars who deny the facts of genocide in the face of the overwhelming scholarly evidence are not engaging in historical debate, but have another agenda. In the case of the Armenian Genocide, the agenda is to absolve Turkey of responsibility for the planned extermination of the Armenians—an agenda consistent with every Turkish ruling party since the time of the Genocide in 1915.

Scholars who dispute that what happened to the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 constitutes genocide blatantly ignore the overwhelming historical and scholarly evidence. Most recently, this is the case with the works of Mr. Justin McCarthy and Mr. Guenter Lewy, whose books engage in severely selective scholarship that grossly distorts history. As noted genocide scholar Deborah Lipstadt has written: "Denial of genocide whether that of the Turks against the Armenians, or the Nazis against the Jews is not an act of historical reinterpretation . . . . The deniers aim at convincing innocent third parties that there is an other side of the story . . . when there is no other side."

As scholars Roger Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert Jay Lifton noted in their article "Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide" (Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Spring '95), scholars who engage in denying genocide are motivated by various factors, including careerism. A Reuters report (3/24/05), "Turkey enlists US scholar to fight genocide claims," underscores the degree to which Mr. McCarthy works with the Turkish government in its effort to undermine the truth about the Armenian Genocide.

We believe it is important to note that in serving the Turkish government, Mr. McCarthy and others like him bolster a government with a long-standing history of abusing minorities, intellectuals, and the principle of free expression. In the 1990s, according to Human Rights Watch and PEN International, Turkey had jailed or detained more writers than any other country in the world. Today Turkey has put on trial some of its most distinguished writers like Orhan Pamuk for mentioning the Armenian Genocide and hundreds of other writers are facing jail sentences for expressing their intellectual ideas. For scholars to support a state with a record of this kind raises profound questions about their professional ethics.

Whatever the agendas or tactics are of the few non-Turkish historians who support the Turkish government's version of history, their claims are the same: 1) all the documents that scholars have used for decades to write about the Armenian Genocide are forgeries or otherwise unreliable; 2) the Young Turk regime did not intend to destroy the Armenian population – the massive deaths were a result of war, not genocide; 3) these were hard times for the Ottoman Empire and many Turkish people, especially soldiers, died, as did Armenian civilians, from famine, disease, wartime chaos, not from systematic slaughter; 4) the Armenians are to blame for their fate because they were a Fifth Column allied with Turkey's enemy, the Russians, who were fighting against the Ottoman Empire in World War I, somehow even justifying the massacre of Armenian women and children.

We believe it is important to underscore the scholarly record on the Armenian Genocide.

The documentation on the Armenian Genocide is abundant and overwhelming. The Armenian Genocide was the most well-known human rights issue of its time and was reported regularly in newspapers across the United States and Europe. The Armenian Genocide is abundantly documented by thousands of official records of the United States and nations around the world including Turkey's wartime allies Germany, Austria, and Hungary; by Ottoman court-martial records; by eyewitness accounts of missionaries and diplomats; by the testimony of survivors; and by decades of historical scholarship. There are over four thousand U. S. State Department reports in the National Archives, written by neutral American diplomats, confirming what U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau called "a campaign of race extermination." Additional evidence is in the British Parliamentary Blue Book, "The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16," compiled by Lord Bryce and Arnold Toynbee; in Austrian and German foreign office records (Turkey's wartime allies), now available as books; and in the Ottoman Parliamentary Gazette which recorded the confessions of government and military officials during the Constantinople war-crimes tribunal held after World War I. Mr. Lewy claims the Gazette records are invalid, even though their authenticity has been validated by meticulous scholarship. Add to this overwhelming body of official evidence, thousands of pages of eyewitness accounts from relief workers, missionaries, and survivors, and it is indisputable that the Armenian Genocide is a proven history.

On April 24, 1915, under cover of World War I, the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire began a systematic, well-planned and organized genocide of its Armenian citizens – an unarmed Christian minority population. More than a million Armenians were exterminated through direct killing, starvation, torture, and forced death marches. The rest of the Armenian population fled into permanent exile. Thus an ancient civilization was expunged from its homeland of 2,500 years.

The Armenian Genocide is corroborated by the international scholarly, legal, and human rights community:

- 1) Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin, when he coined the term *genocide* in 1944, cited the Turkish extermination of the Armenians and the Nazi extermination of the Jews as defining examples of what he meant by genocide.
- 2) The killings of the Armenians is genocide as defined by the 1948 *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.
- 3) In 1997 the International Association of Genocide Scholars, an organization of the world's foremost experts on genocide, unanimously passed a formal resolution affirming the fact of the Armenian Genocide.
- 4) 126 leading scholars of the Holocaust including Elie Wiesel and Yehuda Bauer placed a statement in the *New York Times* in June 2000 declaring the "incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide" and urging western democracies to acknowledge it.
- 5) The Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide (Jerusalem), and the Institute for the Study of Genocide (NYC), have affirmed the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide.
- 6) Every book on comparative genocide in the English language contains a segment on the Armenian Genocide. Leading texts in the international law of genocide such as William A. Schabas's *Genocide in International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) cite the Armenian Genocide as a precursor to the Holocaust and as a precedent for the law on crimes against humanity.

Roger Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert Jay Lifton wrote in "Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide" (*Holocaust and Genocide Studies*): "Where scholars deny genocide in the face of decisive evidence . . . they contribute to false consciousness that can have the most dire reverberations. Their message, in effect, is . . . mass murder requires no confrontation, but should be ignored, glossed over. In this way scholars lend their considerable authority to the acceptance of this ultimate crime."

Sincerely,

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