

**Presentation by Ambassador Gündüz Aktan at the
House Committee on International Relations on
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Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights September 14, 2000**

Testimony of Ambassador Gündüz Aktan

Mr. Chairman,

I thank you very much for inviting me to this hearing. It is a privilege and honor for me to address this sub-committee my personal capacity as a private citizen, although the topic is not a pleasant one.

The question before us is too complex to treat in five minutes. Therefore, I will not dwell on its historical aspects.

Let me stress, however, that the Turkish people firmly believe that what happened to the Armenians was not genocide.

It was relocation to other parts of the Ottoman Empire of only the eastern Anatolian Armenians, away from a war zone in which they were collaborating with invading Russian armies with the aim of creating an independent state of their own in areas where they were only a minority by ethnically "cleansing" the majority Turks.

This tragedy occurred during the war between the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia, which was greatly aided by the Armenians, a long inter-communal struggle between Armenian irregulars and defending Muslim civilians as well as a thoroughly disorganized relocation of the Armenian population under the exceptionally difficult conditions of the day.

As a result many Armenians were killed. But many more Muslims and Turks perished as well.

The Turkish people will be deeply offended by this resolution which practically accuses them of being genocidal- They will also find it disrespectful of their unmentioned millions of dead.

Were it to be adopted, I am afraid, it would have two immediate effects: one on Turco-Armenian relations, the other on Turco-American relations.

Under the tremendous pressure of public opinion, the Turkish government will be compelled to toughen its foreign policy towards Armenia.

Turkey earnestly rejoiced at Armenia's independence after the demise of the Soviet Union. As a token of friendship the Turkish government provided wheat to the Armenian people who were then in dire need. I feel personally gratified to have played a part, together with Mr. G. Libaridian, in accomplishing this Turkish gesture of fellowship.

Turkey integrated Armenia into the Black Sea Cooperation Council, although it is not a littoral state.

Despite the so-called embargo, Turkish governments have deliberately turned a blind eye to the porous nature of the common border through which vital provisions reach the Armenians.

Armenia, however, maintains its occupation of 20 % of Azerbaijani territory, creating one million refugees with the help of Russian protection purchased at the cost of its newly gained independence.

Now, by insisting on the recognition of the genocide, the Armenian leadership and the diaspora will finally silence the few remaining voices favorable to them in Turkey. This will effectively result in sealing the border. Given the situation in Armenia this attitude of the Armenian government is akin to suicide.

However, I am personally more worried about Turkey's relations with the U.S. A strategic cooperation has been developed over the decades with great care and patience on the basis of mutual interest.

The first casualty of this resolution would be Cyprus, for the U.S. will immediately lose its honest broker status in the eyes of Turkish public opinion. Mr. Moses, the President's special representative, may no longer find any interlocutor.

Turkey and the U.S. closely cooperate in the Caucasus, especially in the field of energy, which has recently acquired great importance due to the rapidly increasing oil prices. In the region where Armenia is situated, the potential for cooperation with a country that considers Turks genocidal will be bound to remain severely limited.

But above all our cooperation on Iraq will inevitably suffer. The support for the American policy in northern Iraq, already slim, will dwindle immediately, for the Turkish people already feel enough of effects of the economic embargo with Iraq, which costs them billions of dollars. Why to continue to make this sacrifice?

This would mean the military base at Incirlik would no longer be used by U.S. war planes to bomb northern Iraq. Without air power to deter Saddam Huseyn from regaining the control of the region, this could very well be the end of the INC.

The crucial question is why the Armenians, not content with the word "tragedy" or "catastrophe", insist on genocide.

I am not a jurist. But I served as ambassador to the UN section in Geneva where questions related to humanitarian law (or the law of war) is also dealt with. In connection with the former Yugoslavia we thoroughly discussed the genocide convention.

What determines genocide is not necessarily the number of casualties or the cruelty of the persecution but the "intent to destroy" a group. Historically the "intent to destroy a race" has emerged only as the culmination of racism, as in the case of anti-Semitism and the Shoah. Turks have never harbored any anti-Armenianism.

Killing, even of civilians, in a war waged for territory, is not genocide. The victims of genocide must be totally innocent. In other words, they must not fight for something tangible like land, but be killed by the victimizer simply because of their membership in a specific group. Obviously, both Turks and Armenians fought for land upon which to build their independent states.

Since genocide is an imprescriptible crime, Armenia has recourse to the International Court of Justice at the Hague and may therefore ask the court to determine, according to article IX of the Convention, whether it was genocide.

But I know they cannot do it. They do not have a legally sustainable case. That is why they seek legislative resolutions which are legally null and void.

One last point: I would humbly suggest that all the references to Great Britain in the text of the resolution be dropped, for in July of this year the British Government declared in the House of Lords that "in the absence of unequivocal evidence to show that the Ottoman administration took a specific decision to eliminate the Armenians, the British Governments have not recognized the events of 1915-16 as genocide".

Let us not forget that Great Britain was the occupying power after the First World War and the Ottoman archives were at its disposition.

Thank you Mr. Chairman