



**The Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention
(ATOP)**

www.meaningfulworld.com

E-mail: drkalayjian@Meaningfulworld.com

**How Can We Transform Genocide?
Upholding United Nations Human Rights Declaration**

Harold Takooshian, Ph.D. & Meira Yasin, Ph.D.

April 24, 2021, on the 106th anniversary of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of Armenians, ATOP MeaningfulWorld hosted a program entitled “How Can We Transform Human Rights Violations? Upholding the United Nations Genocide Convention.” Meaningfulworld Educational Director, Dr. Meira Yasin, began the program with a moment of silence in commemoration of a million and a half lives lost in 1915 as well as the lives lost in the recent “44-day war” in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Dr. Ani Kalayjian, ATOP President and Board-Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress, was introduced, and set the agenda for the day. Samer Sabbour, Meaningfulworld United Nations intern from Fordham University, read articles one and two of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:

Article I The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish. 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. Article III The following acts shall be punishable: (a) Genocide; (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide; (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide.

Meanwhile, history was made at noon, when President Joseph R. Biden delivered a White House address on human rights, using the word “genocide” to describe the systematic killing of Armenians, Greeks, and other Christian minorities in Armenia Highlands back in 1915. Within minutes, many mass media reports heralded this as the first time a sitting U.S. President recognized the Ottoman mass killings of Armenians as a genocide. [See Notes 1,2 below. **] Here is an excerpt from his speech:

Each year on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide and recommit ourselves to preventing such an atrocity from ever again occurring. Beginning on April 24, 1915, with the arrest of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople by Ottoman authorities, one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in a campaign of extermination. We honor the victims of

the 'Meds Yeghern' so that the horrors of what happened are never lost to history. And we remember so that we remain ever-vigilant against the corrosive influence of hate in all its forms.

Of those who survived, most were forced to find new homes and new lives around the world, including in the United States. With strength and resilience, the Armenian people survived and rebuilt their community. Over the decades Armenian immigrants have enriched the United States in countless ways, but they have never forgotten the tragic history that brought so many of their ancestors to our shores. We honor their story. We see that pain. We affirm the history. We do this not to cast blame but to ensure that what happened is never repeated.

Today, as we mourn what was lost, let us also turn our eyes to the future—toward the world that we wish to build for our children. A world unstained by the daily evils of bigotry and intolerance, where human rights are respected, and where all people are able to pursue their lives in dignity and security. Let us renew our shared resolve to prevent future atrocities from occurring anywhere in the world. And let us pursue healing and reconciliation for all the people of the world.

The American people honor all those Armenians who perished in the genocide that began 106 years ago today.

On this somber day, as President Biden acknowledged the genocide, Dr. Kalayjian, a Columbia University, Adjunct Professor of Psychology continued to moderate the MeaningfulWorld program thus adding to her list of annual public forums, to mark “Genocide Remembrance Day.” This year’s interdisciplinary webinar featured four diverse experts, and a film clip from the popular 2017 film “The Promise” [3].

The first speaker, Dr. Taner Akcam presented on the impact of the denial of genocide on human rights. Dr. Taner Akcam, a Turkish citizen, is an author and Professor of History and Genocide Studies at Clark University. Akcam explained that the 1915 Turkish genocide of Armenians was a secret right from its start, so the current Turkish denial of this genocide goes back 106 years. He noted that Turkish government compartmentalizes their dark history, and bans all discussions claiming, ‘it’s a threat to Turkish security.’ He reinforced that increasing numbers of scholars within Turkey today want to end this 106-year-old denial and proceed to reconciliation.

The next speaker Dr. Siobhan Nash-Marshall discussed the human cost of lying, including the psychological scale of lying on those impacted by war and the immediate and long-term effects. Professor Siobhan Nash-Marshall is Mary T. Clark Chair of Christian Philosophy at Manhattanville College. Nash-Marshall described how leaders may tell national lies to justify their genocidal acts, but these lies come to harm the perpetrators as well as their victims. Continued denial remains a stain on the Turkish nation today and fueled the Azeri attack on Artsakh in September of 2020.

Next, Dr. David Phillips discussed human rights violations in Artsakh. This included a discussion of various acts attempting to destroy and eradicate culture, such as destroying churches, graveyards, khachkars, religious structures that were destroyed, and the impact on cultural and religious identity. Dr. David L. Phillips is an author, consultant, Director of the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University, and moderator of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC). Phillips noted the Azeri attack on Artsakh in September of 2020 was related to the 1915 genocide in several ways. To help Azeris, Turkey reportedly transported 2,000 ISIS jihadists from Syria, and paid them a bounty to kill Armenians. This “44-day war” left 34,000 Armenians dead, and 100,000 displaced. Azeris committed war crimes by using banned weapons (white phosphorus and cluster

bombs) and targeting cultural sites like the historic monastery in Sush. He urged UNESCO to designate and protect these Artsakh sites as International Heritage Sites.

The discussant, Dr. Harold Takooshian a Professor of Psychology and Urban Studies at Fordham University, raised a few questions about the psychology of genocide. Why is the denial of genocide so damaging? What can we all do today—as governments, institutions, individuals—to deter current and future genocides? How would world and Middle East history be different today, if President Woodrow Wilson in 1918 succeeded to make Armenia a U.S. protectorate—a pro-American enclave in the Middle East? Takooshian encouraged others to view Elia Kazan’s classic 1963 film on life in Ottoman Turkey, “America, America!” [4].

Dr. Kalayjian concluded the stimulating program with this quote from Maya Angelou: History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived. But if it is faced with courage, need not be lived again. She continued alerting that denial is the last stage of Genocide, attempting to keep the surviving generations in continued pain and suffering. As according to H. S. Sullivan (1953), acknowledgment & reparation are extremely necessary for healing from trauma. If not, this trauma, as a chronic intractable trauma, is transferred to 14 generations through DNA.

This forum is one of a series of global webinars, hosted by MeaningfulWorld, in concert with the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN). A 90-minute video of this webinar is available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WwsvvUmCltpCtL-S5cIpHd_8V-fdMonz/view?usp=sharing

For any details, check www.meaningfulworld.com, or contact Dr. Ani Kalayjian at drkalayjian@meaningfulworld.com.

** Notes:

1. Biden: www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/
2. Media: www.nytimes.com/2021/04/21/us/politics/biden-armenia-genocide-turkey.html
3. The Promise: <https://www.netflix.com/title/80163051>
4. Kazan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwG34kPsr1E>
5. Meaningfulworld weekly free support groups on Thursdays at noon EST: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89015052158>
6. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Mission, post war recovery in Armenia 28 April - 17 May: <https://meaningfulworld.com/our-work/global-missions>
7. Meaningfulworld monthly workshop, 22 May, Mindful Leadership & Forgiveness: <https://meaningfulworld.com/our-work/monthly-training>

