

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.

Member of the International Helsinki Federation
With consultative status with the UN and the Council of Europe

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An Ignored Genocide

Ninety years ago, on 24 April 1915, the government of the Young Turks of the Ottoman Empire masterminded, started, organized and carried out the deliberate destruction of the Christians of Turkey. This ethno-religious cleansing was in line with the anti-Christian massacres perpetrated since the middle of 1890s.

The Armenians sometimes complain, and rightly so, about the lack of public interest in their genocide, perpetrated between 1895 and 1922 in the Ottoman Empire, and mainly about the non-recognition of this tragedy by the modern Turkish state but at least it is not ignored and this genocide bears their name. In the shadow of the Armenian genocide, another one has long been ignored: the genocide of the Assyrian Christians (Arameans, Chaldeans, Syriac.) They also paid a heavy tribute. They were massively deported and killed on the order of Talat Pasha, the then Minister of the Interior. This genocide has long been ignored but now, it is slowly coming out of the shadow.

The book "The Christians to the beasts" (Publishing House Cerf), the title of four copy-books containing souvenirs of Dominican Jacques Rhétoré, which has just been published in Paris, recalls what was the genocide of 1915: a holy war declared by the Ottomans against all Christians whatever their denomination.

In his souvenirs, Jacques Rhétoré tells in a moving style the cruel death inflicted on Father Gabriel Manaché, a Syrian Catholic priest: "Father Gabriel Manaché was not a man who was ready to sacrifice his faith for human considerations and he showed it clearly. That was the reason why he was arrested and put in a convoy of Christians doomed to death and sent to Ras-el-Aïn. A survivor of this convoy told that the Tcherkess leaders of the convoy expended a lot of effort to make him recant his faith. When they realized they were unsuccessful, they put him to death in a cruel way: they cut off his hands, his arms and his feet; in the meantime, the priest was praying and asking God to help him. Finally, he was saved by death."

Here is another testimony. In Deriké, "the local Muslims took special pleasure in insulting roughly the Christian religion by targeting Syrian priest Ibrahim Garrômé. They took out the hair of his beard, obliged him to crawl like an animal while a Kurd sitting on his back was speeding his walk by kicking him and stabbing him in his side. After this race, they finished him off by cutting him into pieces."

The word genocide is sometimes misused by the media and this word does not always correspond to the reality of the facts. What is then a genocide? The United Nations answered this question in the Convention for the Prevention and Repression of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. In a genocide, there must be an intention to destroy, in all or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such. Various sorts of acts are concerned such as:

- Murder of members of a group;
- Serious breach of the physical or psychological integrity of members of a group;
- Intentionally submitting a group to living conditions leading to its total or partial destruction.

Christians of Turkey of all denominations were victims of a genocide.

Despite the recognition of the genocide perpetrated against the Armenian and the Assyrians of all religious denominations by the European Parliament and several national parliaments, negationists in Belgium cast doubt on it and relativize it in total impunity.

At the moment, our politicians are discussing a draft law criminalizing the denial of the genocide perpetrated against the Jews. A number of groups have raised their voices to ask our legislators to extend the scope of this law to any duly recognized genocide. We join our voices to theirs.

Jews kept alive the souvenir of the Holocaust and inscribed it in the memory of humankind. The victims of the **Seyfo** also have the right to be inscribed in the memory of humankind. Jews erected mausoleums in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. The names of all the Americans killed during the Vietnam War are engraved in a long black wall in Washington, the capital city of the United States. Brussels is the capital city of Europe, a Europe that Turkey would like to join. **Why not build in Brussels a black mourning wall or a blood-red wall on which thousands of known names of victims of all Christian denominations and all ethnic denominations would be engraved. Why not give a visible and impressive sign of the 1st genocide of the 20th century to present-day and upcoming humankind? The youth of the upcoming generations will need that not only to remember it but also to avoid the repetition of the same horrors perpetrated by their ancestors.**

Nowadays, whilst Turkey is knocking on the door of the European Union, this country continues to deny the existence of this genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire. Would we have accepted Germany in the European Union if it had not recognized the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews and if it had not asked for mercy? Can Turkey claim to have a seat in the European Union as long as it does not recognize the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians and several hundred thousands of Assyrians? Can the EU accept in its midst a negationist Turkey? The question needs to be asked.

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