

Raphael Lemkin and the Armenian Genocide (1945/50)

Source references:

Source 1: Editorial introducing the term “genocide” to Armenian readers “Genocide”, December 9, 1945, *Haratch* (Paris, France), December 9, 1945, p. 1. Translated from Armenian and annotated by Khatchig Mouradian.

Source 2: Lemkin telegram to Reuben Darbinian Telegram from Raphael Lemkin to Reuben Darbinian, editor of the *Hairenik* newspaper, June 14, 1950. Source: Haigazn Khazarian Archive, National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, Mardigian Library, Belmont, MA. English original.

Source 3: Darbinian’s response to Lemkin Telegram from Reuben Darbinian to Raphael Lemkin, June 14, 1950. Source: Center for Jewish History, Raphael Lemkin Collection, Box 2, Folder 3. English original.

Source 4: Editorial calling on Armenian readers to write to Senate Foreign Relations Committee urging ratification of Genocide Convention “Azkasbanutyun vojire yev haygagan chartere” [The crime of genocide and the Armenian massacres], 18 June, 1950, *Hairenik Daily* (Boston, MA), June 18, 1950, p. 4. Translated from Armenian and annotated by Khatchig Mouradian.

Source 5: Mandalian informing Lemkin of editorial in support of Genocide Convention, Letter from James G. Mandalian to Lemkin, 21 June, 1950. Letter from Center for Jewish History, Raphael Lemkin Collection, Box 2, Folder 3. English original.

Source 6: Editorial commemorating the Armenian massacres and introducing “genocide” “Inchu gazmagerbvetsav April 24e yev inch artyunk unetsav” [Why was April 24 organized and what was its outcome?], 23 April 1950, *Aztag Daily* (Beirut, Lebanon), 23 April, 1950, p. 1. Translated from Armenian by Khatchig Mouradian.

Sources:

Source 1:

Genocide

A new word that was used in the context of the Nuremberg Trials. It means *tseghasbanutyun*.¹

Indeed, the four victorious countries declare in their historic indictment: “Germany is responsible for premeditated and planned crimes of genocide – the annihilation of national, religious, or racial groups, especially Poles, Jews, and others.”²

As jurists point out, this is the first time in history that the term “genocide” appears in an indictment. The creator of the term is an American professor, Lemkin, who explains the term’s origin and meaning in a recently published book.³

Genocide is formed of the Greek word *genos*, which means race or nation, and *cide*, to kill, as in homicide, infanticide, etc. It means destroying the essential foundations of national group’s life

¹ Translator’s note: *Tseghasbanutyun* is the Armenian term for genocide. In the 1950s, the term *Azkasbanutyun* was also used (see, for example, document 5), although less commonly. The latter nearly disappeared from use in subsequent decades as a translation of the term genocide.

² Translator’s note: This quote is likely from the *Le Monde* article the editor refers to later in the piece. It certainly is not from Lemkin’s book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* [Publications of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, Washington.] (New York: Columbia University Press. 1944.

³ Translator’s note: A reference to *Axis Rule*.

according to an intentional, predetermined plan, in order to annihilate them through the disintegration of their political, social, cultural, linguistic institutions, national and religious feelings, and economy. A genocidal act is directed at a national group; individuals are not targeted as individuals, but as members of said national group. The act comprises two stages: the annihilation of the governing entity of the oppressed group, and second, replacing it with the oppressor's governing entity (cadre), etc. (*Le Monde*)⁴

The American professor believes that this new principle of international law will not only serve as a vehicle to punish war criminals, but also secure the future protection of peoples, especially minorities.

We read these lines, we follow the Nuremberg trials, and our mind instinctively meanders to a faraway world, where also “war crimes” were committed 30 years ago during the Great War—in accordance with a predetermined plan drawn up three-times-thirty years ago to annihilate an abandoned and helpless people.

Back then too, the same planned practices [were implemented]: to eliminate the heads (leadership); to dismantle, destroy, and cause the roots of political, social, cultural economic life to dry out. And then massacre them, annihilate them *en masse*. On site, on the road to exile, or in the desert. To annihilate them by the sword, dagger, gun, cannon, axe, stone, hatchet, hammer, or cudgel. In the gallows or by burning [them alive]. By condemning them to starvation or drowning them in the river or sea. Even injecting poisonous germs into them.⁵ Or nailing toddlers inside coffers...

In one word, genocide.

Where were today's jurists and judges back then? Had they not discovered the term, or was the bloodthirsty monster so powerful and inaccessible that they couldn't reach it?

Our outrage is multiplied especially because back then, too, the victors were on site, at the crime scene. They were there for four full years, and reigned supreme, just like they do today in Germany. Back then, too, hundreds of arrests were made, and 70 select monsters were transported to Malta to be tried and to receive the punishment they deserved. But then what happened?

Has the world reformed [in the period] from Istanbul and Malta to Nuremberg, Belsen, and Auschwitz?

We wish. Let the hyenas of genocide be tried and mercilessly punished. But where was the first and “template” case of genocide in modern times offered?

Sh[avarsh Missakian]⁶

Source 2:

Chairman Darbinian

Hairenik Assn 212 Stuart Street Boston

Your previous help on genocide of greatest importance. Kindly arrange that Armenian survivors of genocide should write letters to Senators on Foreign Relations Committee urging immediate ratification [of] Genocide Convention. Personal experiences in massacres describe[d] in a simple language should be possibly included in these letters. The Senators should be asked to include in the letter in Congressional record. Kindly reply. Cordially, Lemkin, Yale University

⁴ Translator's note: Lemkin uses the phrase “national pattern” in *Axis Rule*. See, for example, pages 8-9 and p. 79.

⁵ Translator's note: There is no evidence of this practice in Armenian genocide scholarship.

⁶ Translator's note: Shavarsh Missakian (1884-1957), a prominent Armenian intellectual, survived the Armenian genocide and founded the newspaper *Haratch* in Paris in the 1920s. He continued serving as its editor until his death.

Source 3:

Prof. Lemkin, care [of] Barbour
541 East 20 St New York

Have received your telegram June 14th. We have taken steps to fulfill request. Publications will request genocide survivors to send letters to foreign relations senators and will editorialize issue.

Best regards, Rubin Dartinian [sic]

June 14, 1950

Source 4:

Editorial

The Crime of Genocide⁷ and the Armenian Massacres

The Genocide Convention is on the table of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee these days. If the Committee promptly accepts the Convention, it will be presented to the U.S. Senate for ratification. For the Foreign Relations Committee to accept the Convention without difficulty and losing time, it is necessary, as we wrote yesterday in our news section, that every Armenian who has lived through the Turkish hell, has witnessed massacres, has suffered losses, write as eyewitness to any member of the Foreign Relations Committee, preferably to the Senator of their own state, asking that the Committee approve the Convention.

The Armenians of the entire Diaspora are victims of the horrible massacres that the Turkish government has periodically organized over the centuries. Of all nations, it is Turkey that has developed the industry of massacres most. Among the peoples of the old Ottoman Empire there is not even one, Christian or Muslim, that has not been subjected to collective violence. Muslim Arabs, Kurds, Albanians, and Circassians have been massacred. Christian Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Romanians, and especially Armenians have been massacred.

It can be said with confidence that in the history of peoples, there's nothing like the massacres of the Armenians. Even the massacres of the Jews in Russia and elsewhere pale in comparison to the Armenian massacres. In the days when there were no revolutionary organizations among us and the Armenian silently served the Turkish government, they were still massacres with the utmost ruthlessness. Without going too far back, let us remember only a few cases from the 19th century. In 1828-29, in the days of the Russo-Turkish war, 40,000 Armenians headed by Archbishop Garabed left Erzerum and crossed to Transcaucasia only to free themselves of the periodic massacres committed by Turks in that region.

In 1830, to avenge their defeat by the Russian army, the Turks forcibly Islamized 200,000 Armenians in Hemshin, Keskim, Nariman, Tortum and other regions.

In 1846, the persecutions and massacres committed by the Turkish government intensified once again, and continued until the Crimean War. In those days, thousands of Armenians were massacred again in the region of Pasen and Alashgerd.

In 1850, when the Bedirkhans massacred 50,000 Nestorians, Armenian blood was also spilled alongside theirs. What horrors did Armenians experience also in the days of Sheikh Jalaleddin, Sheikh Ubeydullah, and others.

Turks have massacred Armenians on average every 10 or 15 years.

In 1895-96, the Turks massacred 300,000 Armenians. It was in those days that Gladstone, the great son of England, gave Sultan [Abdul]Hamid the title Great Assassin.

⁷ Translator's note: The Armenian translation the editor employs here is *Azkasbanutyun*, murder of a nation, far less common than *Tseghasbanutyun*, murder of a race.

In 1908 came the ominous Ottoman Constitution, and a year after that, in 1909, 30,000 Armenians were massacred in Cilicia.

But Constitutional Turkey committed the greatest crime of its history in 1915, when it ANNIHILATED in the most merciless and inhumane methods more than a MILLION AND A HALF Armenians. In the days of the previous [World] War, the conscience of civilized humanity was shaken when through eyewitness accounts it became familiarized with the horrible details of the Armenian tragedy. In those days, the Allies—England, France, and Russia—officially warned and threatened Turkey that they will hold personally responsible the organizers of Armenian massacres and punish them severely.

But what was the outcome? In 1919, some of the Turkish criminals were arrested and exiled to the island of Malta. However, they soon escaped from there with the tacit knowledge of Allied representatives, and perhaps even with their assistance. Had the Allies punished the perpetrators of Armenian massacres, as they did the Nazis after the end of the last war, all the massacres that took the lives of millions of Jews and Russians, as well as the carnage being committed by the Kremlin against the peoples of the Baltic countries today would not have taken place.

Every effort must be made that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee ratify the Genocide Convention and present it to the Senate [for ratification]. If at least 30 nations adopt the Convention,⁸ one can have hope that through the United Nations, a strong hurdle will be erected against perpetrators of massacres.

We repeat our call: let every Armenian person, as a victim of Armenian massacres, appeal to a Senator on the Foreign Relations Committee, requesting that the Genocide Convention be ratified. In this way, we will not only serve our own nation, but entire humanity—preventing future genocidal crimes.

Any delay is a crime. Every Armenian who has become a victim of Turkish massacres must act!

Source 5:

Hairenik Printers & Publishers 212 Boston 16, Mass.	Association, Stuart	Inc. St.
The The Armenian Weekly June 21, 1950	Hairenik	Weekly
Prof. Yale New Haven, Conn.	Raphael	Lemkin University

Dear Prof. Lemkin:

In compliance with your request, our Armenian language newspaper the Hairenik Daily published an editorial call, inviting our readers to write letters to the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urging them to do their utmost for the ratification of the Genocide Convention. The Enclosed letter which I sent to Senator Lodge was translated and published in our Armenian Daily as a sample, to give the readers an idea of how they should write. I am happy that Senator Lodge was very prompt in his reply to me, the copy of which you will find enclosed.

⁸ Translator's note: Twenty ratifications were needed for the Convention's entry into force.

Sincerely
James G. Mandalian

yours,

Source 6:

Editorial

Why was April 24 organized and what was its outcome?

Years go by, generations change, but the darkest date in our history, April 24, continues to weigh heavy on Armenian souls.

The catastrophe we were subject to as a nation was extremely huge and unprecedented. Nature, with the rage it unleashes through its elemental forces, has never inflicted as much evil upon humanity as man has caused to fellow man. The crime committed by the Turkish tyranny thirty years ago was an act of barbarism never recorded before in history, an unprecedented and inhuman carnage the perpetrators of which remain unpunished—and are even glorified—to this day by so-called civilized nations.

To commemorate the heart wrenching episodes of Armenian martyrdom and to cry means to turn into helpless weepers and fill Armenian life with unconsolable mourning. To remember the dead is, of course, a sacred duty. But [one ought to] remember not only to shed tears, but to be inspired by their legacy and vision, and to become the loyal pilgrims of their ideals.

Every year, on this day, one must ask the following question:

Why was the crucifix of April 24 erected? Why were the Armenian massacres and deportations organized? Why was our intellectual elite also martyred alongside the one million?

When we look at the bloody storm of the recent past that erased the villages and cities of the Armenian world, when we consider the scope and *modus operandi* of the massacres, we see that half the Armenian nation fell victim to a state conspiracy, to a predetermined monstrous plan, the intention of which was to forever erase the Armenian nation and Armenia from the face of the earth.

This was not partial revenge, not religious fanaticism, not punishment as some willfully blind people still think.

The Turkish state, taking advantage of the maelstrom of the First World War, wanted to bury the element that inhabited its domains with which it couldn't compete in civilizational merits and whose rights it couldn't smother through legal means.

A second World War was necessary for the Western nations to feel on their skins what it means to devise a crime against the very existence of a nation, and to condemn it with the concept of "genocide."

When a quarter of a century ago, the most heinous act of genocide was being committed in the deserts of Mesopotamia, when the children of the Armenian nation were being annihilated in the hundreds of thousands, the conscience of the civilized world remained indifferent. A quarter century later, while Nazi genocidaires were hanged in front of the international tribunal, the killers of the Armenian people walked without punishment, free.

This is called politics, and it almost always presents itself as an antonym for justice.

But there is indeed Justice, one that will be served sooner or later. It is with the dream of and faith in that justice that our martyrs embarked on the road of sacrifice. It is in the name of that justice that our heroic battles were fought in Van, Shabin Karahisar, Urfa, and Suedia in the grim days of massacre and exile, and it is that Justice that, finally, emerged victorious on the fields of Sardarabad and Karakilise, becoming a tricolor flag and billowed under the skies of Independent Armenia.

The enemy of our race wrested the one million [souls] away from us, but was unable to wrest away our spirit and faith, was unable to bury our nation, its creative potential, it was unable to relegate to oblivion the Armenian cause and Armenian rights.

This is why, in our endless grief, we feel consoled and look to the future with confidence. This is why, despite the loss of a million Armenians, the perpetrator is defeated—the fate of all perpetrators—and we, the survivors, are victorious, with the wondrous mystery of resurrection.

Let each of us renew our martyrs' oath, which is ours now. Let each one of us resolve to living as an Armenian, as a free Armenian—a commitment for which we lost so many precious lives.

There is no force on earth that can kill a nation that has resolved to live!

We have resolved to live a life worthy of our history, our name, and our calling. We have resolved to claim our right and our ancestral legacies.

It is only in this way that the memory of our victims can be honored, and their tortured souls can find peace.

Blurb:

The Armenian Genocide, and the assassination of its mastermind in the aftermath of WWI, made a lasting impact on Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959), the Jewish Polish lawyer. In the absence of the equivalent of a Nuremberg trial for the Armenian massacres, the survivor generation took justice into their own hands.⁹ An Armenian revolutionary group, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), decided in 1919 to assassinate the perpetrators. By 1922, ARF had gunned down several top Ottoman Turkish leaders implicated in the genocide, including Interior Minister Talaat Pasha, the crime's mastermind. Reading about Talaat's killing, Lemkin felt that the assassin, Soghomon Tehlirian, "upheld the moral order of mankind." He added:

But can a man appoint himself to mete out justice? Will not passion sway such form of justice and make travesty of it? At that moment, my worries about the murder of the innocent became more meaningful to me. I didn't know all the answers but I felt that a law against this type of racial or religious murder must be adopted by the world.¹⁰

Lemkin's quest for an international legal instrument to punish such crimes led him to coin the term "genocide" in 1943 and push for a law against it.

Two months after the third count of the Nuremberg Indictment, in 1945, stated that the Nazi defendants had "conducted deliberate and systematic genocide," the Armenian-language daily newspaper *Haratch* in Paris published an editorial providing the readers with background on the term "génocide," using information from the French newspaper *Le Monde*, and reflecting on its significance for Armenians (Document 1).

The mixed sentiments on the new concept expressed in the *Haratch* editorial, cascaded across the Armenian diaspora. "A second World War was necessary for the Western nations to feel on their skins what it means to devise a crime against the very existence of a nation, and to condemn it with the concept of 'genocide,'" lamented the Lebanese-Armenian daily *Aztag* in its editorial commemorating the genocide in 1950 (Document 6).

⁹ Trials were held in Allied-occupied Istanbul sentencing perpetrators to death in absentia, but most of them were beyond reach, having fled the country (many to Germany), while those the British had imprisoned in Malta were released as part of a prisoner exchange deal.

¹⁰ Donna-Lee Frieze, ed., *Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 20.

The Armenian discourse on the term and the Convention revolved around two strong sentiments. On the one hand, Armenian intellectuals felt that the Convention amounted to too little, too late. The *Hairenik Weekly* in Boston, for instance, published an editorial that argued: “To have any meaning at all, the decision to outlaw genocide must go deeper. It must also offer remedy to the wronged parties. To outlaw genocide, but to sanction the basic aims and results of the action is only a half measure” (“Editorial: Exit Genocide,” 30 December 1948, p. 2).

On the other hand, Armenian intellectuals felt an obligation to struggle for the ratification of the Convention: “In this way, we will not only serve our own nation, but entire humanity—preventing future genocidal crimes,” wrote the editor of the *Hairenik Daily* Newspaper in 1950 (Document 4). In an article published in 1959, Lemkin himself recounted how “the Armenians of the entire world were specifically interested in the Genocide Convention. They filled the galleries of the drafting committee at the third General Assembly of the United Nations in Paris when the Genocide Convention was discussed. An Armenian, Levon Keshishian, the well-known UN correspondent for Arab newspapers, helped considerably through his writings in obtaining the ratifications of many Near Eastern and North African countries.” (“A Weekly Exclusive: Dr. Lemkin, Father of Genocide Convention, Reviews Work Relating to Turkish Massacres,” *The Hairenik Weekly*, 1 January 1959, pp. 1,4).

The collection of sources presented here includes translations from Armenian of three key editorials on the subject that appeared in Armenian newspapers on three continents (Sources 1, 4, and 6), and the original text of two telegrams and a letter exchanged between Lemkin and the editors of the *Hairenik Daily* and *Hairenik Weekly* (Sources 2,3, and 5). The editorials shed light on the ways in which the concept of “genocide” was adopted and critiqued by the Armenian press in the months following the UN vote on the Genocide Convention. The correspondence offers insights into how Lemkin mobilized activists in communities affected by genocide to advocate for the ratification of the Convention by the US Congress and parliaments around the world.

While Lemkin and his allies were successful in securing ratification by 20 countries and thus paving the way for the Convention to enter into force on January 12, 1951, the U.S., the country that gave Lemkin asylum when he escaped Nazi persecution, only acceded to it in 1988. Lemkin, who died in 1959, never saw the day. But the joint struggle with Lemkin lent a major impetus to the Armenian struggle for justice. And on the 50th anniversary of the Armenian genocide in 1965, a transnational campaign for genocide recognition and reparations burst into center-stage and continues to shape Armenian political advocacy from the Middle East to Europe to North America.

Sources selected, translated, and annotated by Khatchig Mouradian.