

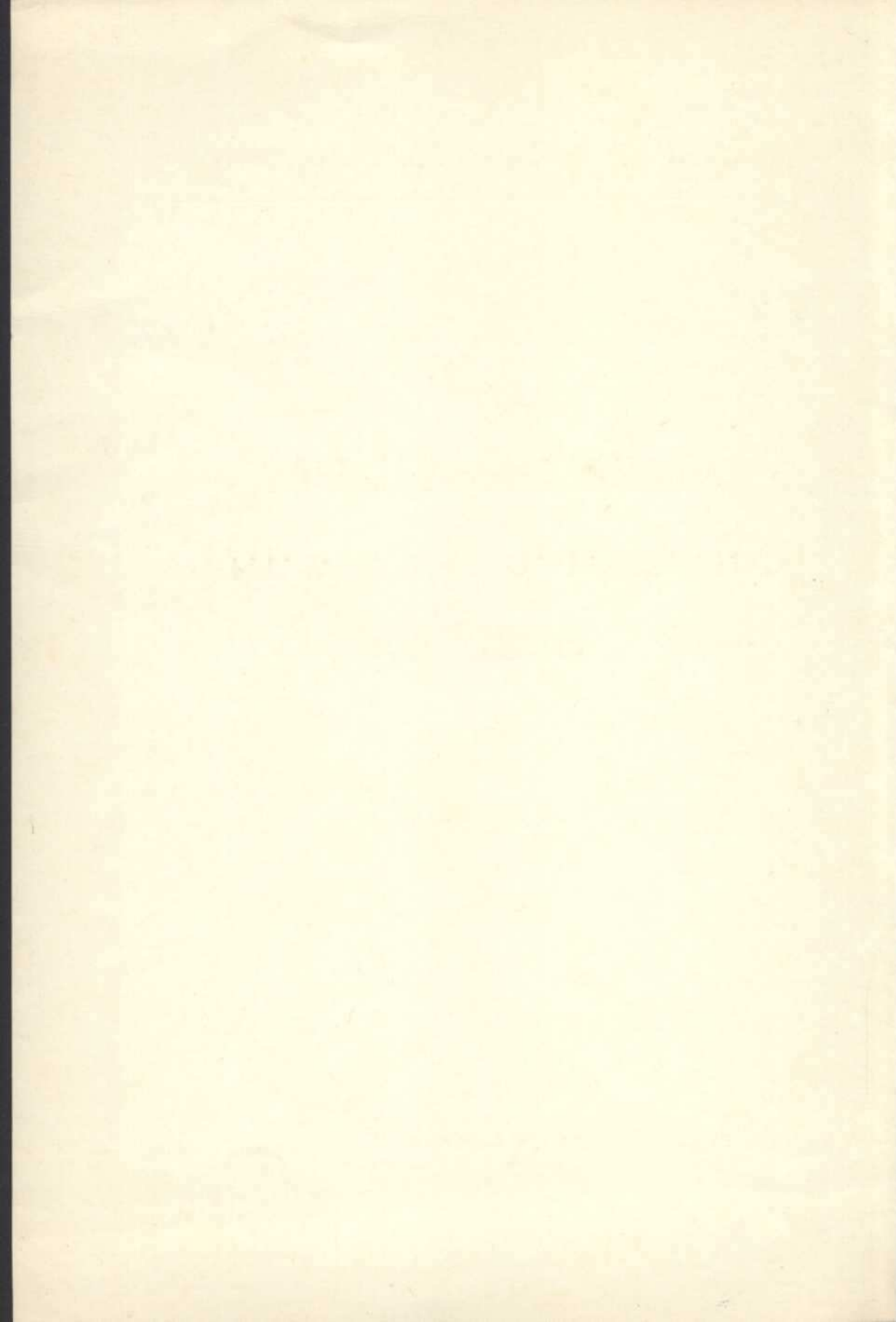
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE TREATY OF SEVRES

**MEMORANDUM**  
**CONCERNING THE ARMENIAN**  
**QUESTION**

*Woodrow Wilson*

1970

BEIRUT - LEBANON



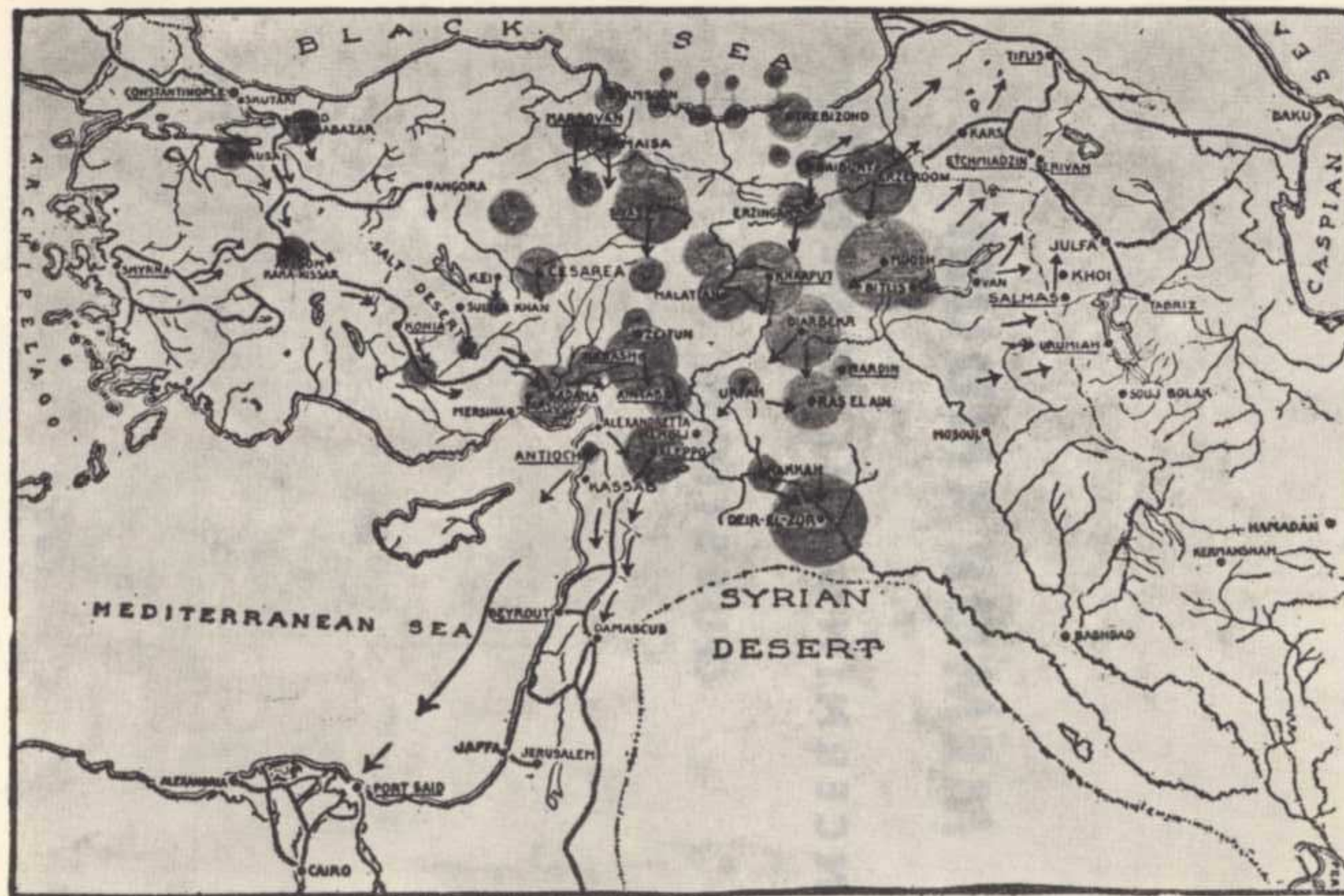
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1. The shaded circles show the main centres of the 1915 Armenian massacres.
2. The arrows show the direction the 1915 Armenian deportees from Turkey were forced to follow.
3. The above map is taken from the Cry of Armenia, published by the American Armenian Relief Fund, in cooperation with the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, New York.

## **I. — INTRODUCTION**

The Armenians, one of the oldest nations in the world, are a people of Indo-European tongue. For 3500 years their homeland has been the region between the Taurus mountains, in Asia Minor, and the Caucasus, around the three lakes of Van, Sevan and Urmia.

With some interruptions, their national sovereignty was maintained till 1375 A.D., date of the fall of the last Armenian kingdom. In 1514 Ottoman Sultan Selim I seized Armenia. The Armenian people suffered under the yoke of the Turks and other neighbouring nations until 1918, when it regained its independence. Since 1920 Armenia has been one of the U.S.S.R. Republics. Today the Armenians number about six millions : 2.5 millions live in the Armenian Republic; 1.5 millions, in the neighbouring countries, mainly in Georgia, Azerbaijan and the northern Caucasus; the rest are dispersed, chiefly in Turkey, Iran, the Arab Middle East, France, the U.S.A. etc.

After the fall of the Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages, the Armenians not only absorbed the shock of the barbarian hordes off Europe, but also greatly contributed to world civilization in various fields (architecture, music, painting, mathematics, science etc.). In this respect, the dictum of William Gladstone, four times prime minister of the United Kingdom, is noteworthy: «To serve Armenia is to serve Civilization».

## **II. — HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION**

After the invasion of Armenia in the XVI century, the Turks not only occupied the homeland of the Armenians but also denied them basic human rights, safety and justice in their own land. The Armenians were treated as third rate subjects, overwhelmed by taxation, exposed to occasional wholesale massacres and looting. They often had their women raped, their villages devastated and their children kidnapped. Their Christian faith was an additional ground for more persecution.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when the liberation process of the Balkan peoples began, the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire strove, without any disloyalty, to secure reforms in the Armenian-populated provinces, with the intent of establishing conditions which guaranteed security of life and development of national culture.

The opportunity arose, at the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1878, on the Balkan issue. In Art. 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano, the **Armenian Question emerged internationally** for the first time; later, this Article was replaced and attenuated in its exigency by Art. 61 in the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, whereby «The Sublime Porte undertakes to realize, without further delay, the ameliorations and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security...».

After the Armenian Question was internationalized, Sultan Abdul Hamid II, using false pretexts, had 300.000 Armenians slaughtered in the Armenian provinces and Constantinople itself, between 1894 and 1896.

After the overthrow of Abdul Hamid II in 1909, the Young Turks continued his policy in regard to the Armenians. The Armenian demands for reform became more pressing. In February 1914 an agreement was signed between Turkey and the Great Powers, whereby in the Six Armenian Vilayets of Anatolia—Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Mamuret-Ul-Aziz, Sevas—specific reforms would be carried out, under the control of foreign inspectors.

### **III. — THE GENOCIDE OF 1915**

However, when, in November 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered into the First World War, the above agreement was annulled. The Turkish leaders, who belonged to the Ittihad ve Terrake Party, believed that, if the war was to end with the Allies' victory, the Armenians, along with the Arabs, would get their independence, and the Turkish Empire would be completely dismembered. Upon a premeditated plan, set in secret party meetings held in Salonica in 1910 and put in its final form in February

1915, the ruling party of Turkey decided and carried out the annihilation of the Armenians of the Empire.

On April 15, 1915 the Ittihad triad, the Minister of the Interior Talaat, the Minister of War Enver, and the Secretary General of the Party Dr. Nazem sent the following cable to all the governors and local administrators of Turkish Asia Minor:

«...The Armenian Question shall come forth, which for more than half a century has already created international interest, and shall be thrust in our breast. Therefore, the Government — which represents the Turkish people and the Ittihad ve Terake Party — in order to prevent the rise of the Armenian Question, has decided to put an end once and for all to this Question, by **annihilating this element** of the population. This may be done by driving the Armenians to the deserts of Arabia, according to the orders secretly given to you.

The Government and the Party Central Committee appeal to you to assist them in this task with all your forces.

Every officer or government official who rejects this patriotic work and tries to defend any Armenian will be recognized as an enemy of the State and religion and will be judged accordingly.

The pretexts which may serve as reasons to implement this plan are:

- a) Armenian voluntary forces which serve in the enemy armies.
- b) Armenian organizations within this country, which will be accused of plotting against our army.
- c) The great number of weapons and ammunition captured all over the land.»

A Turkish intellectual and politician, Mevlan Zade Rifaat, reports what Dr. Nazem, Secretary General of the Turkish Ittihad Party in office, told the General Committee in a secret meeting: «Now we are at war; there is no better opportunity than this. The interventions of the Great Powers and the protests of newspapers cannot be considered; even if they are, the matter will become an **accomplished fact** and soon over.. This time, the operation must be one of annihilation. It is necessary to exter-

minate all Armenians, not letting one alive.» (Mevlan Zade Rifaat, «Turkiye Inkilabinin Ic Yuzu», 1929, p. 28)

On April 24, 1915, took place mass arrests of the Armenian intelligentzia and leaders in Constantinople. They were deported to the interior of Turkey and massacred by atrocious means (A. Toynbee, «Armenian Atrocities» ; the 1916 British Blue Book, «The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire»). Next came the turn of the 300,000 Armenian soldiers serving in the Ottoman army. They were first to give up their arms and turned into labour battalions. Within weeks they were taken to isolated places, forced to dig their own graves, and shot in cold blood. Once all able-bodied men were wiped out, the defenceless population of the Armenian provinces, mostly women, children and old men fell victim to deportation and slaughter.

Churchill wrote, in *The Aftermath*, «The Turkish Government began and ruthlessly carried out the infamous massacre and deportation of the Armenians in Asia Minor.»

Thus, the first genocide of the century was set going. The 3500-year-old homeland of Armenia was robbed of its native people.

In a letter dated October 3, 1918, and addressed to Lord Bryce by Robert Cecil, British Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the latter wrote, «The Ottoman Armenians were systematically murdered by the Turkish Government in 1915. The two-thirds of the population was exterminated by the most cold-blooded and fiendish methods...» **Before the genocide 2,660,000 Armenians** (Publication du Patriarcat Arménien, «Population Arménienne de la Turquie avant la Guerre», Paris 1920, p. 9) lived in the Ottoman Empire, mostly in the Armenian provinces. 1,500,000 of them were massacred. **Today Armenians in Turkey number only 125,000.**

Besides, 2,050 churches and 203 monasteries were gutted. (M. Mesrop, «Armenian Losses in the Field of Art», June 1931). Armenian schools, farms, villages and movables were reduced to ashes or appropriated. Valuable manuscripts were looted or burnt; works of art, robbed or vandalized. Such financial losses amount to **scores of billion dollars**. The **Armenian lands** were usurped. The survivors were scattered all over the world.

#### IV. — THE TREATY OF SEVRES

On August 31, 1915, the Turkish Minister of the Interior, Talaat Pasha, declared to the American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau that the Armenian Question did not exist anymore, since there were no more Armenians.

However, over a hundred thousand Armenians living in the border areas saved themselves by self-defensive fights; others survived deportation; while the Armenians living in Russian Armenia were not harmed. Though, the Armenian people had suffered a crushing blow, and half of its number had been annihilated, Armenian soldiers and guerillas fought alongside the Allied Powers on all fronts. 250,000 Armenians fought in the Russian imperial army. The Armenians delayed the German-Turkish occupation of Baku oil fields for seven months. The 5,000 strong Armenian Legion fought along with the French and British forces under General Allenby on the Palestine Front.

The Allies promised the Armenians to restore right and justice by helping them regain their homeland. On his accession to power, Lenin, on behalf of the Soviet Government, proclaimed not only their right to self-determination but also «the union and independence of Armenian lands». On January 8, 1918, President Wilson of the United States declared his famous 14-point statement, which settled the right of self-determination of all the peoples oppressed by the Turks. In January 1919, the Big Four—England, the United States, France and Italy — defined the war aims of the Allies, one of which concerned the oppressed peoples living in the Ottoman Empire: «Because of the historic misgovernment by the Turks of their subject peoples and the terrible massacres of the Armenians and others in recent years, the Allied and Associated Powers are agreed that Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Arabia must be completely severed from the Turkish empire.»

Finally, on August 10, 1920, the peace treaty with Turkey was signed at Sèvres. The Republic of Armenia was a signatory to this treaty along with Turkey, the British Empire, Italy, Japan, France, Belgium, Greece, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, etc.

The most important articles regarding Armenia were:

ARTICLE 88: «Turkey, in accordance with the action already taken by the Allied Powers, hereby recognizes Armenia as a free and independent State.»

ARTICLE 89: «Turkey and Armenia as well as the other High Contracting Parties agree to submit to the arbitration of the President of the United States of America the question of the frontier to be fixed between Turkey and Armenia in the Vilayets of Erzurum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis, and to accept his decision thereupon, as well as any stipulations he may prescribe as to access for Armenia to the sea, and as to the demilitarisation of any portion of Turkish territory adjacent to the said frontier.»

By this treaty the genocide perpetrated by the Turks upon the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire was **implicitly and officially recognized**. Special tribunals were to be set up by the Allies to judge all responsible persons whom Turkey bound itself to hand over to the Allies (Part VII, Penalties, Art. 226-230).

In compliance with the request of Article 89 (See above) of the Treaty of Sèvres and on the basis of the reports presented by the King-Crane Commission and the Mission of General Harbord, which had studied the matter on the spot, President Wilson decided that «the frontier between Turkey and the Vilayets of Erzurum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis shall be fixed as follows.» (British and Foreign State Papers number 113:652 E, GBTS 1920:11 (E) ). The attached map shows the frontiers of the Wilsonian Armenian Republic.

## **V. — THE NEW TURKISH AGGRESSION AND THE TREATY OF LAUSANNE**

After fierce battles in May 1918 against Turkish troops, the Armenians of Russian Armenia declared their independence. But, hardly one month after the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres, the Turkish nationalist forces of Kemal Ataturk invaded the new Republic in an act of aggression, not only rejecting the

Treaty of Sèvres but also threatening the very existence of the Armenian Republic. After unequal battles, the outnumbered Armenian forces had no other resort than to accept the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Alexandropole, imposed on them on December 2, 1920. On the same day the Armenian Tashnag Party-led Government resigned and handed over its authority to the newly constituted Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. The latter checked the Turkish advance and also secured the withdrawal of the Turkish forces from the region of Alexandropole.

As a consequence of this, the Turks imposed their terms upon the Allies and the U.S.S.R. in the new peace treaty with Turkey, signed at Lausanne on July 24, 1923. The Lausanne Peace Conference, despite the resolutions (Nov. 18, 1920; Sept. 21, 1921; Sept. 22, 1922) of the League of Nations in favour of the Armenians and the pleas of the Armenians for the restoration of justice and the fulfilment of official promises, relegated the Armenian Question to the category of unsolved problems. The Treaty of Lausanne ignored the Armenians. It was nothing but the acceptance of an accomplished fact, created by the Kemalist Turkish forces in the Eastern Front. But, if the Armenian rights were not mentioned, they were not denied either.

## **VI. — THE ARMENIAN CLAIMS AND THEIR LEGAL BASES**

The Armenians of the world, whose mouth-piece in Lebanon acts under the name of Committee for the Restitution of the Armenian Territories usurped by Turkey, claim the **handing back of all Armenian lands** now under Turkish occupation, as well as **full compensation for all human and material losses** and **spoliations** suffered by the Armenians within the years 1915 and 1921.

The majority of the existing six million Armenians live outside the present Armenian Republic, mostly in the neighbouring countries and the Middle East. The population density in the present Armenian Republic is 72 persons per sq. km.; while, in the Turk-occupied Armenian lands, it is hardly 10 persons per sq. km.

The Armenians base their territorial claims, as well as human and material loss compensation demands, not only on the Treaty of Sèvres of August 10, 1920 (Art. 89), but also — and in spite of the deliberate silence on the Armenian Question of the Treaty of Lausanne, which, being the latest treaty of peace in date between Turkey and the Big Powers, has given Turkey the specious argument to contest the Armenian rights — on:

**A) The Charter of the United Nations:**

1. «We the Peoples of the United Nations determine... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations, large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.» (Preamble)
2. «To maintain international peace and security and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice, any international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.» (Chapter I, Art. 1)
3. «...The General Assembly may recommend measures for the peaceful adjustment of any situation, regardless of origin, which it deems likely to impair the general welfare or friendly relations among nations, including situations resulting from a violation of the provisions of the present Charter setting forth the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.» (Art. 14)

**B) The Charter of the International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg, dated October 6, 1945:**

«The following acts, or any of them are crimes coming within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal:

a) ...

b) ...

c) **Crimes against humanity; namely murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhuman acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war; or persecution on political, racial or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated. Leaders, organizers, instigators and accomplices participating in the formulation and execution of a common plan or conspiracy to commit any of the foregoing crimes are responsible for all acts performed by any persons in execution of such plan.**» (Section II, Art. 6)

**C) The Control Council Law No. 10, for the trials of War Criminals at Nuremberg, dated December 20, 1945:**

1) «Each of the following acts is recognized as a crime:

a)...

b) **War crimes:** atrocities or offences against persons or property constituting violations of the laws..., including but not limited to murder, ill-treatment or deportation, to slave labour or for any other purpose, of civilian population..., killing of hostages, **plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages,** or devastation not justified by military necessity.

c) **Crimes against humanity:** atrocities or offences, including but not limited to murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape or other inhuman acts committed against any civilian population; or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds, whether or not in violation of the domestic laws of the country where perpetrated». (Art. 2, No. 1)

2) For any person found guilty of any of the crimes above mentioned, «The punishment may consist of one or more of the following:

a)... b)... c) Fine.

d) Forfeiture of property.

e) **Restitution of property, wrongfully acquired.** (Art. 2, No. 3)

**D) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, dated December 10, 1948:**

- 1) «Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.» (Art. 3)
- 2) «No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.» (Art. 5)
- 3) «No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.» (Art. 9)
- 4) «No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.» (Art. 17)

**E) The Genocide Convention of December 9, 1948:**

- 1) «...The declaration made by the General Assembly of the United Nations in its resolution 96 dated 11 December 1946 that Genocide is a crime under international law contrary to the spirit and aims of the United Nations and condemned by the civilized world...» (Preamble)
- 2) «...Genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they (the United Nations) undertake to prevent and to punish.» (Art. 1)
- 3) «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;...
- 4) «Persons committing Genocide... shall be punished, whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals.» (Art. 4)
- 5) «Disputes... relating to the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the present Convention, including those relating to the responsibility of a State for Genocide, shall be submitted to the International Court of Justice at the request of any of the parties to the dispute.» (Art. 9)

- F) **The warning delivered, in the First World War, by the American Ambassador in Constantinople Morgenthau to the Sublime Porte, on behalf of the Allies, whereby all the members of the Ottoman Government and those of their agents who were implicated in the Armenian massacres would be held responsible for their acts.** Even the German imperial Government, by a note of its foreign office, made a formal remonstrance on August 9, 1915, and declined any responsibility for the Armenian massacres.

While the Nuremberg Military Tribunal for the trial of the Nazi war criminals found a legal precedent to judge genocide (Proposition of the French delegate, Prof. André Gros) in the massacres of the Armenians and the Allies' warning during the First World War.

- G) The general principle of criminal law, whereby there can be no prescription for murder; all the more reason for mass murder or genocide.
- H) The fact that the Armenians did not leave their Turk-occupied homeland of their own will, but were dispossessed through deportation and extermination.
- I) The fact that the Armenian genocide by the Turks still goes on, under various forms such as these.

The Armenians in the dispersion are growingly submitted to assimilation, therefore to the loss of their national identity.

Historical and cultural Armenian vestiges in Turkey are now systematically suppressed, camouflaged or appropriated by the Turks, so as to erase any remnants of the 3500-year-old Armenian civilization in Turk-occupied territories.

The Turkish Press still dares to threaten openly the Armenian Community living in contemporary Turkey: «Let the Armenians keep in mind that they live in Istanbul as a minority. Their welfare reaches such a pitch that it arouses Turkish envy. Although it is not easy to commit genocide nowadays, a trifle may perturb the atmosphere. Then, there will remain not a single Armenian in Istanbul. (« How genocide is carried out today », article published

in the « Yeni Gazette », Istanbul daily paper, January 25, 1967)

To crown all, modern Turkey has erected at Ankara, in 1960, a statue to commemorate the patriotic services of Talaat, the chief organiser of the Armenian genocide of 1915.

## **VII. — CONCLUSION**

It is on such irrefutable grounds that the Armenians propose that an **International Body** be appointed by the **United Nations** to inquire and report about the present state of the **Armenian Question**. On the conclusion of such an **International Commission**, proper action should be immediately taken by the **U.N.O. Authorities**, so that solemn promises given in international charters and conventions, appeasement of world conscience and durable peace shall be effectively secured. Then, and then only, peoples shall believe in international shaping of right, justice and peace, and man shall trust man.

Firmly convinced of the thorough justice of their cause, and trusting in the moral values leading our contemporary society, the Armenians all over the world, in the name of their two million martyrs and centuries of torture and spoliation, **appeal to all civilized nations** to help them finally retrieve their full rights — **restitution of occupied lands, human and material losses compensation** —, as have Greece, Bulgaria, Poland and so many other nations trodden by tyranny and barbarism done in history.

**Let no one flout the authority of international principles**, in the very face of a humanity constantly ascending towards more social morality.

The non-chastisement of genocides, the de facto recognition of annexations accomplished in contempt of all human rights, laws and principles **will put a premium on mass crime and international looting**. It is such a vicious example that has given Hitler the cynical audacity to state, on the eve of the German invasion of Poland in 1939: «I have given S.S. special units the order to proceed to the Polish Front and slaughter men, women and children ruthlessly. Who today speaks of the extermination of the Armenians?» (The Times, London daily, 24th November 1945)

August 1970



Committee for the Restitution  
of the Armenian Lands

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