

Armenians worldwide plan 100th genocide commemoration
by Erika Leigh

WASHINGTON, D.C. – April 24 is a date most people wouldn't consider significant, unless you're waiting to get an Apple watch, but for Armenians, it's a day of remembrance and a time to try to educate those who aren't familiar with the holocaust you haven't heard about: The one that that occurred from 1915-1923.

“Medz Yeghern” or the “great crime” as many Armenians refer to it, was the systematic extermination of 1.5 million Armenians by the Turkish-run Ottoman government. April 24, 1915 is generally held as the day that the Ottoman authorities arrested more than 250 Armenian intellectuals and leaders in Constantinople, for no particular reason, other than that they were Christian. Additionally, the Ottoman Turks wanted Armenia's strategically located territory. April 24 became the day that Armenians worldwide remember the suffering of their ancestors.

The Armenian Genocide was carried out under the guise of World War I (during and after) and was implemented in two phases: first, able-bodied males were either exterminated or recruited into the Turkish army, then, with no male leaders to stop them, the Ottoman leaders deported the women, children, elderly and sickly on death marches to the Syrian desert or concentration camps.

The Ottoman militants led the death marches, depriving the victims of food and water, subjecting them sporadically to robbery of the few possessions they had left, rape and massacre. The Ottoman Turks had some experience with ethnic cleansing before—the Assyrians and the Ottoman Greeks were similarly targeted for extermination by the Ottoman government. Now, the majority of Armenian diaspora communities around the world came into being as a direct result of the genocide from 1915-1923.

The Ottoman Turks, now succeeded by present-day Turkey refuse to recognize the mass killings of the early 20th century, despite the fact that 23 other countries, including the E.U.—France, Russia, Spain and many more—as well as Canada and 43 U.S. States have all recognized or commemorated the Genocide in some way. This year will be no different.

On the 100th anniversary, hundreds of thousands of Armenians will gather around the world—even in Istanbul—as well as here in the United States, in Glendale, Calif., Watertown, Mass., New York City's Times Square, in downtown Chicago and around the country, in many other small churches or around statues and mementos commemorating the lives lost. Other planned commemorations include Yerevan, Armenia, Beirut, Lebanon, Marseilles, France and Sydney, Australia.

For the Armenian people still living today, it's important that the history of their ancestors and the suffering they endured is someday documented in history books everywhere, not just taught by the history teachers who choose to mention it when they discuss WWI.

Now more than ever, Armenians in the United States will call on President Barack Obama to do something he promised Armenians during his candidacy—to have the country as a whole, formally recognize the mass killings for what they are—a genocide.

On January 19, 2008, when he was just a senator, President Obama released a statement:

"Two years ago, I criticized the Secretary of State for the firing of U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, John Evans, after he properly used the term 'genocide' to describe Turkey's slaughter of thousands of Armenians starting in 1915. I shared with Secretary Rice my firmly held conviction that the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable. An official policy that calls on diplomats to distort the historical facts is an untenable policy. As a senator, I strongly support passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution (H.Res.106 and S.Res.106), and as President I will recognize the Armenian Genocide"

Since President Obama was elected, he's bit his tongue, refusing to use the word "genocide" saying only that his opinion on the matter still hasn't changed, because of the U.S.'s relationship with Turkey for the use of their airspace.

After 100 years, American-Armenians, many of whom are here in America because their ancestors fled to Ellis Island during the genocide, think it's time for Obama to make good on his promise. Others, who escaped or fled, went to Russia, Greece and Syria, among many other countries and have since emigrated to the U.S., all as a result of the mass genocide from 1915-1923.