

Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocides

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ARMENIAN, ASSYRIAN AND GREEK GENOCIDES

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Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Premier, and Minister for Western Sydney) [12.35 p.m.], by leave: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that on 17 April 1997 this House recognised and condemned the Genocide of the Armenians by the then Ottoman Government between 1915 and 1922, and designated 24 April of every year thereafter as a day of remembrance of the 1.5 million Armenians who fell victim to the first genocide of the twentieth century;
- (2) recognises that Assyrians and Greeks were subjected to qualitatively similar genocides by the then Ottoman Government between 1915 and 1922;
- (3) reaffirms its condemnation of the genocide of the Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks, and all other acts of genocide as the ultimate act of intolerance;
- (4) recognises the importance of remembering and learning from such dark chapters in human history to ensure that such crimes against humanity are not allowed to be repeated;
- (5) acknowledges and pays tribute to the contribution of the Anzac servicemen who aided the survivors of the genocide; and
- (6) acknowledges the significant humanitarian relief contribution made by the people of New South Wales to the victims and survivors of the genocide.

The horrors of genocide live deep within the hearts of many people within our community. When migrants choose to make a new life in Australia they often leave behind the marginalisation they experienced in their homelands. For many the decision to migrate can be a very painful one and being forced to leave one's motherland due to oppression or persecution is devastating. Genocide has been something from which too many settlers on these shores have escaped. I have moved this motion in recognition of the genocide of the Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians that occurred after 1915. The motion reflects the community's determination to ensure that genocide is never forgotten and that it is recognised around the world.

We can take pride in the fact that New South Wales offered a safe haven for people around the world who faced genocide—those that we are remembering in this motion or those that we have remembered in subsequent times. We can take pride from the fact that individuals in communities in New South Wales have rebuilt their lives, salvaged their identities and can now be identified as Australian here and in their homelands. The Armenian, Assyrian and Greek communities continue to play a significant role in helping to shape the vibrant cosmopolitan culture that characterises New South Wales. In the small business sector individuals and families from these communities are shining examples of the benefits to this State and nation of multiculturalism.

Having left war-torn countries in the Middle East, many Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks established small businesses which continue to thrive decades later. I make special mention of the member for Smithfield, Andrew Rohan, whose parents were amongst the refugees who fled these atrocities and settled in this country. The member for Smithfield has previously recognised in this Parliament the national day of remembrance of the genocides. In moving this motion I acknowledge a similar motion moved in the Legislative Council by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, MLC. Just as the motion passed with the support of both sides of politics in this place 16 years ago, this motion should continue to enjoy the support of this Parliament. To address such horrific crimes of the past maintains our vigilance to prevent such acts against humanity in the future.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [12.39 p.m.]: I speak in support of this motion. Labor has long recognised the tragic events and suffering endured by the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek populations living within the

borders of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War and its aftermath. In 1997 former Premier Bob Carr led this place in supporting a motion recognising the Armenian genocide. At that time, all members of Parliament joined in acknowledging the genocide, placing it on record and pledging never to forget it. Since that time, Labor members also have stood in this Parliament to recognise the suffering endured by the Assyrian people during the First World War.

Therefore, it is fitting that once again we acknowledge the Assyrian genocide, place those terrible events on the record and pledge never to forget. We must acknowledge also the suffering endured by Greek people living in Pontus and Anatolia during the First World War and its aftermath. I again join the Premier in acknowledging the genocide suffered by the Greek people. Again we place those events on the record and pledge never to forget them. In supporting this motion, and in acknowledging the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides, I relay to the House the words spoken by former Premier Bob Carr following this Parliament's acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide in 1997:

Let us all resolve, first, to reject ethnic stereotyping ... Second, let us reject religious intolerance and bigotry for what it is and give all people the right to pursue their faith and, third, while exploring our patriotism, let's reject nationalism which has done so much damage and so much harm.

I am sure all members will join me in again rejecting these three evils as we recognise the terrible events of the past. As I indicated earlier, Labor supports this motion. However, I place on record our dissatisfaction with the way the Premier brought this motion before the House. I was informed only three hours ago that the Premier would move this motion today. I question why it was brought on with such haste and minimal notice to members of this Parliament and the community. It is worth noting that Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile moved an identical motion in the other place just last week. While I do not doubt the Premier's sincerity in moving this motion, the haste with which it was introduced leads me to question his motivations.

In giving my support to this motion, I acknowledge also that, as is so common in our vibrant and multicultural community, this issue attracts a diversity of views. I am concerned that the time has not been taken to speak with all those communities that have strong and, understandably, passionate views on this issue. In the limited time made available to us, I have spoken with members on our side of the House who, like many members in this place, represent electorates that are home to diverse communities. I place on record the fact that the members representing the electorates of Auburn, Liverpool and Macquarie Fields have conveyed to me the Turkish community's disappointment at not having any opportunity to have their say on this issue. I am told that they also are disappointed that the Premier has not contacted the Turkish community leaders to explain his reasons for the haste to deal with this motion today.

I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of the Turkish Consul-General, who is listening to this debate. I do not know whether the Premier has attempted to meet with the Consul-General. I advise the House that at 4.00 p.m. today I will be meeting with the Turkish Consul-General. I do so in order to explain to her my reasons for supporting this motion. I invite the Premier to come along and also meet with the Turkish Consul-General this afternoon at 4.00 p.m. in my office to explain the haste in moving this motion, not the reasons. I again commend the motion to the House and place on record the Labor Opposition's acknowledgement of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides, and pledge never to forget those terrible events.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.