



Australian Hellenic Council

A coordinating body for the Australian Hellenic community

POSITION PAPER

Parliamentary Recognition of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides

In 1997, the Parliament of New South Wales adopted a resolution on the Armenian Genocide. On 25 March and 30 April 2009, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly of South Australia respectively adopted twin resolutions on the Armenian, Hellenic and Assyrian Genocides. **The Australian Hellenic Council believes the time has come for the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia to adopt a motion recognising the historical reality of the Armenian, Hellenic and Assyrian Genocides.**

This is a matter of Australian heritage, an issue for all Australians, regardless of background and faith. **Australians witnessed** the genocidal persecutions of the indigenous Christian populations of the Near East. Australian servicemen – members of the elite *Dunsterforce* – **rescued** survivors of the Assyrian and Armenian genocides. Thousands of Australians were involved in the **relief effort** in support of genocide survivors scattered across the Near East. In the last few decades, the policy of **multiculturalism** provides Australians of Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian background with opportunities to develop their cultures, opportunities denied them in their ancestral homelands in Anatolia.

ANZAC Prisoners

During their terms as **prisoners-of-war** in the Ottoman Turkish Empire (1915-1918), almost 400 ANZACs – Australians and New Zealanders – **witnessed** the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. ANZACs were taken prisoner on all the battlefronts they were facing the Ottoman Turkish forces: the Sinai Peninsula and Palestine; Mesopotamia (modern Iraq); and the Gallipoli Peninsula and the Hellespont (Dardanelles).

Australian Flying Corps Captain Thomas W. White was captured in central Mesopotamia. In his memoir, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, he recorded that the Allied prisoners who were kept in the Armenian church in the city of Afyonkarahissar used its graveyard as their “exercise yard”. White wrote that “[t]he iron-covered [Armenian] cemetery gates were riddled with bullets as if by machine gun fire and suggested that some Armenians had sold their lives dearly”.

White’s presence at Afyonkarahissar is recorded in *Shall this Nation Die?*, the account of another internee Fr. Joseph Naayem, an Assyrian Catholic priest whose work includes eyewitness accounts of the Assyrian and Armenian Genocides.

Thomas White went on to become the Member for Balaclava (since incorporated into the seat of Goldstein, in metropolitan Melbourne). *Guests of the Unspeakable* is but one of a large volume of Australian eyewitness accounts of the inhuman events of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides.

Dunsterforce

During the northern summer of 1918, the Dunsterforce (including Australians) **rescued some 40,000 Assyrian and Armenian genocide survivors** from south-eastern Anatolia and north-western Iran, bringing them to the relative safety of British Mesopotamia.

In his unpublished memoir, Captain (later General) Stanley George Savige wrote: “The unfortunate women folk were so overcome at the sight of the first party of British that they wept aloud. Striking their breasts they would call down upon us the blessings of God and rush across and kiss our hands and boots in very joy at the sight of their first deliverance from the cruel raids of the Turks. We could not save them all ... with lumps in our throats we ignored the cries of the helpless in our endeavour to save as many as we could”.

The Armenian-Hellenic-Assyrian Relief Fund

Following World War One until 1930, **Australians donated money, food and clothing to the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian survivors** scattered across the Near East. Some devoted their lives to this **relief work**. On 12 December 1918, the inaugural meeting of the **Lord Mayor’s Armenian Relief Fund**, held at Sydney Town Hall, adopted a resolution that stated, in part: “... to relieve the terrible distress of the surviving Armenian Christians who have been almost exterminated by the Turks ... deported from their homes, scattered over the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts, homeless, starving and perishing”.

The Near East Relief organisation’s Charles Vickery, wrote the following in his report for 1922: “Australia has assumed the entire support of one of the largest orphanages in Syria, to be known henceforth as the **Australasian Orphanage**, and the contributions reported thus far during the year **from Australia amount to approximately [US]\$100,000** with regular monthly shipments of food from Australia’s surplus food supplies via the Commonwealth Line of steamers direct each month from Sydney to Port Said, thence to Syria”.

Writing for *The South Australian Congregationalist* (May 1923, page 102-103), Adelaide’s **Reverend James E. Cresswell** wrote: “The sights within the caves [outside Aleppo, Syria] are beyond words. No words seem adequate to describe the misery that must be the portion of these poor people. A few yards inside, the light was very dim, then failed altogether, and it was necessary to use a lantern. On either side of the cave were to be seen families, men, women and children, sitting on the ground. In some places, this was fairly dry, but for the most part, it was damp - the air was clammy and cold and in all respects it was depressing. Here were women, pale and emaciated, children with swollen abdomens, the result of starvation. Again, one saw little babes, pinched and pallid – further on, a little one just recently born, one tiny atom among thousands of the suffering children to be seen here”.

Between May 1924 and 1928, Adelaide-born **Caroline Ethel Cooper** worked with the mission of the Society of Friends (Quakers) at the American Farm School, in the foothills of Mount Hortiatias, east of Thessalonike in Greece’s central Macedonia region. Within a year, her “initiative, powers of organisation and her knowledge of the Greek language” meant that Cooper was made head of the relief unit. She remained so until her departure. Queenslander **Joice Nankivell Loch** and her Scottish husband, **Dr Sydney Loch**, spent decades working to help the community of Ouranoupolis recover from the Asia Minor Holocaust and the Second World War. They rest today in the town’s cemetery, amongst those they saved.

This is but the briefest of overviews of the Australian dimension of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. A scan of the print media reveals the detailed knowledge of events in Anatolia available to the Australian public in the period 1914-1924: from the first deportations of the Hellenes of Gallipoli in January 1914 to the massacres of Armenians and Assyrians from 1915 to the expulsion of the last survivors in 1925.

Multiculturalism

The Australian descendants of survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides, along with the Australian descendants of their saviours request that the Parliament of Australia recognise their collective sacrifice with a motion recognising the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides.

APPENDIX ONE

Motion in the Parliament of South Australia by The Hon. M.J. ATKINSON (Member for Croydon; Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Veterans' Affairs)

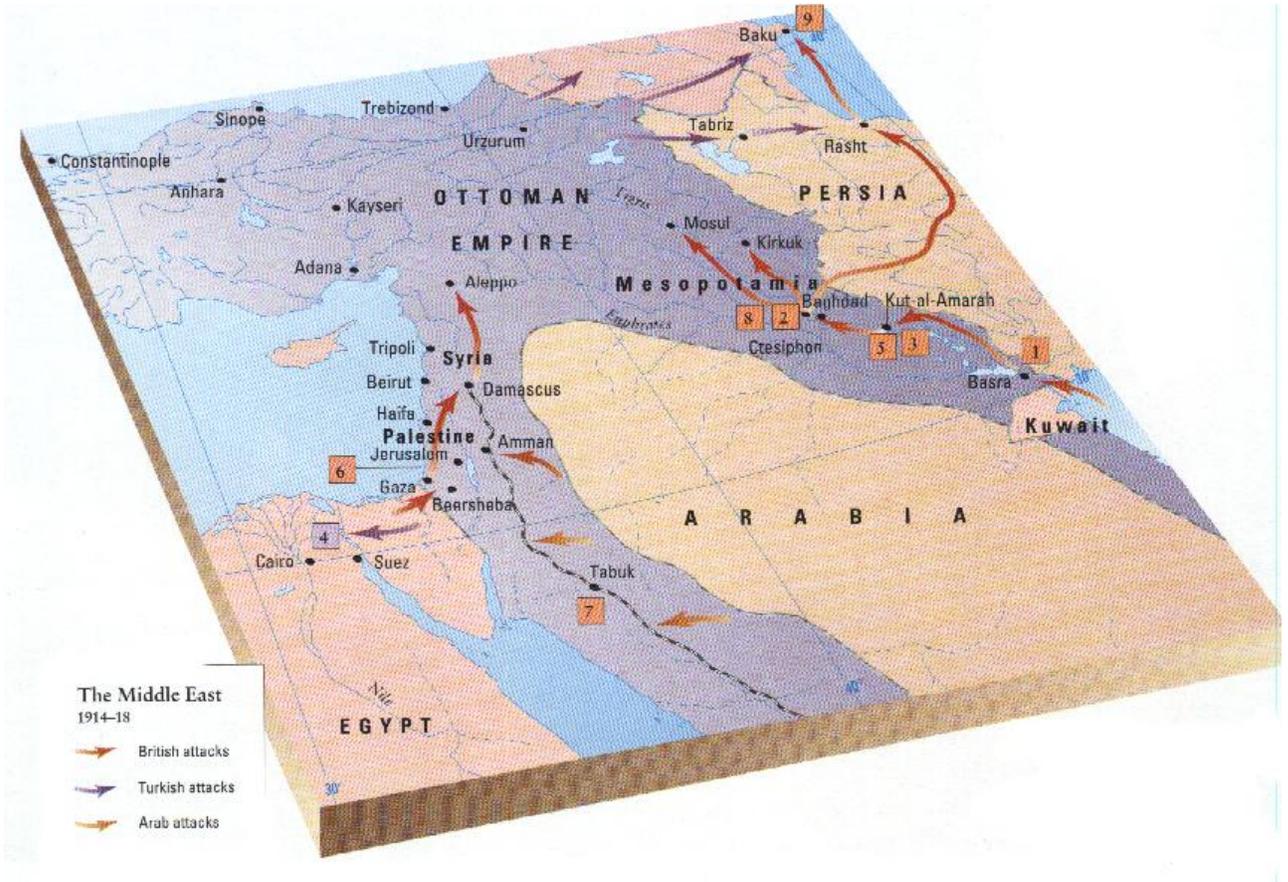
That, whereas the genocide by the Ottoman state between 1915-1923 of Armenians, Hellenes, Syrian and other minorities in Asia Minor is one of the greatest crimes against humanity, the people of South Australia and this House –

- (a) join the members of the Armenian-Australian, Pontian Greek-Australian and Syrian-Australian communities in honouring the memory of the innocent men, women and children who fell victim to the first modern genocide;
- (b) condemns the genocide of the Armenians, Pontian Greeks, Syrian Orthodox and other Christian minorities, and all other acts of genocide as the ultimate act of racial, religious and cultural intolerance;
- (c) 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;
- (d) condemns and prevents all attempts to use the passage of time to deny or distort the historical truth of the genocide of the Armenians and other acts of genocide committed during this century;
- (e) acknowledges the significant humanitarian contribution made by the people of South Australia to the victims and survivors of the Armenian Genocide and the Pontian Genocide; and
- (f) calls on the commonwealth parliament officially to condemn the genocide.

APPENDIX TWO

- Adam-Smith, P. (1997) *Prisoners Of War* Penguin
Brown, J. (1940), *Turkish Days and Ways* Sydney: Angus and Robertson
Creedon, D.B. *Diary*, 1 DRL 223, Australian War Memorial File 12/1/86, Australian War Memorial
De Vries, S. *Blue Ribbons. Black Bread.*
Diamadis, Panayiotis (2005) "Precious and Honoured Guests of the Ottoman Government" *Genocide Perspectives II* Sydney: Brandl and Schlesinger
Kerr, G. (1997) *Lost ANZACS: The Story of Two Brothers* Melbourne: Oxford University Press
Manne, R. "A Turkish Tale" *The Monthly* February 2007
Naayem, J. (1921) *Shall This Nation Die?* New York: Chaldean Rescue
Wheat, J. *Diary*, Australian War Memorial Archives, File No. 3DRL/2965, Australian War Memorial
White, T.W. (1928) *Guests of the Unspeakable* Little Hills Press
Yeats-Brown, Francis (1932) *Golden Horn* London: Victor Gollancz Ltd

APPENDIX THREE



An S.O.S. from Beyond Gallipoli.

The English "Daily Telegraph" published recently authenticated official telegrams sent by the late Talaat Pasha, Grand Vizier of Constantinople, authorizing the massacre of the Armenians.

The telegrams, which reveal the pitiless savagery of the Turkish mentality, were among the documents seized when General Allenby captured Aleppo.

The following quotation is typical of Talaat's instructions:—

"As you have been previously informed, the Government has decided to complete the extermination of all Armenians resident in Turkey, without regard to whether they are women, children or invalids. Without listening to the promptings of conscience, an end must be put to their existence however tragic be the means of extermination."

In the year 1915, 800,000 Armenians were done to death.

They were driven from their homes, about four million of them.

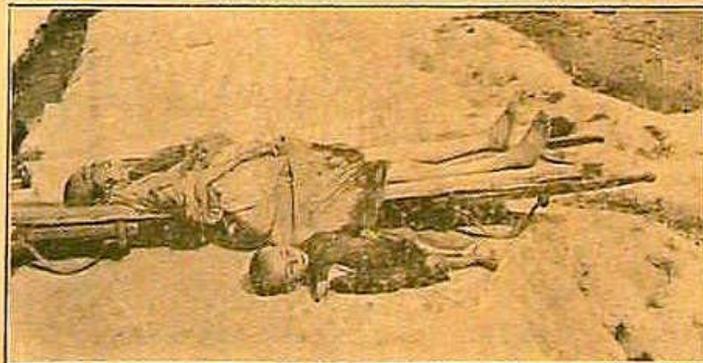
Their young men were pressed into the Turkish Army and shot in the back.

Their young women were violated and thrown into the rivers.

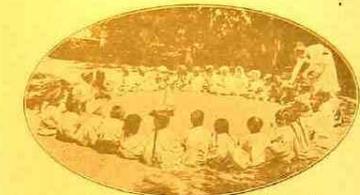
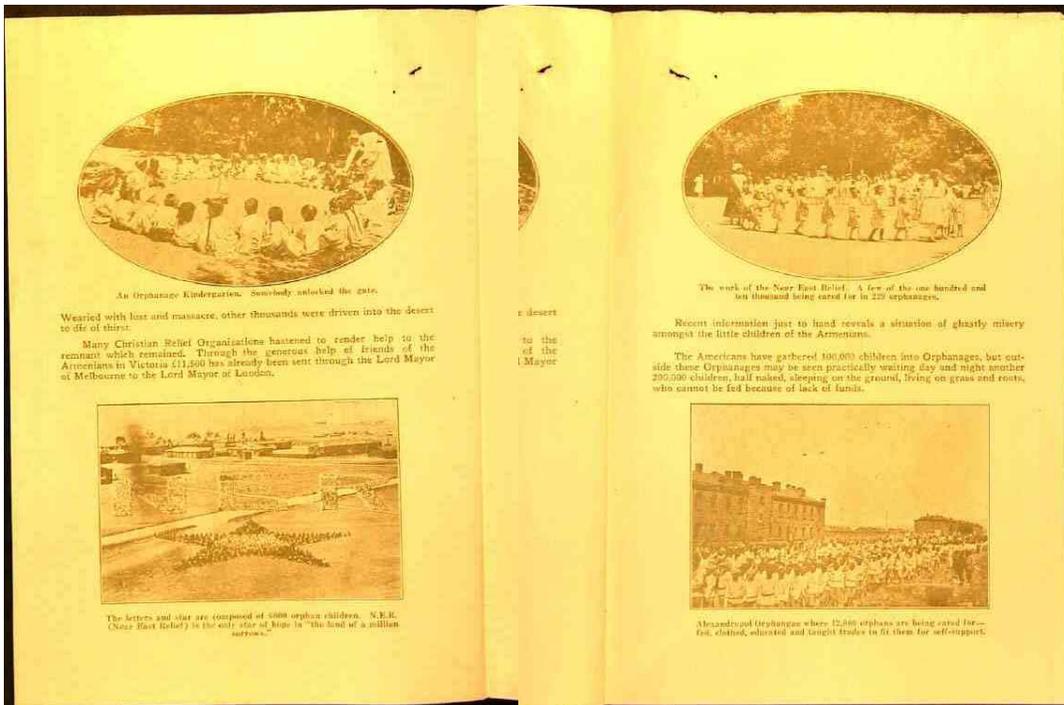
Their little children became targets for spear practice.



These beautiful Armenian children were ruthlessly torn from their parents and are to-day in the merciless hands of the Turks. Perhaps your gift will make their rescue possible.



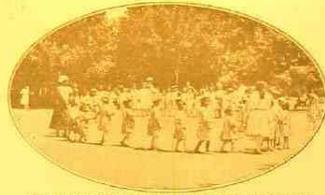
Too late. The daily harvest.



An Orphanage Kindergarten. Somebody unlocked the gate. Wornied with loss and massacre, other thousands were driven into the desert to die of thirst. Many Christian Relief Organizations hastened to render help to the remnant which remains. Through the generous help of friends of the Armenians in Victoria £11,500 has already been sent through the Lord Mayor of Melbourne to the Lord Mayor of London.

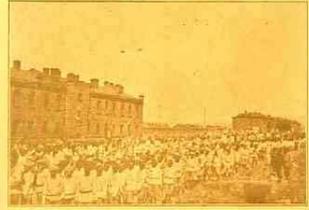


The letters and stars are composed of 3000 orphan children. N.E.R. (Near East Relief) in the early days of hope is "The hand of a million mothers."

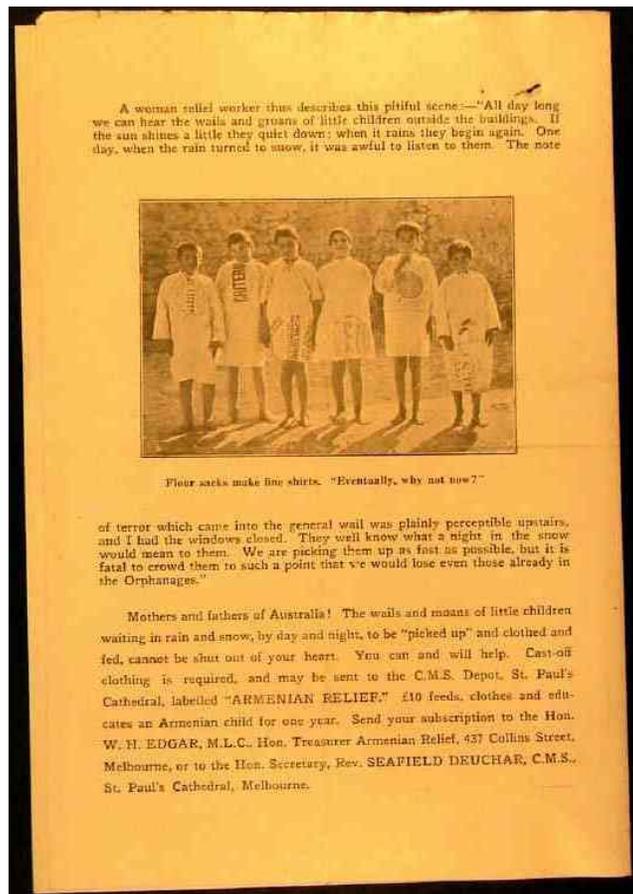


The work of the Near East Relief. A few of the one hundred and ten thousand being cared for in 220 orphanages. Recent information just to hand reveals a situation of ghastly misery amongst the little children of the Armenians.

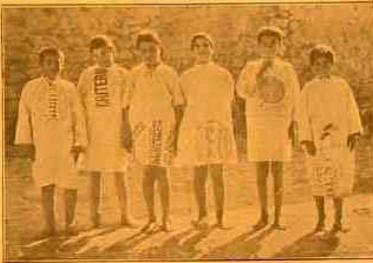
The Americans have gathered 100,000 children into Orphanages, but outside these Orphanages may be seen practically every day and night another 200,000 children, half naked, sleeping on the ground, living on grass and roots, who cannot be fed because of lack of funds.



Alexandropol Orphanage where 12,000 orphans are being cared for—fed, clothed, educated and taught trades to fit them for self-support.



A woman relief worker thus describes this pitiful scene:—"All day long we can hear the wails and groans of little children outside the buildings. If the sun shines a little they quiet down; when it rains they begin again. One day, when the rain turned to snow, it was awful to listen to them. The note



Fleur sacks make fine shirts. "Eventually, why not now?"

of terror which came into the general wail was plainly perceptible upstairs, and I had the windows closed. They well know what a night in the snow would mean to them. We are picking them up as fast as possible, but it is fatal to crowd them to such a point that we would lose even those already in the Orphanages."

Mothers and fathers of Australia! The wails and moans of little children waiting in rain and snow, by day and night, to be "picked up" and clothed and fed, cannot be shut out of your heart. You can and will help. Cast-off clothing is required, and may be sent to the C.M.S. Depot, St. Paul's Cathedral, labelled "ARMENIAN RELIEF." £10 feeds, clothes and educates an Armenian child for one year. Send your subscription to the Hon. W. H. EDGAR, M.L.C. Hon. Treasurer Armenian Relief, 437 Collins Street, Melbourne, or to the Hon. Secretary, Rev. SEAFIELD DEUCHAR, C.M.S., St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne.

One of the pamphlets produced by the Melbourne *Lord Mayor's Armenian Relief Fund* in 1920.