

Type of Legislation: Simple Resolution

Simple resolutions are legislative measures introduced in either the U.S. Senate or the House of Representatives. Simple resolutions are not presented to the President, and do not have the force of law. These types of resolution are used to function as statements of intent for one chamber of Congress. Simple resolutions can also set the stage for a bill—a law that is sent to the President for assent—if the legislators sponsoring the legislation can demonstrate broad support in Congress for the policy intentions in the resolution.

Country of Focus: **Turkey**

Summary of Resolution

H.Res.537 calls on the United States Government to formally recognize the Assyrian Genocide (1914-1925) during which at least 300,000 Assyrians were systematically killed by the Ottoman Empire, and later, the Republic of Turkey. The resolution also calls for the United States to urge Turkey to recognize the genocide.

Background

The Assyrian Genocide began in late 1914 and continued for more than a decade, with the peak of the violence occurring between 1915 and 1918. During these years, the Ottoman Turks (later the Republic of Turkey) and allied Kurdish tribes subjected hundreds of thousands of Assyrians to a systematic campaign of massacre, torture, abduction, deportation, impoverishment, and cultural and ethnic destruction. The campaign also included the destruction of historic Assyrian villages and cultural heritage sites, as well as the assassination of Assyrian intellectual and religious leaders.

The massacres took place in various phases over a very wide area under Ottoman Turkish rule—including modern-day Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. It is estimated that at least 300,000 Assyrians were murdered during the genocide and a large number were forced into permanent exile. Tragically, this figure represented more than half of the entire Assyrian population at the time.

Though lesser known, the Assyrian Genocide coincided with the well-documented Armenian Genocide of 1915. The aim of the Young Turk regime was to homogenize the Ottoman Empire by Turkifying the country and eliminating non-Turkish and non-Muslim communities.

Positives

- H.Res.537 accounts for some of the atrocities committed against the Assyrian people at the hands of the Ottoman Turks during the WWI and recognizes the Assyrian Genocide.
- H.Res.537 emphasizes the legacy of the Assyrian Genocide, noting that Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term "genocide" in 1944, was directly influenced by the systematic targeting of the Assyrian people.
- H.Res.537 recognizes the recent suffering of Assyrians in Iraq and Syria at the hands of ISIS.
- H.Res.537 acknowledges some of the lasting effects of genocide, including the permanent separation of families affected.
- H.Res.537 emphasizes the importance of genocide recognition, particularly with regard to preventing further harm and future genocides.
- H.Res.537 condemns efforts to "enlist, engage, or otherwise associate the United States Government with denial of the Assyrian Genocide."
- H.Res.537 urges the United States to urge Turkey officially recognize the Assyrian Genocide.
- H.Res.537 encourages education and public awareness about the Assyrian Genocide.

Negatives

- H.Res.537 fails to account for the Simele Massacre of 1933, during which as many as 6,000 Assyrians were systematically killed by Iraqi Government forces.

Conclusion

The Assyrian Policy Institute *supports* H.Res.537. Rep. Harder's bold leadership on the issue of Assyrian Genocide recognition is unprecedented. Official recognition of the Assyrian Genocide would mark a courageous turn in American foreign policy as it relates to Assyrians in the Middle East. The United States must take a stand against Turkish genocide denial, especially as the Assyrian people continue to feel the effects and face the threat of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Recommendations

- H.Res.537 should be amended to also account for the Simele Massacre of 1933 in Iraq.

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