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REMEMBERING

AND

UNDERSTANDING



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THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE**

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# Foreword

The Armenian Genocide has been the subject of a large number of volumes. In the beginning, these were largely memoirs of survivors, mostly in the Armenian language. During the past few decades an increasing number of historians and other social scientists have focused their attention on the subject and published the result of their research. Some of these publications cover specific aspects and dimensions of the problem. Others present collections of archival documents. These publications are, by and large, intended for scholars and researchers.

Genocide is the organized killing of a people for the express purpose of putting an end to their collective existence. As a rule the organizing agency is the state, the victim population is a domestic minority, and the end result is the near total death of a society. The Armenian genocide conforms to this simple definition.

In 1915 the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire proceeded with plans to exterminate the Armenians. By 1918 it had succeeded in destroying most of the Armenian communities in the empire. By 1923 when the Nationalist Turks founded the Republic of Turkey to replace the Ottoman state, for all intents and purposes Armenian society has ceased to exist in Asia Minor.

How did this happen? Why were the Armenians selected for annihilation? Why did a whole nation succumb to such a fate? Why did the Turkish state resort to such a policy? Why has the world remained silent about the first genocide of the twentieth century? These are some of the questions that have been asked and which 'must be answered in order to understand the enduring legacy of a tragedy that has come to define the modern identity of an ancient people.

Another important question has been asked since 1991. The great burden of the memory of the genocide was carried by the survivors and their descendants for most of the century. Now a Republic of Armenia, in whose existence Armenians pinned their hopes of survival as a nation, has emerged as an independent and sovereign entity; and everywhere the question is posed, how is the memory of the genocide to be understood in light of the rebirth of Armenian independence? In view of the fact that Armenians think of the genocide as the central event of their history, the responsibility for studying, examining, and investigating it has become all the weightier. The commemorations of April 24 annually renew the memory of the death and suffering endured during those terrible years. Gaining an understanding of the genocide remains, however, the greater challenge.