



Kriss Worthington

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CONSENT CALENDAR

April 26, 2005

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Kriss Worthington
Subject: Proclamation: Armenian Genocide Commemoration Day

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Berkeley City Council approves a proclamation declaring April 24, 2005 Armenian Genocide commemoration day in Berkeley to be presented at the April 26, 2005 council meeting.

BACKGROUND:

Information from UC Berkeley Armenian Students Association

Proclamation language from California Senate Joint Resolution No. 1 (SJR1 -- 2003)

The overwhelming majority of Armenian-Americans living in Berkeley and the Bay Area are descendants of immigrants who found safe haven here from the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923, which devastated their homeland and their families. Although news of this great crime against humanity was common knowledge in America then, many of the important lessons of the "prototype" genocide of the 20th Century have now been forgotten.

It was on April 24, 1915, in the midst of World War I, that the government of Turkey invited several hundred Armenian community leaders to Istanbul to discuss political "reforms," only to become victims of mass murder. The event was the bloody introduction to a long series of death marches and annihilation, resulting in 1,500,000 Armenians dead (one half of the Armenian population), and survivors fleeing to all parts of the world.

Recognizing and officially commemorating the Armenian Genocide can help ensure that the lessons of this terrible crime against humanity are used to prevent future genocides.

Berkeley has a proud reputation for upholding human and civil rights and recognizing when those rights are abused. This proclamation will commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

NONE

CONTACT PERSON:

Councilmember Kriss Worthington 981-7170.

APRIL 24TH AS ARMENIAN GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION DAY

- WHEREAS, The Armenian people, living in their 3,000 year historic homeland in eastern Asia Minor and throughout the Ottoman Empire, were subjected to severe persecution and brutal injustice by the rulers of the Ottoman Empire before and after the turn of the twentieth century, including widespread massacres, usurpation of land and property, and acts of wanton destruction during the period from 1894 to 1896, and again in 1909; and
- WHEREAS, The horrible experience of the Armenians at the hands of their oppressors culminated in 1915 in what is known by historians as the “First Genocide of the Twentieth Century;” and
- WHEREAS, The Armenian Genocide began with the arrest, exile, and murder of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals, and political, religious, and business leaders, starting on April 24, 1915; and
- WHEREAS, The regime then in control of the empire planned and executed the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Armenian people from 1915 through 1923, which included the torture, starvation, and murder of 1,500,000 Armenians, death marches into the Syrian desert, the forced exile of more than 500,000 innocent people, and the loss of the traditional Armenian homelands; and
- WHEREAS, Some Turks and others jeopardized their safety in order to protect Armenians from the crimes being perpetrated by the regime, but the genocide of the Armenian people constituted one of the most egregious violations of human rights in the history of the world; and
- WHEREAS, The United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., stated “When the Turkish authorities gave the order for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race... The killing of the Armenian people was accompanied by the systematic destruction of churches, schools, libraries, treasures of art, and cultural monuments in an attempt to eliminate all traces of a noble civilization with a history of more than 3,000 years;” and
- WHEREAS, Winston Churchill wrote: “As for Turkish atrocities: ... massacring uncounted thousands of helpless Armenians, men, women, and children together, whole districts blotted out in one administrative holocaust—these were beyond human redress;” and

WHEREAS, Contemporary newspapers like the New York Times commonly carried headlines such as “Tales of Armenian Horrors Confirmed,” “Million Armenians Killed or in Exile,” and “Wholesale Massacre of Armenians...”; and

WHEREAS, Adolph Hitler, in persuading his army commanders on the eve of World War II that the merciless persecution and killing of Poles, Jews, and other peoples would bring no retribution, declared, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians;” and

WHEREAS, Unlike other peoples and governments that have admitted and denounced the abuses and crimes of predecessor regimes, and despite the overwhelming weight of evidence, the Republic of Turkey has inexplicably and adamantly denied the occurrence of the crimes against humanity, and those denials compound the grief of the few remaining survivors of the atrocities, desecrate the memory of the victims, and cause continuing trauma and pain to the descendants of the victims; and

WHEREAS, The passage of time and the fact that few survivors remain who serve as reminders of indescribable brutality and torment, compel a sense of urgency in efforts to solidify recognition and reaffirmation of historical truth; and

WHEREAS, By honoring the survivors and consistently remembering and condemning the atrocities committed against the Armenian people as well as the persecution of the Assyrian and Greek populations of the Ottoman Empire, we guard against repetition of the crime of genocide; and

WHEREAS, California has become home to the largest population of Armenians in the United States, and those citizens have enriched our state through leadership in the fields of academia, medicine, business, agriculture, government, and the arts and are proud and patriotic practitioners of American citizenship; and

WHEREAS, Berkeley is proud to join the Armenian-American community in its commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in an effort to educate others about the tragic loss of life, land, and human rights of the Armenian people and the crimes of genocide committed against them; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Berkeley City Council does hereby declare

APRIL 24TH AS ARMENIAN GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION DAY

in the City of Berkeley.

Mayor Tom Bates

Councilmember Max Anderson

Councilmember Linda Maio

Councilmember Darryl Moore

Councilmember Dona Spring

Councilmember Laurie Capitelli

Councilmember Betty Olds

Councilmember Kriss Worthington

Councilmember Gordon Wozniak

