

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 12, 2016

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2015–16 REGULAR SESSION

**Assembly Joint Resolution**

**No. 34**

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**Introduced by Assembly Members Achadjian, Bonta, Brown, Calderon, Chu, Dababneh, Dahle, Beth Gaines, Cristina Garcia, Gatto, Grove, Jones, Levine, Lopez, Nazarian, Olsen, Patterson, Steinorth, Wagner, and Wilk**

(Principal coauthor: ~~Senator De León~~ coauthors: *Senators Anderson, De León, Gaines, Hall, Lara, Leno, Liu, Nielsen, and Pan*)

March 16, 2016

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Assembly Joint Resolution No. 34—Relative to the Armenian Genocide.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 34, as amended, Achadjian. Armenian Genocide.

This measure would, among other things, designate the year of 2016 as “State of California Year of Commemoration of the Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923,” *would* designate April 24, 2016, as “State of California Day of Commemoration of the 101st Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923,” and would call upon the President of the United States and the United States Congress to formally and consistently reaffirm the historical truth that the atrocities committed against the Armenian people constituted genocide.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, Armenians have resided in Asia Minor and the
- 2 Caucasus for approximately four millennia, and have a long and
- 3 rich history in the region, including the establishment of many
- 4 kingdoms, and despite Armenians’ historic presence, stewardship,

1 and autonomy in the region, Turkish rulers of the Ottoman Empire  
2 and the Republic of Turkey subjected Armenians to severe and  
3 unjust persecution and brutality, including wholesale massacres  
4 beginning in the 1890s; and

5 WHEREAS, The Armenian nation was subjected to a systematic  
6 and premeditated genocide officially beginning on April 24, 1915,  
7 at the hands of the Young Turk Government of the Ottoman Empire  
8 from 1915–1919 and continued at the hands of the Kemalist  
9 Movement of Turkey from 1920–1923 whereby over 1.5 million  
10 Armenian men, women, and children were slaughtered or marched  
11 to their deaths in an effort to annihilate the Armenian nation in the  
12 first genocide of modern times, while thousands of surviving  
13 Armenian women and children were forcibly converted and  
14 Islamized, and hundreds of thousands more were subjected to  
15 ethnic cleansing during the period of the modern Republic of  
16 Turkey from 1924–1937; and

17 WHEREAS, During the genocides of the Christians living in  
18 the Ottoman Empire and surrounding regions, which occurred  
19 during the first one-half of the 20th century, 1.5 million men,  
20 women, and children of Armenian descent, and hundreds of  
21 thousands of Assyrians, Greeks, and other Christians, lost their  
22 lives at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the Republic  
23 of Turkey, constituting one of the most atrocious violations of  
24 human rights in the history of the world; and

25 WHEREAS, These crimes against humanity also had the  
26 consequence of permanently removing all traces of the Armenians  
27 and other targeted people from their historic homelands of more  
28 than four millennia, and enriching the perpetrators with the lands  
29 and other property of the victims of these crimes, including the  
30 usurpation of several thousand churches; and

31 WHEREAS, In response to the genocide and at the behest of  
32 President Woodrow Wilson and the United States State  
33 Department, the Near East Relief organization was founded, and  
34 became the first congressionally sanctioned American philanthropic  
35 effort created exclusively to provide humanitarian assistance and  
36 rescue to the Armenian nation and other Christian minorities from  
37 annihilation, who went on to survive and thrive outside of their  
38 ancestral homeland all over the world and specifically in this state;  
39 and

1 WHEREAS, Near East Relief succeeded, with the active  
2 participation of the citizens from this state, in delivering \$117  
3 million in assistance, and saving more than one million refugees,  
4 including 132,000 orphans, between 1915 and 1930, by delivering  
5 food, clothing, and materials for shelter, setting up refugee camps,  
6 clinics, hospitals, and orphanages; and

7 WHEREAS, The Armenian nation survived the genocide despite  
8 the attempt by the Ottoman Empire to exterminate it; and

9 WHEREAS, Adolf Hitler, in persuading his army commanders  
10 that the merciless persecution and killing of Jews, Poles, and other  
11 people would bring no retribution, declared, “Who, after all, speaks  
12 today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”; and

13 WHEREAS, On November 4, 1918, immediately after the  
14 collapse of the Young Turk regime and before the founding of the  
15 Republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923, the  
16 Ottoman Parliament considered a motion on the crimes committed  
17 by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) stating: “A  
18 population of one million people guilty of nothing except belonging  
19 to the Armenian nation were massacred and exterminated,  
20 including even women and children.” The Minister of Interior at  
21 the time, Fethi Bey, responded by telling the Parliament: “It is the  
22 intention of the government to cure every single injustice done up  
23 until now, as far as the means allow, to make possible the return  
24 to their homes of those sent into exile, and to compensate for their  
25 material loss as far as possible”; and

26 WHEREAS, On August 1, 1926, in an interview published in  
27 the Los Angeles Examiner, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk admitted:  
28 “These left-overs from the former Young Turk Party, who should  
29 have been made to account for the lives of millions of our Christian  
30 subjects who were ruthlessly driven en masse, from their homes  
31 and massacred, have been restive under the Republican rule. They  
32 have hitherto lived on plunder, robbery and bribery and become  
33 inimical to any idea or suggestion to enlist in useful labor and earn  
34 their living by the honest sweat of their brow”; and

35 WHEREAS, The Parliamentary Investigative Committee  
36 proceeded to collect relevant documents describing the actions of  
37 those responsible for the Armenian mass killings and turned them  
38 over to the Turkish Military Tribunal. CUP’s leading figures were  
39 found guilty of massacring Armenians and hanged or given lengthy  
40 prison sentences. The Turkish Military Tribunal requested that

1 Germany extradite to Turkey the masterminds of the massacres  
2 who had fled the country. After German refusal, they were tried  
3 in absentia and sentenced to death; and

4 WHEREAS, Unlike other people and governments that have  
5 admitted and denounced the abuses and crimes of predecessor  
6 regimes, and despite the Turkish government's earlier admissions  
7 and the overwhelming proof of genocidal intent, the Republic of  
8 Turkey inexplicably and adamantly has denied the occurrence of  
9 the crimes against humanity committed by the Ottoman and Young  
10 Turk rulers for many years, and continues to do so a full century  
11 since the first crimes constituting genocide occurred; and

12 WHEREAS, Those denials compound the grief of the few  
13 remaining survivors and deprive the surviving Armenian nation  
14 of its individual and collective ancestral lands, property, cultural  
15 heritage, financial assets, and population growth; and

16 WHEREAS, The Republic of Turkey has escalated its  
17 international campaign of Armenian Genocide denial, maintained  
18 its blockade of Armenia, and increased its pressure on the small  
19 but growing movement in Turkey acknowledging the Armenian  
20 Genocide and seeking justice for this systematic campaign of  
21 destruction of millions of Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, and other  
22 Christians upon their biblical-era homelands; and

23 WHEREAS, Those citizens of Turkey, both Armenian and  
24 non-Armenian, who continue to speak the truth about the Armenian  
25 Genocide, such as human rights activist and journalist Hrant Dink,  
26 continue to be silenced by violent means; and

27 WHEREAS, There is continued concern about the welfare of  
28 Christians in the Republic of Turkey, their right to worship and  
29 practice freely, and the legal status and condition of thousands of  
30 ancient Armenian churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and other  
31 historical and cultural structures, sites, and antiquities in the  
32 Republic of Turkey; and

33 WHEREAS, The United States is on record as having officially  
34 recognized the Armenian Genocide in the United States  
35 government's May 28, 1951, written statement to the International  
36 Court of Justice regarding the Reservations to the Convention on  
37 the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, through  
38 President Ronald Reagan's April 22, 1981, Proclamation No. 4838,  
39 and by congressional legislation including House Joint Resolution

1 148 adopted on April 9, 1975, and House Joint Resolution 247  
2 adopted on September 12, 1984; and

3 WHEREAS, Prior to the Convention on the Prevention and  
4 Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the United States had a  
5 record of seeking just and constructive means to address the  
6 consequences of the Ottoman Empire’s intentional destruction of  
7 the Armenian people, including through United States Senate  
8 Concurrent Resolution 12 adopted on February 9, 1916, United  
9 States Senate Resolution 359 adopted on May 11, 1920, and  
10 President Woodrow Wilson’s November 22, 1920, decision  
11 ~~entitled, titled~~, “The Frontier between Armenia and Turkey,” which  
12 was issued as a binding arbitral award, yet has not been enforced  
13 to this date despite its legally binding status; and

14 WHEREAS, President Barack Obama entered office “calling  
15 for Turkey’s acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide” and on  
16 April 24, 2013, and similarly on April 24, 2014, he further stated,  
17 “A full, frank, and just acknowledgment of the facts is in all of  
18 our interests. Peoples and nations grow stronger, and build a more  
19 just and tolerant future, by acknowledging and reckoning with  
20 painful elements of the past”; and

21 WHEREAS, California is home to the largest  
22 ~~Armenian-American~~ *Armenian American* population in the United  
23 States, and Armenians living in California have enriched our state  
24 through their leadership and contribution in business, agriculture,  
25 academia, government, and the arts, many of whom have family  
26 members who experienced firsthand the horror and evil of the  
27 Armenian Genocide and its ongoing denial; and

28 WHEREAS, Every person should be made aware and educated  
29 about the Armenian Genocide and other crimes against humanity;  
30 and

31 WHEREAS, The State of California has been at the forefront  
32 of encouraging and promoting a curriculum relating to human  
33 rights and genocide in order to empower future generations to  
34 prevent the recurrence of genocide; and

35 WHEREAS, April 24, 1915, is globally observed and recognized  
36 as the commencement of the Armenian Genocide; and

37 WHEREAS, Armenians in the State of California and throughout  
38 ~~the world, world~~ have not been provided with justice for the crimes  
39 perpetrated against the Armenian nation despite the fact that over  
40 a century has passed since the crimes were first committed; and

1 WHEREAS, The Armenian people in the State of California  
2 and throughout the ~~world~~, *world* remain resolved and their spirit  
3 continues to thrive more than a century after their near annihilation;  
4 now, therefore, be it

5 *Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of*  
6 *California, jointly*, That the Legislature hereby designates the year  
7 of 2016 as “State of California Year of Commemoration of the  
8 Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923” and in  
9 doing so, intends, through the enactment of legislation, that the  
10 Armenian Genocide is properly commemorated and taught to its  
11 citizens and visitors through statewide educational and cultural  
12 events; and be it further

13 *Resolved*, That the Legislature hereby designates April 24, 2016,  
14 as “State of California Day of Commemoration of the 101st  
15 Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923”; and be it  
16 further

17 *Resolved*, That the Legislature commends its conscientious  
18 educators who teach about human rights and genocide, and intends  
19 for them, through the enactment of legislation, to continue to  
20 enhance their efforts to educate students at all levels about the  
21 experience of the Armenians and other crimes against humanity;  
22 and be it further

23 *Resolved*, That the Legislature hereby commends the  
24 extraordinary service which was delivered by Near East Relief to  
25 the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and the Assyrian  
26 Genocide, including thousands of direct beneficiaries of American  
27 philanthropy who are the parents, grandparents, and  
28 great-grandparents of many Californian Armenians and Assyrians,  
29 and pledges its intent, through the enactment of legislation, to  
30 working with community groups, nonprofit organizations, citizens,  
31 state personnel, and the community at large to host statewide  
32 educational and cultural events; and be it further

33 *Resolved*, That the Legislature deplores the persistent, ongoing  
34 efforts by any person, in this country or abroad, to deny the  
35 historical fact of the Armenian Genocide; and be it further

36 *Resolved*, That the Legislature respectfully calls upon the  
37 President of the United States and the United States Congress to  
38 formally and consistently reaffirm the historical truth that the  
39 atrocities committed against the Armenian people constituted  
40 genocide; and be it further

1     *Resolved*, That the Legislature calls on the President of the  
2 United States to work toward equitable, constructive, stable, and  
3 durable Armenian-Turkish relations; and be it further

4     *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies  
5 of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United  
6 States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the  
7 Majority Leader of the Senate, to each Senator and Representative  
8 from California in the Congress of the United States, to the  
9 Governor of California, to every member of the California State  
10 Legislature, and to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

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