

JEWES JOIN ARMENIANS TO MARK GENOCIDE DAY

Special from Arthur Hagopian

JERUSALEM

Jewish sympathizers joined the Armenian community in Jerusalem last week to mark the anniversary of the Armenian genocide in a somber ceremony at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. People from all parts of the country and all walks of life, priests and laymen, rubbed shoulders with members of the general public as they paid tribute to the estimated 1.5 million Armenians who perished during the First World War. The event is an annual genocide commemoration and symposium organized by the Armenian Studies Program of the Hebrew University. Because of the Jewish Passover and the Armenian Easter, the ceremony, usually held on April 24, was pushed back a few days.

Among the most moving moments was the retelling by photographer Kevork Kahvejian of the suffering and loss endured by individual Armenians, among them his father. As the audience rose to stand in silent remembrance, they would visualize the extent of man's inhumanity to man, of the world's first genocide (of Armenians), the one that followed soon after (Jews), and countless others on a smaller but wildly scattered scale perpetuated to this day: whole families and communities decimated, singled out for extinction for no stronger reason than the names they bore, or the color their skin had! A mellifluous rendition of the plaintive Armenian prayer, *Der Voghormea*, "Lord have Mercy", sung by Father Koosan Aljalian, contributed to the feeling of devastation.

Armenian Patriarch Torkom Manoogian, a regular attendee and speaker, was deputized this year by Archbishop Aris Shirvanyan who highlighted the importance of commemoration and, like Monsignor Raphael Minassian, leader of Jerusalem's Armenian Catholic community, stressed the occurrence in the same week of the Jewish people's Holocaust memorial day and this Genocide memorial evening. Professor Gideon Shelach, vice-Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, pointed to Armenian Studies as an example of what the Hebrew University could do to learn and teach about other cultures, and particularly of a (Armenian) community that has been resident in the Holy Land for two millennia.

The Armenian Studies program is headed by one of the world's leading armenologists, Professor Michael Stone, who happens to be a Jew. Perhaps more than any other, Stone has helped bring to the public documented evidence of the greatness of ancient Armenian literature. Among his latest ventures has been to pluck out of obscurity a mediaeval Armenian epic "Adamgirk" by Arakel of Siwnik, that graphically expresses the yearning of the first people to convert to Christianity, for salvation and paradise. Prof Stone reminded his listeners that, in addition to the killing of peoples, the genocides involved the killing of cultures. "The role of the Armenian Studies program is to nurture and teach Armenian language, history and culture and this very act is itself an affirmation of life beyond the Genocide," he said.

Israel, as a state, is yet to recognize the Armenian genocide, a reflection of its ambivalent political priorities. And it was time, that Israel recognized its moral imperative, Tsolag

Momjian, who is Armenia's Honorary Consul, and whose practical support for the Armenian Studies program has been instrumental in making the Commemoration event possible, told

the gathering. Israeli Member of Knesset (Parliament) Ze'ev Elkin, head of the Israel-Armenia Parliamentary Group, who was present, replied there had been a change in Israeli official thinking as evidenced by the Knesset having a discussion of the Genocide on its agenda for the first time this year. He revealed that matter was referred to Committee and expressed his hope that future developments would take this process to a successful conclusion.

But it was leading genocide scholar and fighter, Professor Israel Charny, who pointed out the ambiguities of Israel's official position and "bizarre" statements by Israel's ambassador to Turkey. He warned of the dangers in either Jews or Armenians claiming exclusive victimhood: Armenian Genocide was also a genocide of other Christian minorities while in the Holocaust the Nazis killed Gypsies (Roma) and other peoples as well as Jews, he remarked. He recommended not just moral indignation at Israel's official policy, but a recognition of the need for a policy that preserves moral integrity while at the same time recognizes Israel's regional position.

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