

## REMEMBERING THE LOST MILLION

From **Arthur Hagopian**  
(Journalist, Jerusalem)

JERUSALEM, April 17 - It is in the news again, Deir Zor, the felicitous little village in Syria which bore witness, a century ago, to the death march of hundreds and thousands of helpless victims of an organized genocide.

The once sleepy Ottoman enclave has metamorphosed into a bustling town of over half a million people - and in the past few days, another hotbed of revolt against the ruling regime.

More deaths and injuries - but nothing to equal the depredation of the Armenian refugees force-marched into exile by the marauding Ottoman forces, during the infamous 1915 persecutions that devastated the Armenian nation.

Poetic justice has seen Deir Zor become home to the third Armenian diplomatic mission in Syria, the honorary consulate of the Republic of Armenia having opened there on February 11 last year.

But in April 1915, it was a slaughter-house.

A million and a half innocent Armenians are estimated to have perished in the bloodbath, among them the flowers of its society. The bloodthirsty swords of the 20th Century Janissaries made no distinction between thinker, writer, artist, spiritual leader, farmer.

This year, as every year since 1915, Armenians all over the world will be commemorating the tragedy.

Here in Jerusalem, the ceremonies will be highlighted by a special symposium on April 28, conducted by the Armenian Studies Program of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and representatives of the city's Armenian community.

The Jewish initiative is aptly significant, inspired as it is in part by the descendants of victims of an even greater genocide, the Jewish "shoach" that saw six million more innocents slaughtered by the Nazis.

The organizers have chosen as chief speakers some of Israel's most prominent luminaries, Prof. Israel Charney who will remind the world that the "memorial of a people's genocide is for all humanity" and Prof. Elihu D. Richter from the University's medical school who will lecture on a doctor's perspective, "From Memory to Prevention."

The program will also celebrate the Armenian cultural heritage, including Armenian poetry and music.

The Hebrew University's Armenian Studies program issued a statement noting that the April 1915 genocide destroyed "by varied estimates, between one million and 1,500,000 Armenian men, women and children in acts of organized killing and during forced marches into exile from their historical homeland, then within the borders of the Ottoman empire, towards the Syrian desert.

But it was careful to point out, in a politically correct endeavor, that the pogroms were "carried out by the Turkish authorities of the early 20th Century."

"Those who survived became refugees, scattered over the world, some of whom joined the old Armenian community of Jerusalem. The great Armenian cultural tradition received a dreadful blow, but continues to flourish in both the old and new Armenian communities throughout the world, and in the Republic of Armenia," the statement said.

"Many nations have recognized this Genocide, the first of the organized atrocities of the 20th Century, three decades before the Jewish Holocaust," but "unfortunately, the State of Israel is not yet numbered among them," the statement added.

Deir Zor has been subjected to its share of conquests and destruction, and rivers of blood have washed its streets. But like the mythical phoenix, it has risen from its ashes to reclaim its share of glory, and today counts as one of Syria's most important touristic and industrial centres.

But for people all over the world, and the few Armenian families that still live there, it will forever be associated with one of humanity's darkest days.

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