The Armenian Genocide, 1915

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Over 3,000 Armenian refugees sought refuge with the Protestant church in Bakhche, Turkey. Archive of the German Assistance Association.

In 1915, the Turkish government began killing Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire (later called Turkey). There were then about 2 million Armenians in the empire. Around 1.5 million were killed. Many others were pushed out of the country. The killings finally ended in 1922.

Historians call what happened a genocide. A genocide is something planned. Its aim is to wipe out a whole people.

The roots of genocide: The Ottoman Empire

The Armenian people have lived in Eurasia for 3,000 years. During the 1400s, Armenia was swallowed up by the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman rulers were Muslim. So were most of their subjects. The Armenians were Christian. They were not given the same rights as Muslims.
Many Turks did not trust the Armenians. They thought they might secretly side with the empire's Christian enemies.

In the late 1800s, the empire was ruled by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Abdul Hamid did not trust the Armenians. He was also angry that they wanted more rights.

**The first Armenian massacre**

Abdul Hamid called on Turks to attack Armenians. Between 1894 and 1896, Turkish soldiers and ordinary men destroyed Armenian towns. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed.

**The rise of the Young Turks**

In 1908, a new government came to power. The empire’s new leaders were called the “Young Turks.”

The Young Turks wanted to “Turkify” the empire. To them, that meant getting rid of Christian Armenians.

**World War I**

In 1914, the Turks entered World War I on the side of Germany.

Turkish generals said the Armenians could not be trusted. They said they would help the other side in the war.
On April 24, 1915, the Armenian genocide began. That day, the Turkish government killed several hundred Armenian leaders.

After that, many ordinary Armenians were rounded up. They were forced to march through the desert without food or water until they dropped dead. People who stopped to rest were shot.

Killing squads were formed by the government. These squads drowned people in rivers. They threw them off cliffs. They burned people alive. Soon, there were dead bodies everywhere.

The genocide finally ended in 1922. By then, there were only 388,000 Armenians left in the Ottoman Empire.
The Armenian genocide today

Even today, the Turkish government says there was no genocide. It says Armenians died because of the war. Almost no historians believe this is true.