Deportations of Armenians. The man in the front is a “gendarme,” a member of the security organization of the Ottoman Empire. Photo from the book “Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian, the Christian Girl who Lived Through the Great Massacres,” by Aurora Mardiganian. Published by Kingfield Press in 1918.

**Editor’s Note:** Before World War I, there were 2 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire (now Turkey). By 1923, about 1.5 million of them were dead. Others had been deported to neighboring countries like Syria, Greece and Egypt.

Today, the Turkish government still claims that the killings took place as part of World War I, and should not be considered a genocide with the specific aim of wiping out the Armenian people. Historians do consider the killings genocide, however.

The roots of the genocide can be traced to the mixed character of the Ottoman Empire. The empire had a Muslim government but contained other religious and ethnic groups. One of these groups was the Armenians, who were Christian.
By the time World War I started in 1914, the empire was falling apart and people had little money. Like the Jews in Germany before and during World War II, the Armenians were seen as a well-off group of merchants and businessmen. This led many Turks to resent them for their supposed wealth. Armenians were also negatively labeled as money lenders who charged overly high interest rates.

In addition, the Ottoman government suspected Armenians of disloyalty because of their religion. It feared they might ally themselves with Russia against the Ottoman Empire. At the start of World War I, Russia had not yet become communist and was still a Christian nation.

The New York Times often wrote about the Armenian genocide. In 1915, it published 145 articles on the genocide. Below is an article published on December 15, 1915.

Headline Tells Of Horrors

MILLION ARMENIANS KILLED: POLICY OFextermination

The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief issued a statement yesterday. It detailed further atrocities committed by the Turks against the Armenian people.
The committee's statement provides further proof that the recent killings are not random. Instead, they reflect an overall goal of wiping out the Armenian people. The sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Abdul Hamid, has said to settle the “Armenian question” would mean getting rid of the Armenians.

Professor Samuel T. Dutton, the secretary of the committee, said:

"Of the two million Armenians in Turkey a year ago at least one million have been killed or forced to become Muslim. Others have been compelled to flee the country, or have died upon the way."

The number of victims is constantly increasing, Dutton said.

Yesterday's statement quotes from a letter received from an English committee that has also been monitoring the Armenian situation. The letter reports that 30,000 Armenian deportees have died in the Caucasus alone. Another 180,000 remain there as refugees.

The statement also quotes a letter from a missionary stationed in the city of Konia. The missionary had visited a railway station at Kachin Han, where a group of desperate deportees had gathered. There he found around 100 people lying about the station in complete despair. They had been waiting there for three days, and most had eaten all the food they had and looked exhausted and weak.

People In Despair

"The train from Konia arrived while we were there," the missionary reported. The desperate deportees then "dragged themselves to the cars in an effort to get on board." However, they were pushed back by the police, "partly because they had no tickets and partly because there was no room."
The crowd was "forced to turn back to where they had been sitting or lying about the station."

"Among the hundred people there were not half a dozen tents," the missionary wrote. "Most of the people were lying out in the open day and night, many of them without even blankets or quilts."

"Half a mile from the station I found two old women who were crawling off on hands and knees too weak to walk," the missionary continued. A driver had promised to take them to a nearby village. However, once out of sight of the police, he had simply dropped them in a field along the way.

The unfortunate people he saw had no future ahead of them, the missionary wrote. All would soon starve to death, he predicted.