

## **Lords Debate on Armenian genocide recognition –**

### **Closing Speech**

#### **Introduction**

**I know that the noble Baroness Cox takes a very close interest in this subject, and I'm grateful to her for introducing this debate.**

**I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm that the British Government recognises the terrible suffering inflicted on Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and shares her view that we must ensure the victims of that suffering are not forgotten.**

**What happened to ethnic-Armenians and other smaller Christian minorities, including the Assyrians, living within the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the last century was roundly and rightly condemned by the British Government of the time. This is**

**reflected in the fact that in 1918 the UK attempted to try 118 people in relation to these events but was unable to establish an appropriate legal jurisdiction.**

**I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest sympathies to the relatives and descendants of the victims. However, the position of this Government has not changed. We believe any truth and reconciliation process has to be owned by the parties directly involved. Relationships need to be rebuilt to ensure a peaceful and secure future for everyone living in the region today.**

**To this end, we continue to encourage the Governments of both Armenia and Turkey to build on the normalisation process that began with the “football diplomacy” of autumn 2008, and led to the signing of two protocols in Zurich on 10 October 2009.**

**The statesmanship and courage of both Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan [Sar-gS-YAN] and Turkish President Abdullah Gül should be applauded. Both understand the importance of creating diplomatic ties and moving forward, despite the challenges involved.**

**The protocols signed last October are a land mark step in progressing bilateral relations between these two countries. As well as paving the way for the establishment of diplomatic relations and the re-opening of borders, the protocols allow for the creation of a subcommittee to examine historical issues, including the events of 1915 – 1917.**

**Signing the protocols was not an easy step for either country and ratification will be equally sensitive. It would be counter productive for the UK Government to make any statement that could jeopardise this process.**

## **Legal debate**

**In calling for the UK Government to recognise the events of 1915/1917 as genocide the noble Baroness Cox has made reference to the report published by Geoffrey Robertson QC last October. Mr Robertson concluded that while the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide could not be applied retrospectively, the legal term genocide could and should be applied to the Armenian massacres.**

**The UK government agrees with Mr Robertson that genocide is a precise term and that the use of the term is best assessed by a competent court. However then, as now, there was no court with the authority to make such an assessment. We therefore believe that it is inappropriate to apply the term to events that**

**predate the Convention and where no legal judgement can be made.**

**It is more constructive to encourage Turkey and Armenia to confront their common history together.**

**I also want to take this opportunity to address another suggestion, made in Mr Robertson's report, namely that FCO officials have misled Parliament on this issue. The Government rejects any suggestion that Parliament has been misled, but I also want to make perfectly clear that it is Ministers, not officials, who are responsible for the statements they make to Parliament.**

**HMG efforts to help Turkey and Armenia resolve the  
debate**

**I want to reiterate at this point that our view that it is inappropriate for the UK government to recognise an Armenian “genocide” in no way denigrates the terrible individual and mass tragedies that occurred between 1915/1917. But the key now is to ensure that both Armenia and Turkey come to terms with these events and look towards the future.**

**Outsiders can commend this approach to the parties, but they should not try to do the work for them, because the parties’ addressing the issues themselves is an important part of the confidence-building and reconciliation process.**

**Our Government has urged both the Armenian and Turkish governments to move forward with the**

**normalisation process. In February the Foreign Secretary raised the issue with the Armenian President, Serge Sargsyan. We have also discussed this with the Turks on more than one occasion, most recently during a meeting between Chris Bryant, Minister for Europe, and his Turkish opposite number just two weeks ago. We will continue to offer support and encouragement as we believe this is the most constructive and effective role we can play at this point.**

**[Insert here any addition responses to points raised in debate]**

## **Nagorno Karabakh**

**I would also like to briefly raise the issue of the unresolved conflict in Nagorno Karabakh [Na-gor-no Kara-back], as Turkey has made a linkage between resolution of this conflict and progress on normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia.**

**The UK supports the position that there can be no formal link between the two issues. However we believe that improved relations between Armenian and Turkey can have a positive impact for the whole region including helping, not hindering a resolution to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.**

**The Government strongly supports the work of the OSCE Minsk Group and its three Co-chairs, as well as**



**the OSCE monitoring mission on the Line of Contact.**

**They play an important role in facilitating the efforts of Armenia and Azerbaijan to make progress on this issue.**

**We believe that if all those involved are willing and able to make some difficult choices then parallel progress on both Nagorno Karabakh and Armenian-Turkish relations could be mutually reinforcing. Such a scenario is certainly ambitious, but we have made clear to all parties involved our view that neither process should be held hostage to the other.**

## **Closing Remarks**

**I cannot give any assurances that Armenia and Turkey will move their relations forward this year, or even the next, though I would certainly hope so.**

**This Government will continue to encourage all parties to take the process forward, reflecting our conviction that reopening the borders and normalising relations will bring substantial benefits – economic, social and cultural – to both Turkey and Armenia, as well as contributing to wider peace and stabilisation in the region.**

**An important part of this process is for the people of Turkey and Armenia to address their historical issues together. They must own this process directly for it to be successful and for it to contribute towards confidence building. Any change in position by the**

**UK Government in regard to the events of 1915-1916  
would not assist the positive progress made by  
Turkey and Armenia towards normalising their  
relations.**