

From: [redacted]

Sent: 21 January 2014 15:17

To: [redacted]

Cc: Jonathan Aves; [redacted]

Subject: FW: Holocaust debate

[redacted]

I have been asked to clear the lines used for last year's Westminster Hall debate, which are to be used for a backbench business debate.

New/updated lines are highlighted yellow. I would also welcome any comments by those copied in. DCLG have given a short deadline of 1000 tomorrow, therefore I would welcome comments by CoP today or SoP tomorrow in Yerevan's case.

[redacted]

Armenian Massacres 1915-1916

Public Lines

The UK Government recognises the terrible suffering that was inflicted on Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire and acknowledges the strength of feeling regarding this terrible episode of history. Our view remains, however, that it is not for governments to decide whether genocide has been committed as this is a complex legal question. Where an international legal body finds a crime to have been genocide, this will often play an important part in whether we will recognise one as such. Instead our position focuses on the need for the governments of Turkey and Armenia to adopt some form of truth and reconciliation process to help both countries move forward on this issue. We believe that this issue can only be resolved through a process owned by those directly involved.

We will, as ever, encourage the Governments of Armenia and Turkey to look to the future and build a better relationship between their countries. In the meantime, we will continue to work for peace, security and mutual understanding in the region.

Background

HMG has consistently stated that events in Ottoman Turkey in 1915-16 were tragic, they were condemned by the government of the day and we continue to endorse that view.

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We endeavour to restrict our use of the term 'genocide' to events which occurred after the adoption of the UN convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948.

In October 2009, Geoffrey Robertson QC published an opinion titled "Was there an Armenian Genocide?" He concluded that the events of 1915-16 do amount to genocide. Further, he states "[FCO] advice reflects neither the law on genocide nor the demonstrable facts of the massacres in 1915-16, and has been calculated to mislead parliament into believing that there has been an assessment of evidence and an exercise of judgement on that evidence." We do not agree with Geoffrey Robertson's assessment. We do not believe that the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide can be applied retrospectively to events which took place in Ottoman Turkey in 1915-16. Nor do we accept that there has been an attempt to mislead Parliament by ministers answering questions on UK government policy with regard to these events.

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Answers to potential supplementary questions

Will HMG recognise the Armenian "genocide"?

Terrible suffering was inflicted on Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th Century. We must ensure that the victims of that suffering are not forgotten. However we believe that it is first and foremost for the Turkish and Armenian people to address their common history. We would encourage any process which helps them do so in an open, honest and constructive manner.

(If further pressed) Our position is unchanged. We acknowledge the strength of feeling about this terrible episode of history and recognise the massacres and crimes of 1915-16 as a tragedy. We would encourage both Armenia and Turkey to build on recent progress to address these issues together.

What do you say to the allegations that you are refusing to acknowledge a genocide because this would affect the anglo-Turkish relationship?

We don't accept this allegation. ~~Turkey and Armenia have begun to re-establish a relationship and for the first time have the possibility to address their shared past.~~ We would encourage any process which helps Turkey and Armenia address their shared past in an open, honest and constructive manner.

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Is recognition of the events as genocide or opening the border a pre-condition for Turkey's membership of the EU?

No. However, under the political criteria for membership Turkey is expected to maintain 'good neighbourly relations' with countries in the region.

Why did the Minister for Europe visit the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Museum and Memorial?

The Minister attended the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Museum and Memorial in September 2012. During a private visit the Minister paid his respects to those that died during the Armenian massacres as well as laying a wreath at the memorial. The Minister's visit does not change the Governments position with regards to this tragic event.

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