

Remarks of Robert M. Morgenthau

International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation Luncheon

Washington, D.C.

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President Sargysan, Members of Congress, Reverend Clergy,  
Foundation Board Members, and Friends

I am honored in more ways than I can recount to be asked to accept the Wallenberg Medal on behalf of my grandfather. The legacy of Raoul Wallenberg holds a very personal significance for my family. My father, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., was Secretary of the Treasury during the Holocaust. At a time when as many as 12,000 Hungarian Jews were being deported to certain death every day, he established the War Refugee Board to resettle the refugees and save their lives. It was Raoul Wallenberg who ultimately would run the Board, and it was his courage and tireless effort that saved 200,000 lives - and provided a model for the kind of humanitarian sacrifice that the world so needs today.

I am honored as well to be in the presence of President Serge Sargysan. I can assure you that my grandfather would be especially pleased to know that one day his grandson would share the podium with the President of an independent and free Armenia.

This year, the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide, has brought an unprecedented level of awareness of the slaughter and deportation of the Armenians, and of my grandfather's humanitarian efforts to stop the killings. What is less well known, but what consumed my grandfather equally, is the sad history of the betrayal of the Armenian people in the quest for self-determination.

Throughout their history, the Armenians showed great courage in resisting dominance by invading armies. The rebellion in Zeitun, the defense of Van, and of course the historic resistance of the Armenians of Musa Dagh, each displayed the determination of a proud people, indomitable in spirit, and unwilling to surrender their faith or their identity. Yet each time, Ottoman leaders responded with overwhelming force, force that escalated to all-out

genocide.

In response, President Woodrow Wilson firmly committed the policy of the United States to the establishment of an Armenian homeland. This flowed from his Fourteen Points, one of which was the principle of the self-determination of the peoples in the former Ottoman Empire. The President appointed a commission, the King-Crane Commission, to set forth specific proposals to manifest this basic principle.

In August of 1919, the Commission concluded that the Armenians should inhabit a homeland that restored losses from the atrocities suffered periodically at the hands of the Ottoman Turks from 1894 through 1916. The homeland would comprise the Armenian highlands in Turkey and Russia, with an outlet on the Black Sea.

In August of 1920, Western powers and the Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Sevres. It too affirmed the principle of an Armenian homeland, although a homeland reduced in size from what Woodrow Wilson had envisioned.

But the ink had hardly dried on the treaty when the new Turkish state attacked the Democratic Republic of Armenia and occupied parts of its territory. Soon, the Soviet Union absorbed the remaining portion. This land grab, so soon after the Genocide of the Armenians, presented a challenge to the conscience of the world, particularly when a German periodical published the comment of the notorious Enver Pasha: "What do you think...Did we slaughter them just for fun?"

The response of the world community to this crisis was nothing short of shameful: the League of Nations capitulated. Soon there was a new treaty, the Treaty of Lausanne, which made no mention of an Armenian homeland.

This explains why, for eighty years, Armenians suffered under Soviet oppression. It is why, for eighty years, the Armenian people, who prided themselves on being the world's first Christian nation, were ruled by an atheist dictatorship.

Today, of course, the Soviet Union is no more, and Armenia is an independent republic. And yet, as Armenians and their supporters all around the world marched this year for Genocide recognition, they did so under a two-fold

phrase: "I remember...and I demand."

I leave it to others to untangle the fiercely complicated question of how to make right the injustices of history. But let us begin by squarely confronting that history.

During the Genocide, my Grandfather witnessed first-hand what happens when the world's conscience gives way to caution. He was personally devastated by what he famously termed a campaign of race extermination. And in the aftermath of that tragedy, even after he returned to the United States, even as he devoted himself to the resettlement of Armenian refugees, his greatest lingering disappointment was that he did not live to see the reestablishment of an independent Armenia.

I have said on other occasions that the principles that have largely animated my own life in public office are those that my grandfather brought back from his service in Anatolia. I commend them to one and all. Among those values are all of the freedoms that would later be included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But there is yet one more value that he taught us, one that gives life to all the rest: a commitment that, on issues of justice, we shall never give up.

On behalf of my grandfather, I thank you for this great honor.