



GENOCIDE EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

The Hon. CHRIS RATH (16:58): I move:

(1) That this House acknowledges that 9 December 2023 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

(2) That this House honours the primary initiator of the convention, Dr Raphael Lemkin, influenced by his studies of the Armenian Genocide and Jewish Holocaust.

(3) That this House urges the Government to expand secondary school Holocaust education to encompass Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek genocides and establish a museum to create awareness about these genocides. I am proud to move this motion and stand in solidarity with those Australians of Armenian, Assyrian and Greek heritage. In 1997 and 2013 New South Wales became the first legislature to recognise the 1915 Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides. It was a bipartisan motion of this place. The motion specifically stated at paragraph (2) (c) that this House:

recognises the importance of remembering and learning from such dark chapters in human history to ensure that such crimes against humanity are not allowed to be repeated ...

Today we are debating a motion that calls on this State to expand Holocaust genocide education, mandate the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides in our curriculum, and establish a museum to ensure that future generations are educated about the horrors of the 1915 genocide. I remember that when I was a student at high school in the Illawarra we visited the Sydney Jewish Museum—the Holocaust museum—which was incredibly insightful and interesting. Learning about one of the darkest times in global history was fascinating but also incredibly sad. All of us as Australians—students and children—know a lot about the Holocaust, and rightly so. Many, many years later I learnt about the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides. They are still not well known and not well taught, which is a very sad thing and exactly what the motion is about.

The motion acknowledges that 9 December last year marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the genocide convention. The scholar who coined the term "genocide", Raphael Lemkin, referenced the Armenian genocide. He said, "I created this word because it happened to the Armenians." We need to understand the reason for this word and the reason is the Armenian genocide, so therefore it must be taught. In May 2014, with a vote of 77-0, California unanimously voted to mandate Armenian genocide education, which many other States have implemented, and New South Wales should follow suit. Education plays a fundamental role in understanding and confronting violent pasts, while at the same time developing the knowledge and values to prevent future atrocities. It is important that we learn the history of Armenian Australians, Greek Australians and Assyrian Australians, many of whom came to these shores as a result of the genocide.

Educating our younger generations about the 1915 Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides is also a way to honour our own history. It is a way to honour everyday Australians who rallied behind the Armenian people in our nation's first humanitarian relief effort. We should be proud of our nation's generosity and compassion at a time when people were not alerted to global events by the click of a button. A substantial amount of aid was raised by the people of Australia and Commonwealth steamers were sent to the Middle East, which helped save the lives of many Armenian refugees fleeing the genocide. Wheat donated by Australian farmers from the wheat belt fed the starving genocide survivors in the Middle East. Those aid efforts were led by Australian priests, bishops and archbishops from churches all across our nation who came together to help those who were fleeing persecution and genocide however they could.

Australia's noble role during this dark period of history must not be forgotten, nor should the millions of innocent victims. Instead, it should be honoured. Many people from the Armenian, Greek and Assyrian communities in Australia are descendants of survivors of those genocides. They are proud of Australia and the humanitarian role it has played in the past. Mandated education of this history and establishing a museum dedicated to its memory in Australia are, therefore, imperative. Some 50,000 Armenians, 500,000 Greeks and 70,000 Assyrians call this great country home. We owe it to them and ourselves to educate the rest of this nation about this important part of our shared history. I commend the motion to the House.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY (Treasurer) (17:03): The Government supports the motion. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was passed by the United Nations on 9 December 1948. It was the first human rights treaty in the history of the United Nations and it was passed just before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR] was adopted by the United Nations. The Chifley Labor Government, in particular Foreign Minister H. V. Evatt, was instrumental in the passage of the UDHR and the genocide convention. It is important to recall that the genocide convention was created as a way to hold the Nazis accountable for their actions and equally to establish the principle that those who commit the crime of genocide will be held to account by the international community. Prior to establishing the convention, there was no recognised theory that suggested that one nation could hold the leaders of another accountable, which is still a contested principle.

Paragraph (3) of the motion urges the Government to consider further steps to teach the history of genocide in the State's curriculum, specifically some named genocides. The Government will always consider the expertise of its curriculum advisers when it comes to setting the curriculum. It is a source of great pride to this nation and this State that we use experts to set curriculums. I know the Minister for Education and Early Learning has already sought advice about the teaching of the subject matter referred to in the motion. I inform the House that the NSW Education Standards Authority is in consultation mode about the new history syllabuses, and that includes updated context around the Holocaust and acknowledging other forms of genocide.

In that debate it should also be acknowledged that First Nations people are campaigning for an updated version of the teaching curriculum to properly reflect the history and experiences of First Nations people following the arrival of the British on this soil. It is fitting that we are having this debate in the Legislative Council, which in various iterations across its 200-year history has played a very big role in the history of First Nations violence in the colony. The Government is leaving that debate to the State's historians to work through the education. In a debate like this we should acknowledge the fact that First Nations people are seeking that as part of the next version of curriculum reform. The Government is working respectfully with First Nations people as we go about making sure that we are teaching all of our history. Lots of people in the community are the victims of genocide or the descendants of victims of genocide. I know some members of this House are from a variety of different backgrounds. It is so important that we make sure we do not forget that history and that, again, we commemorate how great an achievement it was to establish the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Dr AMANDA COHN (17:06): A representative of the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, a United States-based NGO named in honour of Raphael Lemkin, stated:

Genocide is a crime in international law and is a permanent moral wound on the body of humanity. There is never a justification for perpetration of this crime.

In 1997 the New South Wales Parliament formally recognised the Armenian genocide and designated 24 April as a day of remembrance. Recognition of this genocide is important for Armenians and for all of us. As the granddaughter of Holocaust refugees, this matter is not only one of principle but one that is personal for me and my family. Formal recognition and remembrance of genocide, as well as education, are critical for healing and so that it never happens again. I share the sentiments of my colleague and former member of the New South Wales Parliament John Kaye. When study of the Holocaust was made compulsory for all stage 5 students in 2012, he said that this essential education should be taught in the context of other twentieth century genocides.

In supporting the motion, The Greens note that it is unclear why particular genocides have been selected by the Hon. Chris Rath in the absence of others—for example, the Rwandan or Tamil genocides. In stage 5 Holocaust education, schools are already empowered to teach about the atrocities named in the motion. However, it is valuable for members to have the opportunity to discuss the importance of truth-telling today. Genocide is not just historical; every one of us should be making an active effort to prevent it.

The Lemkin Institute, which I quoted earlier, issues active genocide alerts when developments occur that it believes show clear signs of genocide in process. It has recently issued alerts regarding the Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia, Sudan, Artsakh and Palestine. The International Court of Justice [ICJ] this month ruled that some acts committed by Israel in Gaza appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the genocide convention. The ICJ has ordered Israel to refrain from any acts that could fall under the genocide convention, ensure its troops commit no genocidal acts in Gaza, prevent and punish any incitement to commit genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, preserve evidence related to any allegations of genocide, and improve the humanitarian situation for Palestinian civilians, as well as calling on Hamas and other armed groups to immediately release hostages without conditions.

It is despicable that the response from Israel's national security Minister mocked this ruling by posting on social media, "Hague schmague." Today, as we reflect on and acknowledge the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, we must also recognise Australia's responsibilities to prevent genocide in Gaza. A permanent ceasefire and restoration of humanitarian aid in Gaza has never been more urgent. "Never again" means never again for anyone.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER (17:09): "Genocide" is a word which should be said slowly to give the mind a chance to catch up and understand the enormity of this concept. Even then, can we actually contemplate what it means to deliberately set out to destroy another people, not because of anything that they have done but simply because of who they are? The concept is so large and so hard to understand that for many years it went without a name. Churchill spoke of it as "a crime without a name". Now, we have a name: genocide. But does that make this concept or reality any easier to bear?

Perhaps the contemplation of genocide should overwhelm us, as we should be overwhelmed by any contemplation of evil and hate. One cannot visit the Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem or the genocide memorial at Swallow's Fortress in Yerevan without being overwhelmed at the sad and senseless loss of life, at the evil which drove this, and at the indifference of others who looked the other way or allowed it to occur. A common human response when encountering such evil is to try not to dwell on the horror of genocide, but not thinking about these issues has a tremendous price: repetition.

The Armenian genocide is acknowledged as the first genocide of the twentieth century—hardly a milestone to be remembered. Indeed, for decades it was brushed aside and ignored. It took 50 years for the Swallow's Fortress memorial in Armenia to be erected. There was a great humanitarian response to this genocide from Australia, but little international recognition of what had happened, except of course in some quarters, where it was used as a playbook. Speaking to his generals in 1939, Hitler is reported as saying:

Genghis Khan led millions of women and children to slaughter—with premeditation and a happy heart. History sees in him solely the founder of a state ... our war aim does not consist in reaching certain lines, but in the physical destruction ... without compassion, men, women and children of Polish derivation and language.

He then finished by saying:

Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?

We need to speak of this annihilation, because if we do not name evil, acknowledge that evil has occurred, and teach our children to eschew evil, history teaches us we will repeat it. After the Holocaust the world said, "Never again," yet we see antisemitic speech on our own streets. After Swallow's Fortress was erected, the Armenians hoped "never again", but as journalist Lindsey Snell has exposed, at schools and universities in Azerbaijan the young are being taught to hate Armenians. [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG (17:13): I make a contribution to this important motion. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948 was on 9 December 2023. Since 2015, 9 December has been known as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. The convention was passed soon after the formation of the United Nations, just prior to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The convention is currently ratified by 153 countries. As was articulated by my colleague the Treasurer, the Chifley Labor Government, and Foreign Minister H. V. Evatt specifically, were hugely significant in the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the genocide convention. H. V. Evatt was in fact the chair, as the President of the United Nations, when the genocide convention was adopted and was part of the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Rights. On this side of the House we have a steeped history of supporting human rights.

I note that the Government recognises the enduring impact genocides continue to have today on people in our communities and the need for students to recognise the horrific nature of genocides. Currently the year 9 and year 10 history syllabus does include some subject matter on the Holocaust, and a new syllabus is due to be circulated for consultation later this term. I think the point made by my colleague the Treasurer about recognising the similar sorts of acts for our Indigenous population is a very important contribution. Last November I had the pleasure of attending the Armenian National Committee of Australia Gala 2023, representing Minister Kamper. I note a number of MPs and MLCs attended. I learnt a lot about the Armenian genocide, although I had been educated by my Greek wife, who is very aware of these sorts of things because of her background.

These are scars that are left on populations for generations and generations. It is very important that we recognise these genocides when they occur. I finish by acknowledging the fact that in 1997 it was the Carr Government that supported the Parliament's recognition of the Armenian genocide, again showing that Labor takes these things seriously. The motion is very well put and should be supported. We should recognise that genocide can occur in any nation and across any peoples, and should be called out for what it is and condemned, but recognised officially as an international war crime.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO (17:16): I thank the Hon. Chris Rath for bringing this motion to the House. It is a very important matter to consider and obviously an incredibly solemn one. It is a matter that brings together the global and the local. As has been noted already, the genocide convention was the first human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, and Australia was amongst the first signatories to that convention. I note as well that in agreeing to the convention there was an opportunity—and still is—for countries to make objections to the kinds of exceptions that other countries decided to take to certain aspects of the full text of the convention. Australia has made a very staunch contribution to that, not accepting many of the reservations that have been put forward by particular countries because Australia believes in the substance of this text wholly and solely. Article II of the convention, which is the definition of genocide, states:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

As part of article III there is a list of acts that should be punishable, including direct and public incitement to commit genocide. This, as part of the United Nation's mandate, and that of other international organisations, forms part of the basis of our international rules-based order. This is something that has guided the principles of engagement with other countries since the formation of the United Nations, obviously mostly in response to World War II, but has been able to serve us since. In that framework we are able to work with countries that have their own sovereignty, as we do, and try to respect the sovereignty of those countries as we would expect ours to be. The Hon. Chris Rath mentioned earlier the value of something like the Sydney Jewish Museum—the Holocaust museum. I visited there. I recall it. I met Eddie Jaku on the street before he passed away. Remembering the Shoah through these institutions is so important and means that we can do the same thing with other genocides, including the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM (17:19): The timing of this motion is opportune, given what is occurring in Gaza, but it is oddly silent when we know that genocide is occurring right now in front of our eyes. The motion has some glaring omissions—the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnian genocide, the Tamil genocide.

The Hon. Daniel Mookhey: The Khmer Rouge.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The Khmer genocide. The genocide convention is a landmark in the evolution of international law and a step to prevent the horrors that occurred during the Second World War, the Holocaust of the European Jewish community, from ever happening again. The cry is "never again" but the world continues to fail on that front. The world failed in Rwanda in 1994, and 800,000 people were killed. In 1995 in Bosnia, in the genocide of Srebrenica, 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed. In the Tamil genocide in May 2009 at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war, between 40,000 and 70,000 people were killed. That situation is similar to what is happening in Gaza. The Government had established no-fire zones, encouraged the civilian Tamil population into those no-fire zones and then bombarded those no-fire zones, killing many thousands of people.

Today there have been 28,000 deaths in Gaza. On 26 January the International Court of Justice found that Israel is at risk of perpetrating a genocide. We can all talk about the convention. What is happening in Gaza is horrific. Israel is intentionally dislodging the population of Gaza. It has destroyed 50 per cent of the housing in Gaza. The convention says, "In order to liberate humankind from this scourge, international cooperation is required." That means that when a genocide is occurring, like what is happening now, countries like Australia and the rest of the world must take action to prevent it.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE (17:22): It is so important that we teach children in our schools about the crime of genocide, not only as an expression of human solidarity but also in light of our own history. In 1938 between 6 July and 15 July the American Government hosted the Évian Conference on how to deal with refugees from Nazi Germany. The Australian Government chief delegate was Colonel White, who told the conference, "As we have no real race problem, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign migration." On 6 December 1938 William Cooper, an Aboriginal human rights leader, led a protest and a delegation to the German Consul General in Melbourne. One could say that William Cooper was an up-stander and the Australian Government was a bystander. Those are important issues to remember when we talk of our positive contribution to the genocide convention.

It is also important to reflect on contemporary events. I note that the judge appointed by the Israeli Government who sits on the International Court of Justice joined in some of those orders. He particularly did so in respect of incitement to genocide. While the judgement of the court was concerned with questions of prima facie evidence and provisional measures, there is no real question that incitement to genocide has been occurring in Israel, and I think his orders reflect that, as does his profoundly moving judgement. There is no real question about that. There is a broader question about whether the mass civilian death in Gaza is, on allegation, a grave breach of international humanitarian law or genocide.

The Israeli judge said he views it through the prism of international humanitarian law and not through the prism of the convention against genocide. But there is no question, as I said, that incitement to genocide has occurred and that persons of high authority in Israel have urged the destruction of the Palestinians in Gaza. Those contemporary events speak to our common humanity. Are we up-standers or bystanders? Are we in the tradition of William Cooper, or are we in the tradition of Colonel White, who acted, no doubt, on instructions from his Government?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH (17:25): In reply: I thank all members who contributed to this important debate. It is incredibly important to acknowledge the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides and whether they could have a role in our curriculum, because I think they are often forgotten. A recent survey by Deakin University showed that one in four Australians has little or no knowledge of the Holocaust. My assumption would be that if the same question was asked about the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides, that number would be far higher than one in four. As I said, when my high school class visited the Jewish Holocaust museum we had no knowledge of other genocides. I think it is important to expand the comprehension of genocide in this way.

I hope the New South Wales Government and responsible Ministers look at ways to incorporate further genocide studies into the curriculum in an appropriate manner. The Opposition looks to work with the Government in a constructive manner to ensure that is possible. The Hon. Susan Carter made an important point and I will reiterate it. A week before the invasion of Poland in 1939, Adolf Hitler reportedly said, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" That is quite an eerie, very depressing comment to reflect on. In some way the genocide that happened to the Armenians in 1915 was used as inspiration for the atrocities of the Holocaust decades later, as if one can get away with it. I think that was an important contribution from the Hon. Susan Carter. Hopefully, by enshrining the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides in our curriculum, that will never be forgotten in the future.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.