

ORANGE COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

ACTION AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT
Meeting Date: May 19, 2009

Action Agenda
Item No. 4-e

SUBJECT: A Resolution to Foster Genocide Remembrance

DEPARTMENT: Human Rights and Relations

PUBLIC HEARING: (Y/N)

ATTACHMENT(S):
Resolution

INFORMATION CONTACT:
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PURPOSE: To recognize and remember the millions who have perished through acts of genocide.

BACKGROUND: Throughout the 20th century and into this century, countries have perpetrated genocide or mass killing for hateful reasons. There have been numerous atrocities against humankind throughout history, horrible cases of genocide directed against innocent people -- 10-20 million black Africans who died during the 200 years of the international slave trade, the decimation of nearly 12 million Native American Indians in North America between 1600 and 1850, Joseph Stalin's forced relocation and murder of millions of Soviet citizens, and the more recent, so-called ethnic cleansings in Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur.

The first genocide of the 20th century occurred when two million Armenians living in Turkey were, through forced deportation and massacres, eliminated from their homeland. The government order to exterminate the Armenian people on April 24, 1915 led to more than 1.5 million Armenians -- 75% of the population -- being killed. In honor of this massacre, April 24 has been designated Armenian Martyrs Day every year.

The Armenian genocide spawned other governmental efforts to exterminate populations throughout the 20th century. The most far-reaching was promulgated by Nazi Germany under Adolph Hitler. On August 22, 1939, Hitler gave the following instructions to his Army commanders:

"Thus for the time being I have sent to the East my 'Death's Head Units' with the orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish race or language. Only in such a way will we win the vital space that we need. Who still talks nowadays about the Armenians?"

After the initial massacre of the Polish people, the Nazis moved on to acts of genocide against other groups, most famously Jews. In addition to the 6 million Jews who were exterminated in

the Nazi Holocaust, an estimated 5.5 million "enemies of the German State" were murdered under equally inhumane circumstances – people known or suspected of being gay/lesbian; leftists; Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies, and other non-Aryans. In recognition of the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany, April 21, 2009 was designated as Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Since the Armenian Genocide began the modern history of ethnic cleansing, an alarming number of genocides have taken place around the world. Below is a brief list of examples:

- Stalin's Forced famine: 1932 –1933 – 7,000,000 Ukrainian deaths
- Rape of Nanking: 1937 – 1938 – 300,000 Chinese deaths and more than 20,000 rapes
- Nazi Holocaust: 1938 – 1945 – 6,000,000 Jewish deaths and 5.5 million other hate-related deaths
- Pol Pot Cambodia: 1975-1979 – 1.7 million deaths
- Rwanda: 1994 – 800,000 Tutsis deaths
- Bosnia-Herzegovina: 1992-1995 – 200,000 Muslim deaths
- Darfur, Somalia: 2003-present – 200,000+ deaths

In recognition and remembrance of all people who have perished to further agendas of hate and intolerance, the Office of Human Rights and Relations presents to the Orange County Board of Commissioners a Resolution to Foster Genocide Remembrance to encourage Orange County residents to reflect upon all acts of genocide and intolerance.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: None

RECOMMENDATION: The Manager recommends the Board approve the proposed resolution and authorize the Chair to sign it.

ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

RESOLUTION TO FOSTER GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE

WHEREAS, throughout history genocide has been a tragic part of humanity's existence; and

WHEREAS it is important to acknowledge that we are all partners in justice with a shared legacy of intolerance; and

WHEREAS, Americans have contributed to historical acts of genocide, including the 10-20 million black Africans who died during the 200 years of the international slave trade and the decimation of nearly 12 million Native American Indians in North America between 1600 and 1850; and

WHEREAS, the country of Armenia recognizes April 24 as Genocide Remembrance Day in recognition of the government-ordered deaths of 1.5 million Armenians in 1915; and

WHEREAS, April 21, 2009 was recognized as Holocaust Remembrance Day in honor of the victims of Nazi genocide, including more than 6 million Jews and approximately 5.5 million other targeted groups including Gypsies, Poles, gays and lesbians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others; and

WHEREAS, other major acts of genocide have taken place during the past century, including but not limited to Stalin's Forced famine: (1932 -1933: 7,000,000 Ukrainian deaths); Rape of Nanking (1937 - 1938: 300,000 Chinese deaths and more than 20,000 rapes); Pol Pot Cambodia (1975-1979: 1.7 million deaths); Rwanda (1994; 800,000 Tutsis deaths); Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995: 200,000 Muslim deaths); and most recently Darfur, Sudan (2003-present; 200,000 deaths); and

WHEREAS, it is important to remember history so that mistakes of the past are not repeated for future generations; and

WHEREAS, Orange County finds it equally important to remember the atrocities committed against all peoples in the name of religious, racial and ethnic cleansing so that we may recognize the inevitable outcomes of our daily intolerance;

NOW, THEREFORE, we, the Orange County Board of Commissioners, do hereby adopt this Resolution to Foster Genocide Remembrance and encourage Orange County residents to reflect upon all acts of genocide and intolerance.

THIS THE 19th DAY OF MAY, 2009.

Valerie P. Foushee, Chair
Orange County Board of Commissioners