

AMERICAN EMBASSY*
CONSTANTINOPLE

No. 389

August 10, 1915

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

With reference to my previous despatches relative to the Armenian atrocities, I have the honor to transmit to you herewith in duplicate copy of a despatch from Consul Davis at Harput, dated June 11th, 1915, together with a copy of the testimony of a widow and a translation of a letter received from the Armenian revolutionary society "Dashnakzoutioun", dated August 2nd, 1915.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

[signed] Morgenthau

Enclosures:

- 1/ Consul Davis to Mr. Morgenthau, June 11, 1915. [*sic*, July 11, 1915].[†]
- 2/ Testimony of Widow Victoria K. Barutjibashian.
- 3/ Letter of "Dashnakzoutioun", August 2, 1915.

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/122

† See NA/RG59/867.4016/127

Enclosure No 2

Copy

TESTIMONY OF WIDOW VICTORIA KHATCHADOUR
BARUTJIBASHIAN OF BAIBOURT.*

A week before anything was done to Baibourt, the villages all around had been emptied and their inhabitants had become victims of the gendarmes and marauding bands. Three days before the starting of the Armenians from Baibourt, after a week's imprisonment, Bishop (Dzairakoun Vartabed) Der Anania Hazarabedian had been hanged, with seven other notables. After these hangings, seven or eight other notables were killed in their own houses for refusing to go out of the city. Seventy or eighty other Armenians, after being beaten in prison, were taken to the woods and killed. The Armenian population of Baibourt was sent off in three batches; I was among the third batch. My husband died eight years ago, leaving me and my eight-year-old daughter and my mother extensive possessions, so that we were living in comfort. Since mobilization began, the Merkez Commandant has been living in my house free of rent. He told me not to go, but I felt I must share the fate of my people. I took three horses with me, loaded with provisions. My daughter had some five-lira pieces around her neck, and I carried some twenty liras and four diamond rings on my person. All else that we had was left behind. Our party left June 1 (old style), fifteen gendarmes going with us. The party numbered four or five hundred persons. We had got only two hours away from home when bands of villagers and brigands in large numbers, with rifles, guns, axes, etc., surrounded us on the road, and robbed us of all we had. The gendarmes took my three horses and sold them to Turkish mouhadjirs, pocketing the money. They took my money and that from my daughter's neck, also all our food. After this they separated the men, one by one, and shot them all within six or seven days, every male above 15 years old. By my side were killed two priests, one of them over 90 years of age. These bandsmen took all the good-looking women and carried them off on their horses. Very many women and girls were thus carried off to the mountains, among them my sister, whose one-year-old baby they threw away; a Turk picked it up and carried it off, I know not where. My mother walked till she could walk no farther, and dropped by the roadside on a mountain-top. We found on the road many of those who had been in the previous sections carried from Baibourt; some women were among the killed, with their husbands and sons. We also came across some old people and little infants still alive but in a pitiful condition, having shouted their voices away. We were not allowed to sleep at night in the villages, but lay down outside. Under cover of the night indescribable deeds were committed by the gendarmes, bandsmen and villagers. Many of us died from hunger and strokes of apoplexy. Others were left by the roadside, too feeble to go on.

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/122

One morning we saw fifty to sixty wagons with about thirty Turkish widows, whose husbands had been killed in the war; and these were going to Constantinople. One of these women made a sign to one of the gendarmes to kill a certain Armenian whom she pointed out. The gendarmes asked her if she did not wish to kill him herself, at which she said "Why not?" and drawing a revolver from her pocket, shot and killed him. Each one of these Turkish hanums had five or six Armenian girls of ten or under with her. Boys the Turks never wished to take; they killed all, of whatever age. These women wanted to take my daughter, too, but she would not be separated from me. Finally we were both taken into their wagons on our promising to become Moslem. As soon as we entered the araba, they began to teach us how to be Moslems, and changed our names, calling me Nadjié and her Nourié.

The worst and most unimaginable horrors were reserved for us at the banks of the Euphrates and in the Erzingian plain. The mutilated bodies of women, girls and little children made everybody shudder. The bandsmen were doing all sorts of awful deeds to the women and girls that were with us, whose cries went up to heaven. At the Euphrates, the bandsmen and gendarmes threw into the river all the remaining children under fifteen years old. Those that could swim were shot down as they struggled in the water.

After seven days we reached Erzingian. Not an Armenian was left alive there. The Turkish women took my daughter and me to the bath, and there showed us many other women and girls that had accepted Islam. Between there and Enderes, the fields and hillsides were dotted with swollen and blackened corpses that filled and fouled the air with their stench. On this road we met six women wearing the feradje and with children in their arms. But when the gendarmes lifted their veils, they found that they were men in disguise, so they shot them. After thirty-two days' journey we reached Constantinople.

July 15/28, 1915*

NOTES

The general persecutions began on April 11/24, 1915. The resumé of the previous excesses have been communicated to the Sublime Porte, and to the German Embassy. That was done before the beginning of the arrests “en masse,” when our comrades were still free. From the above-mentioned date on, we have had news from Erzeroum until the forced migration; from Van until its occupation by the Russian army; from Mouche until May 15/28; from Sivas and from Cilicia. From that same date on, no direct news have reached us from the vilayets of Diarbekir, from Bitlis, Trebizond, Harpout and Ordou etc., nor from all the dependencies of the above mentioned provinces. So that for us too, the horrors committed in those regions these last 3-5 months remain obscure. It is owing to witnesses worth being trusted, and to some German travellers that we know a little about the dreadful catastrophe. At Diarbékir 2,000 persons (males only) were murdered, as a Swiss-German teacher coming from Aleppo reports. The whole region of Schabin-Kara-Hissar is in ruin. At Merzifoun almost all the men have been murdered in the presence of their wives and children. This we hold from an American source. And so on.

II. The disarmament, pursued with a passion for months, is one of the most senseless and defiant proceedings of the Young-Turk Government. During the first years of the Ottoman Constitution, the Committee of “Union and Progress” itself encouraged the armament of the Armenians, seeing in them the most convinced and surest partisans of the new régime. During the reactionary movement of March 31, 1909 (old style), the Ittihad appealed to the armed assistance of the Armenians, especially in the provinces, to fight the enemies of the Constitution. Moreover, the Armenians as well as all the partisans of the new régime found it absolutely necessary to carry arms on them, just for self-defence, because of the threatening growth of anti-constitutional and anti-Christian elements. Since July 10/23 1908, the Armenians never made their profit of the troubles of the Young-Turk Government. If they had had the idea of a rebellion, they could have created many pretexts, without waiting for the present general war. In spite of the fact that of the whole of the Armenian population in Turkey, scarcely 10 % have ordinary weapons, and that because of absolute necessity, the agents of the Young Turk Government proceeded to acts of horrible violence, in order to obtain the arms according to fantastic list, even before the temporary law of disarmament had been promulgated. Thus to escape a sure death many of these unhappy peasants had to buy arms immediately from their Turkish neighbors and to deliver them to the authorities as their own possession.

III. In all the regions inhabited by Armenians, the process of extermination began with the general disarmament, then followed the arrest or the deportation “en masse”

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/122

of the healthy men, and then the forced migration of the population. From all the facts already ascertained, and as the Turkish officials themselves admit, the Turkish Government had without doubt, a fixed plan for the complete annihilation of the Armenian element, ever since the discussion of the question of reforms (1913-1914). The measures which the Government has adopted since a few months aim at the nationality, the religion, the physical and moral existence of its Armenian subjects. And now all their goods are taken away from them, and even their means of livelihood, and they are sent through mountains and deserts at the mercy of barbarous hordes. Of 400 families in Kirassounde 200 in despair embraced Islamism; in Ordou 160 out of 250 families; in Arabkir almost the whole of the population. These conversions have consequences otherwise irreparable. We are informed from a good source that the converted husbands are obliged to abandon their legitimate wives, and to take Turkish wives, and vice-versa. The children too, girls or boys, are separated from their parents.

In vain do the members of the Cabinet of Said Halim Pacha declare that they are powerless to help in any way and that the whole responsibility lies on the military authorities. On the one hand they declare hypocritically that the Government has no feelings of animosity towards the Armenian people; and on the other they consider it as a “subversive element”. One needs not be very clever to understand that the exceptional and sinister policy pursued since the beginning of the war, is ordered by the Cabinet in power in conjunction with the committee “Union and Progrès”. After having conscientiously applied on the most loyal and tortured element all the measures of the military dictatorship and of the violence of the panislamic movement, to speak of responsibilities is only a way of making fun.

Daschnaktzoutioun Committee
Balkan Section
Sofia

No. V*

The Extermination of the Armenian People.

I. The Horrors of Beibourt (Report of an eye-witness.)

After eight days' imprisonment the Armenian vicar of Beibourt, Anania vartabet, and seven important personalities of the town were hanged. Seven or eight of the Armenians were murdered in their houses because they resisted the forced migration. Finally seventy other personalities, who were imprisoned, were murdered in a neighboring forest.

The forced exodus of the last part of the population took place on June 1/14. All the villages as well as 3/4 of the town had already been evacuated. An escort of fifteen gendarmes followed the third convoy which included 4-5,000 persons. The prefect of the city had wished them a pleasant journey. But at a few hours distance from the town, the caravan was surrounded by bands of the Ittihad, and by a mob of Turkish peasants armed with guns, axes and clubs. They first began plundering the deported, searching carefully even the very young children. The gendarmes sold to the Turkish peasants what they could not carry away with them. After having taken even the food of those unhappy people, the massacre of the males began, including two priests, one of whom was ninety. In six or seven days all men below 15 had been murdered. It was the beginning of the end... People on horseback raised the veils of the women, and carried off the pretty ones.

On the way, we constantly met murdered men and youths, all covered with blood. There were also women and girls killed near their husbands or sons. On the heights of the mountains and in the depths of the valleys numbers of old men and babies were lying on the ground. During the night the caravan was not allowed to stop in the villages, they had all to sleep on the ground, exposed to the unwarrantable barbarism of the Turkish bands and peasants. The poor people found themselves in the necessity of eating grass. Sometimes the gendarmes distributed them a small piece of hard bread. Many hungry people died of all that suffering.

On the way to Erzinguan 50-60 carriages were seen; they were taking 30 Turkish ladies to Constantinople; each lady was carrying five or six Armenian girls below 10 years of age with her. One of them expressed the wish of killing an Armenian; the Hanoum fired with her revolver, and one more miserable man was dead.

The Turks in devoting themselves with such frenzy to the extermination of all males, of no matter what age, were, without doubt obeying to an order.

The most horrible of scenes took place in the plain of Erzinguin, near Euphrates river. The cries of the women, girls and children made one's hair stand on end. Women, girls and children below fifteen were pushed in the river by the bands and

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/122

gendarmes. Those who tried to escape by swimming were fired upon. The river was filled with corpses.

In Erzinguian not one Armenian could be seen. But numbers of Armenian girls who had been converted were to be seen among the Turks.

From Erzinguian to Enderes, the fields, the mountains and the valleys were full of decayed corpses. On the way the gendarmes met six women with children; they were young Armenians with shaved moustaches, disguised as women. They were murdered immediately.

During our 32 days of journey from Beibourt to Constantinople we could not meet one single Armenian.

II, Persecutions in the sandjak of Ismidt.

(Extract from an official report)

Persecutions accompanied by horrible tortures have taken place in the Armenian village of Bahtchédjik or Bardizag (2,000 families) where about one hundred personalities were cruelly ill-treated in the school and the archbishopric; in Ovadjik (600 families); in Arslanbeg (600 families); in Deungel (65 families); in Sabandja, in the towns of Ada-Bazar (1,000 families) and of Ismidt etc.

The inhabitants of the village Kurt Belène (5-7,000 families) have been expelled. Most of the men were in the front. As a result of a passive resistance 20-30 persons were killed. While the unhappy peasants were waiting at a short distance from the village, the Mouhadjirs, called by the gendarmes, began plundering their houses, of which they took possession immediately. The peasants expelled at a distance of ten hours were abandoned to their fate. About ten women in rags and suffering from hunger could reach the town of Ismidt and ask for relief.

The 40-50 families of Sabandja were scattered in the Turkish villages of Adabazar, 5-10 families in each.

The 30-40 families of Ak-Hissar were expelled to Darakli (a Turkish village).

We are informed that the inhabitants of Bahtchédjik (2,000 families) in the vain hope of escaping the expulsion, have promised to pay a ransom of 1,000 Ltq., and to establish in the Armenian school an hospital for Turkish soldiers containing 100 beds. The village of Duenguel must pay 100 Ltq., Ovadjik 300 Ltq. etc. The inhabitants of Adabazar have been given the order to leave their houses within four days. The 150 inhabitants of the village of Alem Daghi (vilayet of Constantinople) 4 hours distance from Scutari have been scattered in the Circassian and Turkish villages eight hours distance from Adabazar. The priest having tried to go to church from the neighboring village for the divine office, the Mudir prevented him with these words: "We have a mosque here; you can go and pray in there."

The evacuation of Bahtchédjik has already begun, after the payment of the ransom.

III. Various News.

Arabkir: June 25 (old style) (From a private letter).

The Armenian population has been converted to Islamism, it was a means of escaping from the forced migration. Orthodox Turks are given the wives of absent husbands or their daughters. We have been told that according to an order from the Padishah everybody must embrace Islamism.

Sivas: (From an American source) After the arrest of more than 1500 men, the whole Armenian population was expelled. It will be sent to Mossoul sixty days distance. With the march of the caravans the extermination of Armenians is steadily going on. The deported are obliged to dig graves in which they are buried alive. Hundreds of them are made to perish in the rivers. At Ordou 160 families out of 250 have embraced Islamism; at Kirassunde 200 families out of 400; the others have been expelled from their homes. In Cilicia the Armenians of Tarsous and of Sis have been equally deported. We are informed that the convent of the Catholicosate of Sis has been turned into a mosque.

Since two months we have had no news from the Armenian communities expelled from Armenia, Asia Minor and Cilicia. According to information from foreign travellers almost the whole of the Armenian population of the sandjak of Shabin Kara-Hissar and its dependencies has been murdered.

We have no news from our comrades who had been sent to Diarbekir in order to be judged. The deputy Zohrab died at Ourfa.

We are informed from a very good source that all the Armenian military physicians, who have been serving in the army with so much devotion since ten months, have been arrested in a sinister aim, that is sure.

Daschnaktzoutioun Committee
Balkan Section

Sofia
August 20/2, 1915.