

AMERICAN EMBASSY\*  
CONSTANTINOPLE

No. 643

November 17, 1915

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

Referring to my despatch No. 612 of the 10th instant, I have the honor to herewith enclose the translation of a second statement made by Miss Alma Johanson, a Swedish lady connected for several years with the German Mission at Moush, regarding atrocities committed against the Armenians of which she has been an eyewitness.

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

Enclosure: as stated, in duplicate.

800.

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\* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/241

## MISS ALMA JOHANSON'S REPORT.\*

Translation.

When one first hears of the terrible cruelties committed against the Armenians during the last months, he can hardly believe the truth of those reports and then, involuntarily, asks the question: "What was the cause of it all?"

We, who were on the spot, have seen the matter develop step by step. As early as the beginning of the first mobilization, the Turks started a systematic robbery of the Armenians; they not only took from them things that were needed for the war, but everything that was of any value. Those Armenians that had any money, could save something by giving bribes to the Mudirs (Governors of towns), for whom, of course, money was the most desirable thing. (I am speaking only of those provinces in the interior where I have lived and personally witnessed things.) Everybody who was of military age was taken into the army, and those who could not pay for their exemption, including the blind, lame and sick, were all taken by the military authorities for service. On the other hand, very strong and healthy Turks were left alone, either through bribery or influential friends. Other Turks registered themselves as gendarmes of Government officials, in order to acquire the absolute right of robbing the Christian population; and those Turks who did enter the army, hoped to have still better opportunities of robbing. Not a single man went for the purpose of serving his fatherland. Rich Turks or Kurds who had not the slightest military knowledge, were made officers.

At the beginning of the war, the foodstuffs for the army had to be transported from the interior to the Russian front on people's back. Who was to do this? Why, the Armenians of course. Thus, all the Armenians, excepting the very old men and boys, and those who had paid their exemption fee, were used for that purpose. They also called the Kurds to do the same thing, but the latter always ran away.

The winter in the Moush-Bitlis-Erzeroum district is very severe and long; and it was the cause of the death of innumerable Armenians who, naked and hungry, succumbed on the roads; those of them who had any money with them to buy food, were robbed of it by the gendarmes that accompanied them. If a man was exhausted and could no longer walk, he was badly beaten by the gendarmes until he would either try to resume his march or would fall dead on the ground. Then, one of his poor companions would take off the clothes of the dead and use them for his own protection against the cold! If one third or one fourth returned of each group that was sent out, it was quite satisfactory. One would hardly consider it a sin if, under the circumstances, a man who could escape did so.

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\* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/241. For the original German text of this report see LC/PHM/Reel 22/457-474.

The Holy War was then proclaimed, and we all knew what was in store for the people. The high officials and priests delivered inflammatory speeches to the effect that all Christians ought to be massacred.

The Vali of Bitlis and the Mutessarif of Moush (the latter being a very intimate friend of Enver Pasha) stated officially in last November that they were only waiting for an opportunity, and that when they would find one, massacres would be started throughout the country and not a soul would be spared.

The Turks often said that before the arrival of the Russians they would massacre all the Christians; then the Russians might come in.

In the beginning of April, Ekran Bey, the Adjutant of Major Lange, publicly stated: "We shall exterminate the Armenian race."

What held the Turks back from a massacre was the knowledge that the Armenians were nowadays not so helpless as in the time of the previous massacres, as most of them had some sort of a weapon and the Turks admitted that they generally got the worst of it in fighting with the Armenians. I must here say that the Armenians had duly paid for the arms they had bought of Russia, same as for every other article they had bought; the charge that the Russians had supplied the Armenians with arms is untrue.

From now on circumstances grew worse and more intolerable every day. As the Government had made it known that those who refused to give anything to the soldiers would be severely punished, the soldiers took the liberty of committing such atrocious crimes in the villages that a description of those cruelties would make a very long and sad tale.

It very seldom happened that the Armenians rebelled, and those few instances were only cases where they wanted to defend their wives against the Turks, and invariably the result of such resistance was that the village was partly or entirely burned and pillaged.

Towards the beginning of April we heard of disturbances in Van. We received reports from Armenian as well as Turkish sources as to the cause of these disturbances, and the various reports agree in every respect, with the exception that the Armenians declare that the number of lives lost amount to a few thousands, whereas the Turkish officers glory in their report that they massacred all the Armenians at that place.

According to these reports it appears that the Government ordered all Armenians to give up their arms. The Turks, down to the children, were all allowed to keep their arms. The Armenians did not wish to surrender their arms. The Government sent troops there and a fight ensued. The Government then ordered the total destruction of the population of many villages. A few weeks later the Russians approached. A band of Kurds was sent to fight against the Russians, but they all joined the Russians. These Kurds now attacked the Turks in the same manner as the latter had done to the Armenians, and there ensued a regular massacre. When the Government realized that it could no longer hold the city, it gave orders to burn it. Those Turks who had

a chance to flee, did so; a great many of them arrived at Moush and related to us the facts. They admitted that the Kurds had treated them in the same way as they had treated the Christians, but they added that they had been treated so by their co-religionists!

The massacres spread as far as Bulanuch, Lis, Acklat and also to part of the vilayet of Bitlis. During the first days of May, all was ready for a massacre in Mush; and we used to hear on all sides from the Turks that only in Moush were the Armenians left alive. Meanwhile the Russians came as far as Lis, and this saved Moush for the time being, the attention of the Turks being drawn to the Russian activities.

The Government now started to send groups of Armenians loaded with food stuffs to the front, and when they arrived there, they were all put to death. Now and then one or two managed to escape and they came back and told us why their companions would not come back.

Towards the end of June 20,000 soldiers came to Mush with eleven guns and a great quantity of ammunition. The town was besieged, and everything showed clearly that it was only a question of time and that the massacres would start. During those weeks it was possible for a few to escape to Sassoun.

The Mutessarif then ordered us (two sisters) to leave for Mamuret-ul-Aziz. We begged him to permit us to remain there, as our work was in Moush; but he got terribly angry and threatened to send us away by force. We were warned by friends, however, not to leave, as the Turks had evil intentions against us. The Mutessarif promised us that we could take our employees along. When I asked him whether there was any danger for them on the way, he replied: "Nothing will happen to you; they only cut off the heads of the Armenians."

As we were both sick, our date of departure was put off to August 10th. Late in the evening, they started to shoot; it lasted several hours. It seems that some Armenians had tried to escape to the mountains and got in touch with the sentinels. The shooting stopped, but the next morning we saw the whole town in arms.

I went straight to the Mutessarif and asked him to protect our houses. He was very angry and said it served us right, as we had not left in time. He said that the Armenians would now be expelled; if they left, well; if not, the whole town would be destroyed and razed to the ground; and that it would be impossible for them to protect us against the guns. He advised us, however, to move to a Turkish quarter, where the danger from the cannon would be less. The Turks who used to live near Armenians, had left their houses long ago.

What should we now do? My companion, Sister Biörn Bodil, was in bed suffering from typhus. At noon I once more went out to request the assistance of a few men to bring an ox cart for Sister Bodil. The Mutessarif had just then with him the leading Armenians of the city and was telling them that the whole population should leave within three days; that if they wished, they could leave the women there, but that whatever they possessed, whether they took it along or abandoned there, would belong to the Government. Only the rich people agreed to leave. They thought that

they could at least preserve their lives with money. The Mutessarif now told me that we could stay where we were. They gave three days time to the Armenians, but hardly two or three hours had passed when the gendarmes and the soldiers entered the houses by force and seized them. A few women and children came to take refuge in the Orphanage. Those Armenians who were still in town said, however, that as the Government would seize all their property, it meant their ruin and death, so they desired to die all together in their homes.

On Monday, August 12th, very early in the morning, when some soldiers wanted to enter a house by force, the Armenians defended themselves and fired a few shots; thereupon the cannon roared. Besides the 20,000 soldiers, every Turk in Mush was armed and took part in the massacre—at least in shooting. The Armenians fired back from their houses, only in cases where the soldiers wanted to enter by force, and in those houses there were only but males.

I do not intend to describe you a siege. We often did not know where to hide ourselves; from all sides, neighbors were able to shoot into our windows; during the nights, it was still worse. The sick nurse and myself lay on the floor in order to avoid the shots. The walls of the orphanage were broken through by cannon shots. I was obliged to leave the orphans all alone as my companion was ill. Towards the evening of that day, the outer gate of our orphanage was broken down. I went down and inquired of them what they wanted. The Commander, Ismail Bey, demanded that I open the house as they were searching for fugitives. I assured him we had no fugitives with us. (There were only a few of our village teachers who had come to us the evening before and who did not dare to go out into the streets when the shooting started. Who would have ventured to go out then? I could not consider them as fugitives.)

The Commander insisted that I should let them in, as otherwise they would also break open the main door. Having no alternative, I opened the door and let them in. They searched the whole house, opened every cupboard. The village teachers were carried off; but we were assured that nothing would happen to them. Before they left, however, they shot down a woman and a big girl. On the third day a few soldiers and men returned; one would think that they were in search of some wonderful enemy. They came with an order from the Government that we were to hand over to them all our people in the house, big or small. All my requests and petitions were in vain; they assured us on their word of honor that they would be provided with comforts and sent to Ourfa. I then went to appeal to the Mutessarif. He stood as First Commander by the side of a cannon. He would not even listen to me; he had become a perfect monster. When I pleaded with him to at least spare the children, he replied: "You cannot expect the Armenian children to remain alone with the Mohammedans; they must leave with their nation." We were allowed to only retain three girls as servants.

I cannot tell you how I could reach my home and how I managed to see the poor people go off without anything whatsoever; not even five paras were they allowed to

have with them. I was afraid they would die on the way from sickness and starvation, and never thought that they would be murdered so soon. I was aware that there was no way out for the men.

It was that very afternoon that I received the first terrible reports, but I did not fully believe them. A few millers and bakers, whose services were needed by the Government, had remained and they received the news first. The men had all been tied together and shot outside of the town. The women and children were taken to the neighboring villages, placed in houses by hundred, and either burned alive or thrown into the river. (Our buildings being in the main quarter of the town we could receive the news quite promptly.) Furthermore, one could see women and children pass by with blood streaming down, weeping,..... Who can describe such pictures? Add to all this the sight of burning houses and the smell of many burning corpses.

Within a week everything was nearly over. The officers boasted now of their bravery that they had succeeded in exterminating the whole Armenian race. Three weeks later when we left Moush, the villages were still burning. Nothing that belonged to the Armenians, either in the city or the villages, was allowed to remain.

In Moush alone, there were 25,000 Armenians. Besides, Moush had 300 villages with a large Armenian population.

We left for Mezreh as soon as Sister Bodil had sufficiently recovered. The soldiers that accompanied us showed us with pride where and how and how many women and children they had killed.

We were very pleased to see upon our arrival at Harput that the orphanages were full. This was, however, all that could be said. Mamouret-ul-Aziz has become the cemetery of all the Armenians; all the Armenians from the various vilayets were sent there, and those that had not died on the way, came there simply to find their graves.

Another terrible thing in Mamuret-ul-Aziz was the tortures to which the people had been subjected for two months; and they had generally treated so harshly the families of the better class. Feet, hands, chests were nailed to a piece of wood; nails of fingers and toes were torn out; beards and eyebrows pulled out; feet were hammered with nails, same as they do with horses; others were hung with their feet up and heads down over closets... Oh! How one would wish that all these facts were not true! In order that people outside might not hear the screams of agony of the poor victims, men stood around the prison wherein these atrocities were committed, with drums and whistles.

On July 1st, the first 2,000 were despatched from Harput. They were soldiers, and it was rumored that they would build roads. People became frightened. Whereupon the Vali called the German missionary Mr. Eheman and begged him to quiet the people; he was so very sorry that they all had such fears etc. etc. They had hardly been away for a day, when they were all killed in a mountain pass. They were bound together and when the Kurds and soldiers started to shoot at them, some managed to escape in the dark. The next day another 2,000 were sent in the direction of Diarbekir. Among those deported were several of our orphans (boys) who had been

working for the Government all the year round. Even the wives of the Kurds came with their knives and murdered the Armenians. Some of the later succeeded in fleeing. When the Government heard that some Armenians managed to escape, they left those who were to be deported, without food for two days, in order that they be too weak to be able to flee.

On July 5th, 6,000 families of the best class (some women and children of these families could reach Ourfa) were deported.

On July 6th, 1,300.

Then again, all the righ [sic] Catholic Armenians, together with their Archbishop, were murdered in the valley of Göljik.

Up to now there still remained a number of tradesmen whom the Government needed and therefore had not deported; now these too were ordered to leave and murdered.

It was about the time of Bairam when the American Consul, together with Mr. Eheman and an Austrian, came to the Vali and begged him to telegraph to Constantinople and request to have mercy on the remaining Armenians. He agreed to it. It was arranged to get up the text with the Chief of Police. The latter insisted on having the telegram worded as follows: "The guilty are gone" etc. etc. He wanted thus to describe those thousands and thousands of deported people as "guilty," while in reality they were absolutely innocent. Thereupon, the gentlemen said that it would be better if the remaining few Armenians also died rather than misrepresenting the truth.

When Warsaw fell they celebrated the event by deporting all the cripples and lame people.

During this time the women and children that were left over, began to come from the regions of Keghi, Erzeroum, Erzingen, Samsoun, Trebizond, etc. The stories that they related cannot be put down; one would prefer to be killed at once rather than to be exposed to such terrible treatment. In Harput almost every Turk has taken an Armenian woman.

Now that all the people had been sent away, an order was received exempting Protestants and Catholics from deportation. Some people who had been able to hide themselves showed up. The officials now worked with all their might to convert the remaining Armenians into Mohammedanism. The Armenians were forced to submit petitions requesting to become Mohammedans; and they did it for the sake of their wives and children.

On our way to Constantinople we met caravans consisting of women and children; no young women or girls were, however, to be seen among them. The others will be maltreated until they die.

This is the awakening of Islam. They have executed their plan with a diabolical cleverness. Many a time one would hear them say: "Now let your Christ help you." etc. etc. Not rarely were Armenians crucified in the villages.

And they say: “Germany has ordered all this; we can hardly stand this, but what can we do; we cannot help being on bad terms with Germany!”

There are still a few thousands alive, and to them our care should be devoted. We must not take upon ourselves the shame that we have allowed a whole nation to be exterminated. We cannot call it a nation anymore; it is a remnant of a nation.

May the Lord have mercy on them.