

AMERICAN EMBASSY\*  
CONSTANTINOPLE

No. 2085

October 31, 1916

**CONFIDENTIAL**

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

With reference to my telegram No. 2186 of October 17, 1916, concerning Armenian affairs, I have the honor to transmit herewith the report from the Consul at Aleppo upon which this telegram was largely based, in connection with other information received by the Embassy.

The name of the author of the report submitted to Mr. Jackson should be kept absolutely secret, as his life would be in very serious danger if his name should be divulged. It would also be well to refrain from the slightest reference to his identity.

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

[signed] Abram I. Elkus

Enclosure:

Copy of despatch No. 754, dated Sept. 21, with enclosure.

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\* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/302

COPY\*

No. 754

American Consulate, Aleppo, Syria,  
September 21, 1916.

The Honorable  
Hoffman Philip,  
Chargé d'Affaires,  
American Embassy,  
Constantinople, Turkey.

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith a report under date of September 10, 1916, addressed to this Consulate by Mr. Auguste Bernau, Aleppo Agent of the Vacuum Oil Company of New York, describing the conditions he encountered between Aleppo and Der-el-Zor in regard to the Armenians deported from various parts of Turkey and now found in those parts, and which report is self-explanatory.

Mr. Bernau's mission consisted in distributing relief to these unfortunate people, and the success thereof may be judged when I say that he was able to give to the most needy a sum amounting to nearly Ltq. 3,000.00. The money was paid to groups according to the number and existing condition of each, receipts having been taken in each instance, and which are shown in the account of this office with Mr. Peet.

It must be added that the distribution of relief charged to this Consulate by the Embassy is conducted under the most trying circumstances, as the authorities are never in accord therewith, and have even objected most strenuously to such action on the part of anyone. Heretofore the funds have been paid to Miss Beatrice Rohner, who has undertaken the distribution, but after several of her aides had been arrested, and, as I am informed, some of them imprisoned and perhaps suffered worse ends, as no news can be had of them, Miss Rohner decided to retire therefrom, at least temporarily, and has gone to Marash for a rest. In the meantime all the work connected therewith has fallen to myself. The chief Turkish authority expressed his unalterable opposition to the giving of relief to the deported Armenians, and I am expecting daily a serious rupture over the matter. However, as I have no doubt been able to save the lives of many thousands of these victims up to the present, I can see no other way than to continue, even in the face of disastrous results to myself. If I succeed, well and good. Otherwise, I shall have to stand the consequences. As long as

\* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/302

the Embassy continues to furnish the funds everything possible will be done to bring relief to the greatest number possible, with the hope that sooner or later conditions will change for the better. It seems that possibly the Embassy might have instructions sent to the local authorities to permit us to work without menace or interference, so that we can save at least a small amount of the afflicted race.

Mr. Bernau left again today over the same route as far as Hammam and Rakka, for the same purpose, a report on which I shall not fail to forward at first opportunity.

Kindly bring this to the attention of Mr. Peet.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(signed) J. B. Jackson

Consul

Enclosure:

Copy of report, as stated.

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Aleppo, September 10, 1916

Jesse B. Jackson, Esquire  
American Consul,  
Aleppo.

Dear Mr. Consul:

I was entrusted by you to go and visit the Armenian encampments all along the Euphrates, Meskene and Der-i-Zor and to give you an account of the state in which the deported Armenians are found in those localities, their present condition and if possible the approximate number of these unfortunate exiles.

The above-mentioned is the subject of the present report which I take the liberty to send you, Mr. Consul, asking you at the same time to kindly take unto consideration my conclusions in the latter part of the report, which conclusions only can in a small way, alas, lighten the suffering which a race on the point of disappearing is enduring daily.

It is impossible to give an account of the impression of horror which my journey across the Armenian encampments scattered all along the Euphrates has given me; especially those on the right bank between Meskene and Der-i-Zor. These can hardly be called encampments, because of the fact that the majority of these unfortunate people, brutally dragged out of their native land, of their homes and of their families, robbed of their effects upon their departure or en route, are penned up in the open like cattle, without shelter, almost no clothing, fed barely by food altogether insufficient.

Exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather, in summer to the torrid sun of the desert, in winter to the rain and cold, enfeebled already by privations, and the long marches, the bad treatment, the most severe tortures and the daily pangs of death, the less feeble have succeeded in digging holes for them on the banks of the river.

Those who have succeeded—who are very rare—to save from the flood some clothing, some cloth for tents and a little money to procure some flour, if they can find it, are to be counted as lucky persons. Also if they can find watermelons from the peasants of the neighborhood or some sick goat from the nomads at the price of gold. Everywhere you see emaciated and wan faces, wandering skeletons, lurking for all kinds of diseases and victim moreover to hunger.

The management which has been entrusted to transport these people through the desert has no intention to feed them. Even it appears that it is a governmental principle

\* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/302

to allow them to die of hunger. An organized massacre, even in the times of liberty, equality and fraternity were not proclaimed by the Constitution would have been more humane. It would at least have spared these miserable people the horrors of hunger and death in small doses in the worse tortures, in refined methods of torments worthy of Mongolians. But a massacre would have been less Constitutional!!!!!! Civilization is safe.

The remainder of the Armenian nation disseminated on the border of the Euphrates is composed of aged people, of women and children. The middle aged and young men, who have not as yet been massacred, are scattered on the roads of the Empire where they break stones requisitioned for the needs of the army, and are occupied in works for the State.

The young girls, often even very young ones, have become the booty of the Musulmans. They have been captured all along the road of emigration, occasionally violated and sold, if not killed by the gendarmes who conduct the sad caravans, have been thrown into the harems or into the domesticity of their executioners.

As on the gates of "Hell" of Dante, the following should be written at the entrance of these accursed encampments: "You who enter, leave all hopes." Mounted gendarmes make rounds with orders to arrest and flog fugitives. The roads are well guarded! And what roads! They lead to the desert, where death is as sure as under the bastinade of the guards of the Ottoman convict gangs. I have met in the desert at different places six of these fugitives abandoned dying by the gendarmes and surrounded by hungry dogs waiting for their last hiccups of agony to jump on and feast on them.

In fact you meet all along the road from Meskene to Der-i-Zor graves containing the remains of unfortunate Armenians abandoned and dead in atrocious suffering. It is by the hundreds that these mounds are numbered where sleep anonymously in their last sleep these outcasts of existence, these victims of barbarity without qualification.

Prevented, on one side, from going away from the encampments to find means of subsistence, the deported Armenians cannot on the other hand exercise their faculty so natural to men, and especially to the Armenian race, to adapt itself to the misfortune and to apply its ingenuity to diminish the amount of its hardships.

Some shelter could be constructed such as a hut or shed of earth, to try at some farming, if at least they had homes to remain where they are. Even this hope is refused to them. They wait any moment to be obliged to change their place of torture and then begin new forced marches without bread and water, under the blows of the horsewhip, new sufferings, bad treatments worthy of slave dealers of Soudan, and victims all along the road of this abominable calvary.

Those who have some money left are incessantly exploited by their guards, who under threats of sending them further on, take from them gradually their last resources, and when these resources are exhausted, they put these threats into execution.

All that I have seen and heard surpasses all imagination. Speaking of "thousand

and one horrors” is very little in this case, I thought I was passing through a part of hell. The few events, which I will relate, taken here and there hastily, give but a weak idea of the lamentable and horrifying tableau. The same scenes repeat in the different localities through which I have passed, everywhere it is the same Governmental barbarism which aims at the systematic annihilation through starvation of the survivors of the Armenian nation in Turkey, everywhere the same bestial inhumanity on the part of these executioners and the same tortures undergone by these victims all along the Euphrates from Meskene to Der-i-Zor.

Meskene, through its geographical position on the border between Syria and Mesopotamia, is the natural point of concentration of the deported Armenians coming from the vilayets of Anatolia and sent afterwards all along the Euphrates. They arrive there by the thousands, but the majority leave there their bones. The impression which this immense and dismal plain of Meskene leaves is sad and pitiable. Information obtained on the spot permit me to state that nearly 60,000 Armenians are buried there, carried off by hunger, by privations of all sorts, by intestinal diseases and typhus which is the result. As far as the eye can reach mounds are seen containing 200 to 300 corpses buried in the ground *pele mele*, women, children and old people belonging to different families.

At present, nearly 4,500 Armenians are kept between the town of Meskene and the Euphrates. These are but living fountains. Their superintendents distribute to them sparingly and very irregularly a piece of bread. Sometimes three or four days pass when these famished people who have nothing to eat but this piece of bread, receive absolutely nothing.

A dreadful dysentery makes numerous victims among them, especially among the children. These latter fall ravenously upon all that come under their hands, they eat herbs, earth and even their excrement.

I saw, under a tent of five or six square meters, about 450 orphans *pele mele* in dirt and vermin. These poor children receive 150 grams of bread a day, sometimes and this is more often the case, they remain two days without eating anything. Also death makes among them cruel ravages. This tent was sheltering 450 victims while I was passing through. Eight days afterwards during my return, intestinal disease had carried off seventeen of them.

Abou Herrera is a small locality north of Meskene on the bank of the Euphrates. It is the most complete desert. On a small hill 200 meters from the river are confined 240 Armenians under the surveillance of two gendarmes without pity, who leave them to die of hunger in the most atrocious sufferings. The scenes which I witnessed surpass all horrors. Near the place where the carriage stops, women who had not seen me arriving, were searching in the dung of horses barley seeds not yet digested to feed on. I gave them some bread. They threw themselves on it like dogs dying of hunger, took it voraciously into their mouths with hiccups and epileptic tremblings. Instantly, informed by one of them, 240 persons or rather hungry wolves, who had nothing to eat for seven days, precipitated themselves towards me from the hill,

extending their emaciated arms, imploring with tears and cries a piece of bread. It was mostly women, children and about a dozen old people.

On my return, I brought them bread and was during three quarters of an hour the pitying but unfortunately powerless spectator of a rapacious fight for a piece of bread such as savage famished beasts would exhibit.

Hammam is a small village where are kept 1,600 Armenians. Every day the same scene of hunger and horrors. The men are taken as workmen, roadmen and diggers. They receive as wages a piece of bread which cannot be digested and which is insufficient to give them the force necessary for their exhausting work.

In this place I met some families who have still some money and who can live miserably; but the majority lie on the bare ground, without shelter, feeding on watermelons, the most unfortunate of them satisfying themselves with gnawing the skin thrown away by the others. The mortality is very high, especially among the children.

Rekka, a fairly important town, situated on the left bank of the Euphrates, 5 to 6,000 Armenians, mostly women and children, are scattered in the different quarters of the town, and live in groups of from 50 to 60 in houses which the kindness of the governor has procured for the most poor. Merit must be recognized wherever it is found, and that which would have been the strict duty in normal times of an Ottoman official towards Ottoman subjects, can be counted as generosity and even heroism in the present circumstances.

Although the Armenians of Rekka are treated better than at other places, their misery is terrible. Flour is very irregularly distributed to them by the authorities and in insufficient quantities; every day you see women and children in front of bakeries begging for some flour and asking charity in the streets by the hundreds from the inhabitants. Always the horrible fantom of hunger. When one realizes that among these famished common people there are persons who have occupied high social positions, it is easy to imagine the tortures, especially moral, which these unfortunate people undergo, yesterday rich and envied, today begging like the most miserable for a vile piece of bread.

On the right border of the Euphrates, opposite Rekka are found nearly one thousand famished Armenians, living under tents and guarded by soldiers. They wait to be transferred to other parts of the country to doubtless fill the gaps made by death in other encampments. And how many of them will arrive at their destination!

Zierrat is north of Rekka, nearly 1,800 Armenians are encamped there, they suffer more than anywhere else of hunger, because Zierrat is altogether desert. Groups of men and children are seen there wandering about on the border of the river, looking for herbs to relieve their hunger and others who fall dead from exhaustion under the un pitying eyes of their guards, whose chief, a barbarous person in the full sense of the word, forbids anybody to pass the limits of the encampment, without special authorization, under penalty of bastinado.

Sebga, small village where a group of 250 to 300 Armenians live as miserably and as famished as in other places.

Der-i-Zor, headquarters of the independent governorship (mutessarifate) of the same name. Some months ago, 30,000 Armenians were installed in encampments on the outskirts of the city, under the protection of the Governor, Ali Souad Bey. Although I do not want to make personal remarks, I would not want to pass silently the name of this man of heart, of whom the immigrants had to congratulate themselves and who tried to alleviate their misfortunes. A certain number of them had even begun a small commerce and were feeling happy to remain there. This proves very well that if reasons of State demanded—let us suppose—the deportation in mass of Armenians for the preventive settlement of the Armenian Question (?) at least the authorities could have acted humanely and also in the interest of the Ottoman Empire, in transporting the Armenians in cities where they could give themselves to commerce or exercise their professions, or by removing them to lands which can be cultivated, as the necessity of labor is felt so keenly at the present moment. But if it was intended to suppress the race in order to eliminate at the same time the Armenian Question, the aim would doubtless not have been attained.

Again the comparative favor(?) that the Armenians were enjoying at Der-i-Zor was denounced to higher authorities, the guilty, Ali Souad Bey, was transferred to Bagdad and replaced by Zekki Bey, notorious for inhuman acts and barbarism. They have related to me appalling things about this new Mutessarif (Governor) at Der-i-Zor. The prison, tortures, bastinade and hanging were at one time the daily bread of this small town. The girls were violated and given to the Arabs for their pleasure or domestic use, the children drowned in the river, neither weakness nor innocence were spared.

The distinguished Ali Souad Bey had gathered about one thousand orphans in a large house and was looking after their subsistence at the expense of the town, his successor threw them out of the house, the majority of them died in the streets like dogs, of hunger, of all sorts of privations and from assaults.

Furthermore, the 30,000 Armenians who were at Der-i-Zor were cruelly expelled all along the Chabour, flowing into the Euphrates; that is, to the most desert like region of the country, where it is absolutely impossible for them to find anything for their subsistence. According to information obtained by me at Der-i-Zor, a great number of these are already dead and the rest will soon follow them.

Conclusion: I believe there are some 15,000 Armenians scattered about all along the Euphrates between Meskene and Der-i-Zor, passing through Rekka. As I have already said, these unfortunate people, abandoned, ill-treated by the authorities, put in an impossible position to provide for their food, are gradually dying of hunger. Winter is approaching; cold and dampness will add their ravages to that of famine. They can always find something to eat—although very dear, if they have the money to pay for it. Doubtless, there are many obstacles to sending money, of which the principal is the ill will of the authorities; but one could nevertheless, through indirect

ways, succeed in transmitting to them pecuniary assistance which might be divided among the various encampments for an equitable and sufficient distribution of flour.

If these funds are not sent, these unfortunate people are doomed; if, on the contrary the funds are fairly substantial, it is believed that many among them can survive until peace is concluded which will decide their fate.

I think, Mr. Consul, I have said enough regarding this forsaken wreck of humanity so that immediate measures be taken for the purpose of giving them assistance, and under the impression that my weak voice will be heard and bring results I close my report and beg you to accept the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments.

(Signed) A. BERNAU

Enclosures:

Separate complete lists of Armenians in the localities indicated above. The list of Armenians at Rekka and a part of those at Meskene are missing as I could not obtain from them for reasons beyond my control.\*

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\* List not in file.

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December 21, 1916

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Dr. James L. Barton,  
Chairman, American Committee for  
Armenian and Syrian Relief,  
14 Beacon Street,  
Boston, Massachusetts.

Sir:

There is herewith enclosed to you, for your confidential information, a report addressed to the American Consul at Aleppo by Mr. Auguste Bernau, describing conditions encountered between Aleppo and Der-el-Zor, in regard to Armenians deported from various parts of Turkey and now found in these parts.

The copy of this report is sent to you to aid in the work of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, and should not be made public.

I am, Sir,  
Your obedient servant,

For the Secretary of State:  
[Stamped] ALVEY A. ADEE  
Second Assistant Secretary

Enclosure:

Copy of report with No. 2085, from Constantinople, of October 31, 1916  
867.4016/302 3 AHP\*JWB

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\* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/302