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The month of April is the first full month of spring, a time of renewal and rebirth. The month has a starkly different meaning as well, as April 24 is the symbolic date for the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

More than 1.5 Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Turkish Empire in the period of 1915-1923, representing nearly 70% of the pre-World War I population of Armenians. The land on which the Armenians had lived for more than three millennia was emptied of Armenians and those who survived were permanently exiled.

Each April 24 Armenians gather throughout the world to solemnly remember their losses, at sites such as the Martyrs Monument in Yerevan, Armenia, where hundreds of thousands walk silently to the memorial to place flowers or in places such as Fresno where the local community holds commemorative events.

This year marks the 95th anniversary of the Genocide. Soon there will be no survivors who are still alive; only their descendants will be alive to remember.

Armenians seek affirmation of the terrible events of 1915 and recognition from the world for the first genocide of the 20th century. Armenians especially demand recognition of the Genocide by Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, at whose hands the Armenian suffered. They seek restitution from Turkey for the lives lost, for the loss of homes and livelihood, and for the lands occupied.

Turkey, however, has followed a policy of active denial of the Genocide, to the extent that within the country it is a crime to openly discuss the Genocide, considering it an “insult to Turkishness.”

Genocide is not an issue of interest only to Armenians. In a 20th century remembered for its world wars, regional conflicts, and other genocides, human beings throughout the world are struggling to prevent a repeat of these tragic events. One way to ensure that such acts do not again take place is to bring perpetrators to a swift and sure prosecution and punishment. Without such a deterrent, it is difficult to see how Genocide could be averted in the future.

The 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United States and by Turkey, defines the crime of Genocide, stating clearly that there is no statute of limitations for prosecution, and providing a mechanism for punishment of the perpetrators. The Armenian case meets the United Nations criteria for genocide and is a model for successive acts of genocide.

For those who believe that justice is a right enjoyed by each citizen of the world, the campaign for recognition is a duty, rather than a passing fancy.

Successive presidents since Ronald Reagan have opposed efforts for Genocide recognition by Congress. Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, all publicly pledged to support recognition as candidates, but reneged on their promises after inauguration.

The truth is a powerful antidote to such political expediency. American diplomats such as Henry Morgenthau and Leslie Davis eloquently documented the Genocide and

the archives of England, France, Russia, and Turkey contain ample historical evidence supporting the genocide.

Our great country was founded on principles of equality and justice and so the U. S. should take the lead in pushing for genocide recognition, as an important international human rights issue and because it is the right thing to do.

On this anniversary, Armenians will continue their struggle for human dignity and the belief that people should never again be subject to genocide. We can make our voices heard by contacting local and national representatives and reiterating that genocide recognition is an issue of national and international importance.

The U. S. has a long tradition of world leadership in the pursuit of human rights and must also demonstrate political will at home, becoming a champion of justice and acknowledging the Armenian genocide.