

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE** [6.33 p.m.]: Today the New South Wales Legislative Council unanimously agreed to my motion that recognised the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides. In remembering these events we do not seek to apportion blame. This is a matter of history and history must be neither erased nor forgotten. We must remember and speak the truth. New South Wales was recently visited by world-renowned scholar Professor Taner Akcam, whom I met. He had previously been in Turkey. Professor Akcam said:

We must create a global awareness of genocides and their prevention. Genocide denial and the struggle against it are part of global democracy and human rights ... Recognition is an issue relevant to all of humanity.

Anzacs from New South Wales were eyewitnesses to the genocides. Anzacs rescued survivors of the massacres and deportations across the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1918. People of our great State donated generously to save the lives of those who had reached sanctuary in Greece, French Syria, British Iraq and British Palestine. The stories of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides are a part of the Australian story and they deserve their rightful place in that narrative.

The genocide of the indigenous peoples of the Ottoman Empire that took place during World War I and its aftermath is a historical event. The victims of this criminal act were the indigenous peoples of the Ottoman Empire: Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians. Many members of this Chamber have substantial numbers of Australian Assyrian, Australian Greek and Australian Armenian people in their communities. Hundreds of thousands of them have made their homes in New South Wales over the past two centuries. All of these groups suffered at the hands of the government of the Ottoman Empire.

As early as 1910 plans were formulated and published for the elimination of the indigenous Christians of the Ottoman Empire as part of the government's efforts to homogenise its population. Those documents, and millions more like them, are

available today. They demonstrate the intention of the Ottoman government of the time. There was a determination on the part of Ottoman politicians to eliminate non-Turkish identities. With the outbreak of the war their plans began to be implemented. When the Anzacs landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula there were Greek people living there tilling the soil and fishing the waters. There were also Turkish tax collectors, police and soldiers. The non-Turks are the people who were deported. These are the people who were massacred during World War I and after. International reaction was immediate to what British Secretary of the Admiralty Winston Churchill labelled an "administrative holocaust". Relief committees sprang up all over the world. A Joint Allied Declaration issued on 24 May 1915 stated:

In view of these new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization, the Allied governments announce publicly ... that they will hold personally responsible ... all members of the Ottoman government and those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres.

When the Anzacs left the Gallipoli Peninsula they left behind hundreds of prisoners of war—men such as Sydney-born Private Frederick Ashton of the 11th Battalion AIF and Bourke-born Petty Officer Cecil Arthur Bray of HMAS A.E.2 RAN. The Anzac prisoners of war went through a series of prisoner of war camps, typically being marched from one to another on bread and water rations in bitter cold or blistering heat. While Ashton, Bray and many of their comrades were eventually released, more than 60 other Anzac prisoners perished from a combination of exposure, disease, malnutrition and exhaustion.

A small number of Anzacs became rescuers, saving the lives of those who had survived the massacres and deportations. Most famous of these are the men of the Dunsterforce. Australian officers in this unit, including Captains R.H. Hooper, Andre Judge and Stanley Savige, have left a legacy of written and photographic records of their rescue of some 40,000 Assyrians and Armenians in the mountains of north-west Iran and eastern Iraq in the summer of 1918. In response to the needs of destitute survivors scattered across the Near East, committees of the Armenian Relief Fund and Save the Children Fund emerged in Sydney and Melbourne between 1915 and 1919. Among the leading lights of this movement were Sydney Lord Mayor J. Joynton Smith and many other leading citizens. It was a truly national effort, with New South Wales at its heart.

I am indebted to the research of Dr Diamadis and Mr Vicken Babkenian, Directors of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Their pioneering efforts

have provided the evidence of these genocides. The truth of the genocides—the truth of what happened to the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek peoples—is in the records of our Australian servicemen. We should remember and learn from such dark chapters in human history. In the same spirit, we can secure recognition of a genocide which is still very real and very heartfelt by the Australian Assyrian community, the Australian Greek community and the Australian Armenian community today. Lest we forget.