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Background – the Armenian Genocide: Though the Ottoman Empire, throughout its long history, had had a generally good track record with regard to human rights (long-standing tolerance of its Jewish and Christian populations), the pressures of the world war and the rise of modern nationalism led to the worst kind of wartime abuse: genocide. Since the rise of nationalism, there had been tensions between the Ottoman government and the Armenian population, and sporadic persecutions of Armenians had occurred since the late 19th century. With the pressure of a world war, some members of the Ottoman government looked at the Armenians with increased distrust. After all, many Armenians lived near the Russian border (a combat zone), and because both Armenians and Russians were Christians, the Ottomans suspected that the Armenians might ally with the enemy of the Ottoman state. In 1915 Ottoman forces began rounding up Armenians, especially in the eastern part of the country. Between 1 and 1 ½ million Armenian men, women, and children died – either killed directly or marched across eastern Turkey and into the Syrian desert, where they died of disease and starvation. This is considered the first modern genocide in world history; unfortunately, it would not be the last.

Here is an early account of the Ottoman persecution of Armenians and the effects on survivors:

“Turkish Outrages in Armenia.” *The Times* (London). 15 Oct. 1915: p. 7.

Bishop Bagra, writing from Etchmiadzin, states that great quantities of refugees have arrived there and at other points of the Government of Erivan.In all 160,000 refugees passed through Igdir and Etchmiadzin. Their pitiful condition is indescribable, and it is reported that the daily mortality is about 100 deaths due to famine and disease, chiefly dysentery and typhus.

The needs of the refugees were at first attended to by the Committee of the Etchmindzin Brotherhood, who distributed bread, opened hospitals, and an asylum for 3,000 children. The transport of the sick and feeble picked up along the line of march was also undertaken by this brotherhood.

The Moscow Armenian Committee subsequently sent their medical provisioning detachment to organize a proper system of relief. ...[People from various areas came to help.] But the needs of the refugees are very great. There is urgent need of doctors and nurses in considerable numbers, and medicines, flour, sugar, tea, and other foodstuffs and cloting in large quantities are required.

Mr. Consul Stevens adds that about 9,000 refugees at Elenovka and Ahti are in no better condition than the refugees in the Government of Erivan, and have great need of medical attention. It seems inevitable that half the refugees must die unless this help is quickly forthcoming.