

ASSEMBLY OF THE ARMENIANS OF WESTERN ARMENIA

Item 5: Study and advice on the right to health and indigenous peoples, with a focus on children and youth

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Since this is the first time that I am speaking, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your nomination!

The devchirmé (in Turkish *devşirme* and in Ottoman Turkish *دوشیرمه*), literally “the harvest”, also known as the “blood tax”² or the “blood tribute”, was, in the Ottoman Empire, the annual forced recruiting system carried out by the Sultan’s armies.

It consisted of commandeering boys aged 8 to 18 from among the Armenian populations. Once they were “harvested”, the boys were sent to Constantinople, converted to Islam to be raised as Muslim Turks and to be trained to occupy civil or military positions in the Empire, especially within the Janissaries (from the Turkish *Yeni Çeri*; the “new troop”).

Established by Murad I in the second half of the 14th Century to counterbalance the growing power of the Turkish nobility in the administration and in the Ottoman army, this system of slavery – even though it was in contradiction of Islamic law – was pursued up to the beginning of the 19th Century during the reign of Mahmoud II.

The Genocide of the Armenians - From 1894 to 1923, after having failed in their attempts to integrate or assimilate the Armenian child populations, successive Turkish governments initiated several plans for the systematic destruction of the indigenous Armenian People in Western Armenia.

A nation of orphans in Western Armenia - As a result, more than two million Armenians became victims of these extinction plans, and hundreds of thousands of orphans wandered in the deserts of Syria and Mesopotamia, forming an orphan nation, one part of which took refuge in exile, and another part in the mountains of Western Armenia.

To survive and sustain their very existence, this orphan nation submitted to all of the humiliations and all of the conversions. The Armenian educational system consisted of thousands of elementary and secondary schools, since destroyed, as well as boarding schools and orphanages.

Yet even today, among the Armenian populations in the regions of Hakkari, Silopi, Cizre, Nusaybin or Dikranagert, indigenous women and children are subjected to violence and crimes committed by agents of the State (such as the armed forces).

In the particular case of the indigenous Armenian populations, as well as in a more general sense, a specific mechanism for prevention and reparation should be offered for the populations whose children have suffered from crimes against humanity with respect to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, in its General Assembly Resolution 260 A (III) of December 9, 1948. In accordance with Article 7.2 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, indigenous peoples [...] shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.

This mechanism for prevention and reparation, having as its basis objective statistics, studies and research (information on this topic is not abundant) would be a solid and truthful foundation that would allow the necessary measures to be taken to train personnel in indigenous health and enable indigenous health practitioners in order to integrate them into indigenous health networks, including psychological monitoring of victims, with respect to the application of the right to health.

As long as a genocide is not resolved, it will continue over time !

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (4 min)

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