



## Hansard Transcript

May 9, 2019

42nd Parliament, 1st Session

### Private Members' Public Business

#### **Genocide Awareness, Commemoration, Prevention and Education Month Act, 2019 / Loi de 2019 sur le Mois de la sensibilisation, de la commémoration, de la prévention et de l'éducation à l'égard des génocides**

Mr. Babikian moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to proclaim Genocide Awareness, Commemoration, Prevention and Education Month / Projet de loi 97, Loi proclamant le Mois de la sensibilisation, de la commémoration, de la prévention et de l'éducation à l'égard des génocides.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am humbled to stand in this august chamber this afternoon as a descendant of an Armenian genocide survivor to lead the debate on Bill 97.

Before I do that, I would like to welcome delegates from 40 civil society organizations representing 11 different ethnic and religious communities in Ontario. They are all in the gallery here, and I'm going to mention their names a little bit later in the debate.

Madam Speaker, genocide is a deliberate act to eradicate a group with a common religious, ethnic or national origin. It is a crime against humanity which poses a threat to mankind. Dehumanization of the victims precedes, accompanies and follows such crimes. According to Helen Fein, a pre-eminent Holocaust and genocide scholar, it is estimated 38.6 million people were killed in the 20th century as a result of genocide. Additionally, 130 million people have been killed as a result of politicized mass killings, starvation, forced labour and concentration camps. Denial of these crimes further injures the traumatized survivors and their descendants.

Ontario and Canada are recognized as world-leading champions of human rights. Genocide has touched the lives of many communities and families in our province. Furthermore, a large number of survivors and descendants call this great province home. I believe Bill 97 will help these families and communities to overcome the trauma they have suffered as a result of genocide, in addition to providing a way to find healing and closure to the victims and their descendants.

This bill will also be an important tool for future generations to learn from the mistakes of the past so that we can prevent such crimes from happening ever again.

Madam Speaker, I cannot stand in this chamber and speak about this bill without recalling the horrors and the atrocities committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria during the summer of 2014. At the time, the world watched helplessly as Yazidi women and children were taken hostage and were sold in slave markets.

Nadia Murad, the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and survivor of that genocide said, and I quote, “By acknowledging and remembering past and ongoing genocides, we hope to make ‘never again’ a reality.” Ms. Murad’s sentiments truly reflect the intention of this bill. “Never Again” is the message I want to bring across to the people of Ontario and Canada.

Other communities and populations of Iraq, Syria and Egypt were also victims of genocide and crimes against humanity by ISIS in 2014, until their defeat.

I recall people from the affected communities speaking to me about forcible removal from their homes, the destruction of places of worship, and worst of all, the annihilation of historic communities. The loss of material culture of ancient people and the endangerment of historical monuments reminds us that genocide does not only affect the victims, but rather humanity as a collective.

I hope this bill will help the victims find healing and closure as the gaping wounds left behind continue to haunt survivors—and many of them call Ontario home.

Madam Speaker, I also recall the victims of the genocide of 1915. Armenians, Greeks, Syrians, Assyrians and Chaldeans were all affected. Innocent men, women and children were massacred. Homes, villages and cities were destroyed. Worst of all, the crimes have continued to be denied. Victims and their descendants have lived with the trauma for more than 100 years. I hope this bill will ensure that these communities can now find comfort in the collective solidarity with the victims of other genocides and crimes against humanity who call Ontario home.

During the Second World War, the Jewish people of Europe and the Chinese population of Nanjing were the targets of genocide.

Rwandans are another group of victims who have made Ontario home. Tutsis, as victims, continue to live with the trauma they experienced in 1994. Over a million lives were lost in the span of 100 short days. I know from my friends in the Rwandan community that survivors have had to deal with the horrific and gruesome nature of the crimes they witnessed. I believe that we in Ontario can provide the victims who call this province home with a place where they can heal and begin new life.

In more recent times, the Tamil, Rohingya and Sikh communities have also experienced such criminal acts.

Some have asked, “Why are you trying to demonize perpetrator state members who call Ontario home?” This bill does not do such a thing. On the contrary, by acknowledging these crimes, we pay tribute to and honour all the virtuous individuals who risked their lives to save victims of genocide. We also pay tribute to those who openly commemorate, write about, discuss and atone for the mistakes of their predecessors. To honour the sacrifices of these righteous people—some of them live in Ontario and across Canada—it is our moral duty to stand up and support them in this Legislative Assembly.

Madam Speaker, the passing of Bill 97 will be a landmark acknowledgement of an important chapter in our history, and as such, will pay tribute to thousands of Canadians whose generosity and participation in Canada’s noble experiment have saved thousands from annihilation during the genocides of the 20th century.

Sara Corning, a Nova Scotia nurse who was in the Ottoman Empire at the time of the genocide, helped save 5,000 Armenian and Greek children from certain death. In fact, Canada was one of the leading countries to launch a relief effort to help the refugees and the orphans. Under the patronage of the Governor General of the time and Archbishop Neil McNeil, Canada played an active role in helping to raise \$300,000 to help the victims and the survivors of that genocide.

Furthermore, 109 orphan boys, later known as the Georgetown Boys, were brought to Canada and resettled on a farm near Georgetown in south-central Ontario, hence giving them a new lease on life.

Toronto’s Globe newspaper spearheaded the campaign to raise funds for the starving Armenians.

It is this type of compassionate and humanitarian vision that has helped to establish Canada’s reputation as a caring, welcoming, tolerant and enlightened country. Likewise, Bill 97 will honour the contributions of our ancestors.

Furthermore, it is also possible to teach and commemorate genocides without disliking the perpetrators. This is being done successfully in our educational system, where the Holocaust and the Armenian and Rwandan genocides are taught without blaming contemporary Germans, Turks and Hutus.

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The intent of Bill 97 is to preserve the memory of historical events, but also because the truth is a way of paying our respects to the victims.

Moreover, if genocides can be perpetrated and successfully denied, tyrants will draw their own conclusions, as the notorious statement by Adolph Hitler in 1939 testifies. Trying to justify his plans to invade Poland and annihilate the Jewish people there, the Nazi dictator said, “Who today remembers the annihilation of the Armenians?”

Finally, genocides that are denied tend to be forgotten, thus cutting us off from the knowledge that might help prevent future atrocities. For this reason, denial of genocide is not just an issue for Armenians, Jews, Ukrainians, Tutsis, Sikhs, Tamils, Chinese, Greeks, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Cambodians, Yazidis or Rohingyas: It is an issue for all humanity. Ignoring or denying genocide is an attack on history and the way we transmit the past to the future.

My bill lists genocides that have not been recognized in Ontario. The text of the bill states, “In addition to the genocides that either the Legislative Assembly of Ontario or the Parliament of Canada, or both, have recognized, Ontario recognizes the genocides committed against” a number of communities.

This was done in order to allow educators and schools to include these horrific crimes in teaching materials to help educate future generations in addition to the Holocaust and the Armenian, Rwandan, Ukrainian, Cambodian and Sikh genocides.

Finally, I’m convinced that once Bill 97 is passed, it will provide an opportunity to start the reconciliation process between affected groups. It is time for us to help end the trauma of the victims and send a message that we stand in solidarity with the victims.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate?

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** I rise today to speak on behalf of Bill 97, an act that would proclaim the month of April each year as Genocide Awareness, Commemoration, Prevention and Education Month.

As we debate this bill, I want to share the stories I have heard from my own community about genocide, in Toronto–St. Paul’s. Last Wednesday, I attended a Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration at Holy Blossom Temple in my riding. Standing in that room with Holocaust survivors, let me tell you, it felt like time stood still.

One story I want this House to hear is the story of Fay Kieffer. Not a breath could be heard while Fay recounted the atrocities she had personally experienced at the hands of the Nazis. At 15 years old, Fay was tortured, Fay was abused, and, at 15 years old, Fay lost both her father and brother in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

It’s the words of her brother I will share with this Legislature today—the last words Fay heard from him. He told her, “You must survive because you need to tell our story of what they did to us.”

To this Legislature I say that we have a responsibility to carry on this legacy, to ensure that in this concerning era of increasing Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism, we work to ensure Fay’s story and the story of her family is told. History cannot keep repeating itself in this respect. Education and awareness-raising is the first step in eradicating all forms of violence, discrimination and persecution.

“Genocide” is not a word to be thrown around lightly, Speaker, and it is not something that we can afford to be imprecise about in its application. It does not serve any community group to leave some acts of violence out of a catalogue of crimes against humanity.

Recognition during this month is a powerful act of validation of what a community has experienced. It provides narrative and meaning to what they or their ancestors have gone through. It means that educational curricula, museum exhibits, days of significance and awareness campaigns will develop to draw attention to parts of global and national history that we don’t talk about enough.

In addition, understanding how genocide affects the lives of many communities in Ontario helps us identify and understand the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma, from physical and mental health to accessing resources, power and opportunities. We can use this understanding to identify and

remove the barriers that many survivors of genocide continue to face today, and provide them with relevant supports.

This is what I think the most significant impact of such a month will be: spreading the understanding that the past is not just locked away in the past, but its impact can be felt today, and we can never afford to forget it.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate?

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** It is my honour to speak to Bill 97, An Act to proclaim Genocide Awareness, Commemoration, Prevention and Education Month, introduced by my colleague and friend the member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Today, we are so fortunate that we live in a multicultural and diverse nation, a home to people of all faiths and ethnic communities. However, we cannot be allowed to forget the victims that succumbed to all genocides.

When we talk about genocide, historians look to our past for these incidents.

Speaker, I speak in support of Bill 97 in the House as a Canadian today, but I am also a Chinese who grew up in mainland China. I learned as a child about the tragedy of the Nanjing Massacre, which happened in December 1937. Over six weeks, hundreds of thousands of civilians and disarmed soldiers in Nanjing were extensively killed. There was a systematic, widespread rape of women of all ages by the occupying forces. Pregnant women were killed by the aggressors.

We remember these citizens who were killed and brutalized, and who suffered extreme hardship. We also pay tribute to the survivors of this dark period in history, who lived to tell their stories to future generations.

By passing Bill 97, we will acknowledge the terror of all genocides that this world has had to suffer. By learning about these events, it allows us to better understand these dark moments in world history.

Our country is one that advocates for equity, tolerance and compassion. We must learn the lessons of history and strengthen our commitment to love and peace.

The atrocities and genocides that have occurred around the world must be condemned on all counts and never happen again.

Speaker, I will support this bill, and I ask all of my legislative colleagues to do the same.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch, Madam Speaker. Today I would like to speak as a First Nations person, as an Indigenous person, about Bill 97, the Genocide Awareness, Commemoration, Prevention and Education Month Act.

The preamble of the bill lists acts of genocide committed against communities that are recognized by Ontario and Canada. These were terrible crimes against humanity that have no place in this world.

There are many examples that get left out of history, like what happened here in Canada. When we talk about reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada, Bill 97 does not talk about or include the history of genocide as experienced by Indigenous peoples. Bill 97 needs to go further to inform and create this awareness.

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I'd like to remind the House that the United Nations' definition of genocide is "killing members of" national, ethnic, racial or religious groups. An example is, during the residential school era, thousands of Indigenous children died away from home.

Another definition is "causing ... bodily or mental harm" to members of a group. This government must acknowledge that there are thousands of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls who go unacknowledged.

One of the definitions, as well, is preventing births within a group. There is a historical legacy of forced sterilization of Indigenous women by hospitals across the country.

By these definitions, the treatment of First Nations and Indigenous people by the state, historically and in the present, can be defined as genocide. So, if the member's bill wishes to inform the public about genocide, it must be a truthful one—a truthful one that seeks to accurately speak about our history in Ontario.

Meegwetch.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate?

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** It is a pleasure for me to rise today to speak in support of Bill 97.

Throughout history, we have witnessed the horrible atrocities and crimes committed against humanity simply because they were seen to be different—different in ethnicity, different in religious beliefs or different in their lifestyle practices.

I lived in Sri Lanka during an intense period of racial strife and hatred and a period when most Tamils feared for their lives. In fact, members of my family were victimized and lost their lives in Sri Lanka because of racial hatred and ethnic cleansing.

I fled Sri Lanka, my motherland, in 1983, as a political refugee in fear for my life. The emotional impact of living under such circumstances and being forced to leave your motherland cannot be described in words: not knowing if you can sleep safely in your own household, not knowing if you are safe to travel, not knowing who you can trust, and not knowing if the next day is your last day. No one should have to live their life in such fear, and I know many families in Ontario and Canada have also experienced pain and suffering.

Canadians have always stood firm and spoken loudly against heinous acts, regardless of where they have occurred in the world. Today, Ontario and Canada represent the benchmark for how diversity and tolerance can work and thrive, and it's why so many from around the world choose Canada as their new home.

Today we acknowledge and remember solemnly the Holocaust against the Jewish people, and, every April, the Armenian and Rwandan genocides.

In my former role as a Markham councillor, I was proud to lead the Markham council's resolution in 2009 recognizing, investigating and condemning the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Tamils in Sri Lanka during the civil war. It was a resolution passed unanimously, and Markham was the first municipality in Canada to do so.

Madam Speaker, I encourage the members of our Legislature to act together and support Bill 97 in the same spirit and in solidarity, as a voice that stands for tolerance, love, compassion and human rights. This bill will show the leadership of our Legislature to recognize and increase the awareness of genocide committed against many others around the world. It will also ensure that future generations won't forget the painful tragedies and unforgivable acts committed against millions around the world and, with these memories, will continue to stand strong against these crimes and diminish them over time.

The proclamation of Genocide Awareness, Commemoration, Prevention and Education Month every April will help to remind us and reinforce the right path forward, a path where everyone can practise their faith and live their life without fear.

Madam Speaker, I commend the member, my good friend, the MPP from Scarborough–Agincourt for his leadership on this bill, and encourage all members to provide their support. It is the right thing to do, Madam Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate?

**Ms. Rima Berns-McGown:** I want to thank the member for Scarborough–Agincourt for bringing forward this bill. It's such a critically important topic.

As an academic and a researcher, I've interviewed a great many survivors of genocide, and people who were deeply affected by the intergenerational results of it.

I know this is a particularly poignant month for Tamils. It's 10 years since the Mullivaikal genocide.

I know that Armenians still feel to their core the depth, the pain and the anguish of what happened a century ago, in part because Turkey has never admitted and accepted what happened.

Denial is so crucial an element of preventing healing. As the member from Kiiwetinoong was saying, a crucial part of healing is hearing the perpetrator say, "Yes, we did this; we apologize," and for that apology to be real and meaningful.

We need to think really carefully, when we put together a bill like this, about who is included specifically and then who is left out, and what that means. I think we need to maybe go forward and fill in those wrongs.

There were Greek people who did not feel completely heard and seen by what was in the bill. I know that that was true for the Sikh community. The member mentioned them in his remarks, but it isn't here in the bill. It matters, because the government of India is doing precisely what the government of Turkey is doing, in the sense of not accepting and apologizing to the victims of genocide. This is so absolutely crucial.

It is perhaps most crucial when we're closest to home, because we are in the midst of trying to grapple with what the TRC called a cultural genocide, but which my colleague the member for Kiiwetinoong just argued so persuasively went way beyond a cultural genocide. It was a genocide in other senses of the word as well. We in Ontario cannot move forward until we accept that that is what happened, that is what we did perpetrate, and that is what we are continuing to perpetrate. Not until we accept it can we actually move on meaningfully.

I was at a very powerful meeting last night where Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler presented the Minister of Indigenous Affairs with a copy of Treaty 9, which Ontario signed as well as the federal government. He said, "We are here as partners, not as stakeholders."

We need to bring this close to home and understand that we have played a part in this. We need to fix our own backyard.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate?

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** I want to speak today to support MPP Aris Babikian's Bill 97. As a Canadian who believes in Canadian values and human rights, I support any and every bill which emphasizes and protects those rights—the right of freedom of speech, the right of freedom of religion, and the right of protection under the power of law for minorities.

Madam Speaker, these are the rights we cherish in Canada. We enjoy them. In a majority of cases, we take them for granted. We don't appreciate it as much as a human who escaped his homeland because of persecution or even his and his family's life getting threatened—many, many stories which, when we hear them, we can appreciate our beloved Canada.

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There is no justification whatsoever for threatening or killing any human for religious, ideological, political or any other reasons. When these acts are taken by any group or power on a scale, we end up with a genocide where innocent people lose their lives.

Madam Speaker, why do I support the bill? I hope by doing my role to spotlight such actions, we are sending a message to the world, a reminder, so that it never happens again. All over the world, we see those atrocities happening, day in, day out. Does this make it okay? Absolutely not. We stand in solidarity with victims. More importantly, we stand united as humans supporting other humans.

Madam Speaker, this assembly is a symbol of our Canadian democracy. It is the conscious example which we are all proud of as Canadians. As a member of this assembly and as a human, I have to, and I am proud to, stand for our Canadian humanitarian values, against those heinous acts of discrimination and cleansing for any reason.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate?

**Mr. Gurratan Singh:** To heal from trauma, from pain, from oppression, the first step is to name and recognize the injustice that was done. That's why it's so important for government to have courage to speak truth and to recognize the gravest of injustices: genocide.



Genocide is the most serious crime that can be committed. It's the erasure of a people, their culture, their ways, their lives. Genocide marks not only the community, but hurts us all. We're all one, and a genocide against any of us is a genocide against all of us.

As a Sikh, the genocide that we experienced still has a devastating impact on us. That's why it was so powerful when all parties came together in this House to recognize the Sikh genocide. The passing of this motion was praised across the world because finally, after over three decades, our pain was legitimized. The grievous trauma we suffered was named and acknowledged.

In 1984, Sikhs were burned alive. We were victims of severe physical and sexual violence, and children were beheaded, all at the hands of the Indian government. So when the Ontario Legislature recognized this state-organized violence as genocide, it sent a message to the Sikh people, a message that the pain we suffered was not our fault, that we didn't deserve it, and more, that the Indian government was wrong for carrying it out. It's also why many Sikhs are really hurt that last November, when elected officials across Canada, across this world, rose to remember the 1984 Sikh genocide, members of this Conservative government were silent. It left the Sikh community wondering why, why they didn't choose to speak against this heinous genocide then.

So while I will be supporting this bill and I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for having the courage today to name the Sikh genocide, I urge the Conservative government to amend this bill and explicitly name the Sikh genocide in it. The year 2019 marks 35 years since the Sikh genocide, and though this year we will be remembering our history throughout it, we'll also be remembering our trauma and the pain that the genocide created. With April being Sikh Heritage Month, a time when Sikhs already come together, it's so fitting to have the Sikhs named in this bill. Naming the Sikh genocide will allow us to tell our own story in our own voice and, further, allow us to heal from this pain.

And more, in the spirit of Sarbat da bhalla, for the benefit of all, let us acknowledge other genocides committed to other communities included in this bill or otherwise—Indigenous, Tamil, Assyrian and more. Let us recognize their trauma as well, because when we lift others up, when we help others heal, we all rise.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky):** Further debate? Further debate?

The member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** I would like to thank my colleagues from Toronto–St. Paul's, Don Valley North, Kiiwetinoong, Markham–Thornhill, Beaches–East York, Mississauga–Erin Mills and Brampton East for their support and for their solidarity with this bill.

Also, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the presence of many of the victim groups here. First of all, I would like to welcome Bishop Arshur Soro, the Chaldean Church bishop, and Father Niaz Toma from Hamilton. And I would like to recognize the names of the organizations who are here in support of this bill: the Canadian Hellenic Congress; Pan-Macedonian Federation of Canada; Hellenic Canadian Congress of Ontario; World Council of Pontian Hellenism; Panarcadian Federation of Canada; Hellenic Macedonian Association Agios Panteleimon; AHEPA Toronto; the Greek Community of Toronto; Pan-Korinthiaki Enosis Apostolos Pavlos; Cypriot Community of Toronto; Assn Kosmas Aitolos Aitololoacarnanias Avritanias; Pan-Messinian Federation of USA and Canada; Greek Canadian

Veteran Association; Pan-Pontian Federation of USA and Canada; Panmessinian Association of Toronto; the Thessalon Federation; Brotherhood Pontion; and the Athenian Association of Toronto.

I would like also to recognize the Alpha Education Group under the leadership of Dr. Joseph Wong. I would like to recognize also the Centre for Canadian-Assyrian Relations; Assyrian Church of the East; Assyrian Aid Society; Bet Nahrain cultural group; Chaldean Church of Toronto and Hamilton; Press-center of Russian Compatriot in Canada; United Communities of Canada; Russian Heritage of Canada; Heritage Beyond Borders; Bangla Radio; the Armenian National Committee of Toronto; St. Mary Armenian church; Armenian Youth Federation; Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam; Canadians for Peace Sri Lankan Alliance; Uthayan newspaper; and Rwandan Community Abroad.

Madam Speaker, I am grateful to all these organizations for standing by this bill. In the last few days and weeks, they have worked very diligently to write letters of support to members of Parliament. They signed petitions. Because it means so much for these communities—these communities are yearning for closure. They are not here to blame anyone. They are not here to cast blame on any nationality, state etc.; they just need a simple acknowledgment of what their predecessors—and some of them are still living here in our province—have gone through. So that is why I urge my colleagues to pass this bill unanimously.

Thank you very much, and God bless everyone.

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