

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE — 103RD ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION

Statement by Member for Armadale

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [12.55 pm]: On 24 April this year, the Armenian–Australian community commemorated the 103-year anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. In 1915, under the cover of war, the Ottoman Empire began its systematic attempt at the eradication of the native Armenian inhabitants of Anatolia, resulting in the deaths of 1.5 million people. On the day before the Anzacs landed at Gallipoli, Ottoman forces rounded up and beheaded 200 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders. Following this, men, women and children were sent to forced labour camps, marched to their deaths, raped, starved, and ultimately massacred. The systematic nature and sheer extent of the massacres led legal scholar Dr Raphael Lemkin to coin the term “genocide” to describe the destruction of an entire race.

It was actually the testimonies of our Anzacs, as well as Australian media reports, that awoke Australians and the world to the humanitarian crisis facing the Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians and other Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire. The Australian media also documented the relief effort conducted by Australians across the country, a significant piece of shared history between these countries.

Unfortunately, Turkey continues to deny its own history, refusing to acknowledge the 1.5 million deaths as genocide. It is concerning for Australia that such a government seeks to dictate our position on matters of human rights, threatening to refuse our right to commemorate our fallen Anzacs at Gallipoli should we ever recognise the Armenian Genocide. To that I say it is our responsibility to recognise the Armenian Genocide. It is our responsibility to our diggers to honour their memory and stand up for the values they fought to protect. It is our responsibility to acknowledge a proud moment in our own nation’s history—our first international humanitarian relief effort.