

TESTIMONY OF

Dale Daniels, Executive Director of the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights & Genocide Education at Brookdale Community College
Middletown, NJ

THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

HEARING ON THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE CENTENNIAL

April 23, 2015
Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC

I am Dale Daniels, Executive Director of Chhange, the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights & Genocide Education at Brookdale Community College in central NJ. I thank you for the opportunity to speak briefly about the impact of education about the Armenian Genocide on our youth.

Chhange, founded in 1979, is the first Holocaust/genocide studies center in NJ. A non-profit volunteer organization, its mission is to:

- Educate about the Holocaust, genocide and human rights;
- Promote the elimination of racism, antisemitism and all forms of prejudice; and,
- Develop creative programs regarding these crucial human issues.

Chhange inspires constructive action: We empower students, educators and community members throughout NJ by providing the proactive tools to address injustice and become concerned, involved citizens.

Today, the world we live in is racked by violence, and widespread human rights violations. I don't need to describe the killings in Syria, or the widespread rape in the DRC to the distinguished individuals in this room. You are not only aware and knowledgeable about these

and other ongoing atrocities, but you are working to end them. But I do need to address these situations with young people, the middle school, high school and college students Chhange serves. They must understand that they not only have the responsibility to recognize violations of human dignity, but they must take positive action to stop them.

In Chhange's 36 years of educating our children and our community, there are a few tenets we know for sure:

- The HUMAN STORY of Genocide is a powerful means to teach history and its lessons. While Genocide speaks of massive numbers of individuals, in the Armenian genocide 1.5 million men, women and children murdered, one human story personalizes history.
- The connections made to genocide survivors, rescuers, and resisters become life-changing events for young people. They identify with these "heroes", especially when the heroes are their neighbors, members of their community, or their own countrymen.
- Lessons of genocide have contemporary relevance and can aide in resolving human rights crises today.
- Today's youth has the power at their fingertips, quite literally at their fingertips, to make a public statement about genocide, impact governmental legislation, and provide resources to victims of human rights abuses. In other words, our youth have the power to make a difference.

At Chhange we have taught about the Armenian Genocide to students for over 30 years. Why the Armenian Genocide? Could we just teach about the Holocaust? Or the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda? We do, but history doesn't speak kindly about the American response to these genocides. Former President Clinton himself [has called the failure to intervene in Rwanda](#) one of his biggest regrets.

The history of the Armenian Genocide provides strong examples of American citizens who stood up and ensured that the reports of murder, massacre, atrocities were known. As surely every one here knows, United States Ambassador Henry Morgenthau Sr., and Jesse

B. Jackson, US Consul in Aleppo ensured that Washington, DC knew that a “campaign of race extermination was in progress”, calling it the “murder of a nation”. Devastated by what he witnessed, Morgenthau dedicated himself to raising funds for surviving Armenians. Near East Relief (NER), which was incorporated by an act of Congress in 1919, administered \$117,000,000 of assistance. It delivered food, clothing, and materials for shelter by the shipload from America. NER is credited with having cared for 132,000 Armenian children orphaned by the genocide who were scattered across the Middle East. This is a powerful model of action, a successful model of American response for our developing young American citizens. But is the impact of this historical model of social action tainted by denial, when our own government does not officially acknowledge the event that led to these deeds by our diplomats and citizens?

At Chhange we also work to make those life-changing connections between our youth and heroes. Leaders, human rights activists, decision-makers meet face-to-face with our students. Lt. General Romeo Dallaire, head of the UN forces in Rwanda during the genocide, Mark Hanis, founder of Genocide Intervention Network, and Terence Roberts, one of the infamous ‘little Rock Nine,’ are just a few of the leaders who have worked directly with our children. And in Chhange’s 36 years, hundreds of thousands of students have met firsthand with Holocaust and Genocide survivors. Their strength, resilience and most of all, their ability to re-claim their humanity after they have been victimized, resonate with students.

While the survivors of the Armenian Genocide have passed on and no longer are here to meet face-to-face with our children, they have left behind a legacy of courage that is preserved by their families. To honor the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Chhange chose to tap into this legacy, gathering memory and working closely with its Armenian Community to create a multi-faceted commemoration that would use individual personal histories to teach about the genocide. ***A Journey to Life: Armenia***, an interactive historical exhibit, features these personal histories and provides each visitor with a tablet computer for individual exploration of the exhibit. Fifty-four personal histories of Armenians from across the Ottoman Empire are also compiled into our new publication: ***Hundred-Year Legacy of Courage: Celebrating the Lives of Armenian Genocide***

Survivors in our Community. But it is the art exhibit ***Illuminating Images: A Hundred-Year Remembrance***, that speaks volumes about study of the Armenian genocide. This exhibit of 3-dimensional artistic cityscapes depicting Armenian life before and after the genocide, reflects the collaborative efforts of hundreds of middle school, high school and college students throughout New Jersey in response to learning about the Armenian Genocide through Chhange-trained educators. Here is one statement about this learning experience:

Emma Bongiovanni of Wall High School wrote:

I'm a senior at Wall High School, and it's not every day you are able to participate in something so artistically and historically important. Attempting to convey the horrors of the Armenian Genocide via art is not a fun, nor easy task. Hopefully, that does not downplay its significance. If the overall goal of this project was spread awareness, then it has already succeeded, especially for me. Painting pain, painting death, painting corpses....it was emotionally moving not only as a artist, but as a person. To realize that "this actually happened", and as I drew, I was recording it...somehow this made the destruction both more real and more incomprehensible. I tried to illustrate this through muddy colors, blurry figures, and rough textures – because that's how I felt searching for images to reference, and saw only horrible gritty and decaying pictures. I sought to commemorate the dead, and not let their suffering be forgotten—the painting was harsh and tough; it was a privilege to do.

Yes, hundreds of students collaborated for the *Illuminating Images* Exhibit. Thousands of students, educators, and community members will see this art, read these statements and feel the impact of the Armenian Genocide. Isn't it time we followed in Emma Bongiovanni's foot steps and recognized this genocide for what it is?

Thank you.