

Fresno County Supervisor Poochigian urges President Obama to recognize Armenian genocide

By Andrea Castillo

Fresno County Supervisor Debbie Poochigian



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Fresno County Supervisor [Debbie Poochigian](#) wrote a letter to President Barack Obama last month urging him to reverse the U.S. stance and recognize the Armenian genocide.



April 24 marks the 100th anniversary of the start of the genocide. By its end in 1923, an estimated 1.5 million Armenians — two-thirds of the population — were dead, many children left orphans.



Turkey rejects the term genocide. The United States government has yet to officially label it as such.

In [the March 18 letter](#), Poochigian said it's ironic that while the government sees recognition of the genocide "as an annoyance," American newspapers are filled with eyewitness accounts of what happened at the time. She pointed to President Ronald Reagan's 1981 statement about the Holocaust, comparing it to the "genocide of Armenians before it."

"But since that time, the United States' apparent policy has been to countenance Turkish lobbying to withhold official

acknowledgment,” she wrote.

Poochigian said she had wanted to write the letter for a long time. She has since written similar letters to Secretary of State John Kerry, Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner and Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Poochigian has not received any response, but said she'd much rather have them act than write her back.

“There are very few survivors left,” she said. “Once the survivors are gone then it's maybe easier for people to deny.”

The letter also details personal accounts of the experience Poochigian's family endured.

Her grandmother was stabbed and knocked unconscious by Turkish soldiers, and was surrounded by bodies when she came to. She was nursed back to health by a physician who hid her in a basement with other victims. She later walked across Russia and eventually ended up in San Francisco, where she met Poochigian's grandfather and started a new family.

“Until her death in 1957, she was haunted by memories of the loss of her three children and first husband and never knowing if any of them had survived,” Poochigian wrote.

Poochigian said the experiences of her family members are just like thousands of other Armenian survivors who became productive, patriotic Americans. It is in their memory, she said, that recognizing the genocide remains a worthy cause.

“Every year we hear, ‘Now is not the right time to recognize what happened,’ ” she said. “The time is now. Why wait?”

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