



ATOP Meaningfulworld  
 Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP)  
 185 E 85 Street, NYC 10028  
[www.meaningfulworld.com](http://www.meaningfulworld.com)  
[DrKalayjian@Meaningfulworld.com](mailto:DrKalayjian@Meaningfulworld.com)  
 Phone: 201.941.2266

## TOWARD PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

### Nations Acknowledging Their Dark History: Practicing Mindful Non-Violence

Carol Raff, Jane Kearns, Renoude Charles, & Dr. Ani Kalayjian, Zhehan Fan

4 April, 2013, United Nations, New York

This informative, insightful and transformative program began with a moment of silence to honor all those who sacrificed their lives in the genocides from slavery to present political crises in Syria, Mali, Sudan, and DR Congo with a firm commitment for peace and compassion.

The event was kicked off with opening remarks by **Ambassador Garen Nazarian**, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, who stated that the horror of genocide is repeating itself in different parts of the world and innocent civilians continue to be persecuted for no other reason than their ethnicity, religion or national origin and international cooperation and action is required to facilitate the timely prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide.

He continued that the UN Human Rights Council recently adopted a resolution initiated by Armenia and co-sponsored by almost 60 member states which stresses the importance of the promotion of truth, justice, and reparation, and that perpetrators of genocide crime should be held criminally accountable on the national or international level and affirmed. Ambassador Nazarian emphasized the importance of education, including human rights education, in the prevention of genocide. He further noted that the process of international recognition of the Armenian genocide will be continued despite Turkey's denial of that indisputable historical fact. The Ambassador also welcomed the clear position adopted by the many countries on the Armenian Genocide and expressed gratitude to all those, including Turkish scholars, students and simply citizens of that country, who realize the significance of preventing crimes against humanity and support the process of international recognition of that crime.



Ambassador Nazarian, Dr. Ani and Mr. Dinelaris



Audience and setting

The event was chaired by Dr. Ani Kalayjian, President of the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention. She then presented a moving PowerPoint lecture about the genocides around the world, starting with slavery, all the way to the current genocide in Sudan. She placed emphasis on, first and foremost, healing from trauma through the 7-step Integrative Healing Model, including acknowledgment and validation, discovering lessons learned, moving into the practice of forgiveness, and commitment to peace within as well as around us.

The symposium featured a screening of Michael Hagopian's *"Voices from the Lake"* documentary which was introduced by recognized filmmaker and producer Carla Garapedian.

Winners of the **Eighteenth Annual AASSG Krieger Essay contest** were high school students Tanisha Williams, Fatima Tariq, Usama Chaudhry, and Khubaib Zaman, who received awards by Ambassador of Armenia Garen Nazarian, with \$100 for first winners and \$50 for second. They shared their wonderful essay summaries on "What the Legacy of Genocide Means to me" and how to prevent genocides around the globe. Emphasis was placed on the role of education, acknowledgment, forgiveness, learning from dark history and using technology for the dissemination to the masses. Honorary mentioned awards were given to Markos Plimakis, and Aidana Razhap. Special gratitude was expressed to Dr. George A. Hero, their social science teacher, who raised their awareness and educated the students about all the genocides.

"Voices from the Lake," written and produced by late survivor Dr. Michael Hagopian, and narrated and introduced by Carla Garapedian, was about the "secret" genocide, the Ottoman Turkish genocide of the Armenians. The outcome of twenty-five years in research and production, it is the first feature-length documentary film on the genocide of Armenians focusing on the day-to-day tragedy unfolding in Kharpert-Mezreh, one among 4000 towns and villages of the former Ottoman empire (previously Armenia, and at that time inhabited by Armenians) in 1915, where monumental forces were unleashed by a policy of annihilation. The global humanitarian dimensions of the cataclysmic event are recorded by eyewitness accounts of American and European officials, missionaries, educators, and by Armenian survivors

Dr. Kalayjian concluded with a poem on 'Vicarious Trauma' With thoughts such as 'We feel guilt over having privileges. Where is God when I work in these traumatized nations? Do we really need evil to appreciate the good?'



Essay Winner High School Students

Dr. Joyce Aspel

**First speaker Dr. Joyce Aspel** is Professor at New York University, President of the Institute for Study of Genocide, the NGO-DPI representative at the UN for the International Network of Museums for Peace.; and director of RightWorks International, a global human rights educational initiative. Additionally, Dr. Aspel is Course Director of the Genocide and Human Rights University Program sponsored by the Zoryan Institute at the University of Toronto each summer. Her most recent publication co-edited with Ernesto Verdeja is "Genocide Matters: Ongoing Issues and Emerging Perspectives." A recipient of the NYU Distinguished Teaching Award, Dr. Aspel spoke on the 'Issues of

Prevention’ on the subject of genocide. World-wide atrocities continue to exist despite our efforts to create a world of rights and we must understand and work toward the prevention of these atrocities. We must also educate others to become aware of these horrific wrongdoings as only education can lead to change. Humanitarian interventions are extremely important in encouraging people to dialogue with one another. Both Turkish and Armenian students, from the Zorian Institute in Toronto, Canada, are for example, beginning to talk to one another about the Turkish responsibility in the Armenia genocide. Education is bringing about a better understanding of the atrocities in such places as Syria and the Congo. Dr. Aspel feels that we need a Transitional Justice Mechanism to hold perpetrators responsible for their unjust acts of violence. Truth Commissions, which exist in Guatemala, for instance, acknowledge what has happened to individuals and recognize the victim’s need to heal. Repercussions amongst the victims of violence go on for generations. “Genocide does not stop when the killing stops,” which was fully examined in the poignant film “Voices from the Lake.”

The next speaker was **Ms. Thea Halo**, who began as a talented artist, writing poetry and short stories and then her Mother’s memoirs. She won numerous awards for her poetry and literary & political essays, wrote her own newspaper column, and worked as a news correspondence for public radio station WBAI. She is the author of “Not Even My Name,” and “A Lit for Every Pot.”

Ms. Halo, author on the Greek and Assyrian genocide, reflected on her book about her mother’s memoirs, “The Role of Memoir in the Healing Process” and discussed about how her parents survived the Ottoman Turkish Genocide. Her father is deceased and was of Syrian descent and her mother, who is currently 104 years young, is of Greek descent. Her parents taught her never to hate or denigrate the Turks but to instead blame the Turkish government for their atrocities against others. Ms. Halo gave a heartfelt description of her mother’s early childhood and how although her mother’s marriage was arranged, her parents remained till her father’s death. She spoke of how her mother witnessed the death marches led by the Turks and the victim’s cries of anguish, the sight of dead bodies and of those losing loved ones. She reflected on a mother holding her dead baby in her arms. These memoirs have the potential of helping the Turkish government realize how they destroyed lives. Ms. Halo emphatically states that the ‘Act of Genocide’ will not be defeated if we continue with a tribal mentality. The human experience is our experience. When we begin to think and act as one family, perhaps then we have the possibility of wiping away genocide. Memoirs can only help touch our hearts and minds.



Ms. Halo



Dr. Dinlaris

The next speaker was **Mr. Alexander Dinlaris**, who is a two-time Drama Desk Nominee. He is a playwright on the genocide of Armenians, recent productions include “Red Dog Howls,” , with the New York Theater Workshop, “Still Life” at Manhattan Class Company, “Folding the Monster, the Chaos Theories” for Shotgun Theater, In This, Our Time at 59e59, and “Big Kids”. Mr. Dinlaris wrote the book for the current West End production of THE BODYGUARD, and has been nominated for two Drama Desk

Awards. He has recently completed work on “Birdman,” the latest film by director Alejandro Gonzalez-Innaritu and has just finished work on two original screenplays, “The Year of the Monarchs” and “In This, Our Time.” Mr. Dinelaris attended Barry University on a Drama scholarship, where he received the Mack McKindree Award for Excellence in Drama. Mr. Dinelaris spoke on how he was raised by his Armenian grandmother who shared her stories of the genocide and her feelings of guilt, fear and anger towards the Turks. In the play, Mr. Dinelaris, who has been haunted with these negative feelings, depicts how genocide is dehumanizing. The main character, Michael, who is the protagonist, is in search of his Armenian roots. Much like Mr. Dinelaris himself, Michael, through letters from his father, traces down his grandmother who nourishes and protects him. Theatre, according to Mr. Dinelaris, is about the expression of rage with compassion and the search for identity of one’s true self.

Mr. Dinelaris said he didn’t plan to write a political play but realized he carried the fear, guilt and rage in him and didn’t want to pass it down to his child, who was in utero at that time. Mr. Dinelaris found that expressing feelings of rage appropriately and creatively will help us own it, and with compassion, one can work on transforming it. He was astounded at what happened to the audience in “Red Dog Howls” and how everyone in the room regardless of background or ethnicity was deeply affected.

A lively and meaningful Q & A followed as the audience had submitted questions in writing during the program. One question was about feelings of “guilt” connected to the genocide. Guilt may be juxtaposed with complicity, as in guilt of silence, complacency, or not doing enough. There may also be guilt of survival, even guilt of happiness or having a lifestyle devoid of suffering, all of which are transmitted generationally.

The next question was about how to tell one’s story in a book. Ms. Halo advised to “just start writing”. Use a tape recorder or latest digital technology. She emphasized the importance of “capturing details” so that sharing the details of what happened makes it connectable for the reader. One person emphasized the need for more of these kinds of events on genocide. Dr. Kalayjian shared that Meaningfulworld organizes symposiums on this topic annually for the last 20 years, as well as monthly healing groups in NYC and around the globe.

Another question was specific to Rwanda and how to heal in the presence of denial. Dr. Kalayjian cautioned about Rwanda skipping the healing process and jumping into forgiveness, as her observations revealed a wave of anger increasing. She emphasized the importance of expressing feelings and continuing the healing process, because if denial continues, other crises may be faced. Dr. Kalayjian concluded with expressing extreme gratitude to all who made the event possible as well as the audience who took the time to be present. Her ending words were sharing her poem on vicarious trauma, which ends:

*“As I sequester myself to reflect,  
Balancing the good and evil,  
Weighing the positives and negatives  
Of all that I’ve witnessed, I remain in wonderment  
As I ask myself: Do we really need the evil to be able to appreciate the good?”*

Many attendees sent their heartfelt expressions via e-mail, and here are a few examples: Marsha Chase wrote with deep gratitude “I was so deeply touched by you, the speakers and the students. It is such an important topic to understand on healing nations and people can begin the truth. I would love to come to more talks on healing trauma both personal and larger.” Dr. Azadeh Aalai also expressed her appreciation of being a part of the event as well as her interest in collaborating to prevent

genocide with Meaningfulworld. Dr. Aalai stated “I wanted to let you know that the symposium was a very transformative experience for me personally that has renewed my dedication to raising awareness regarding genocide and promoting greater global consciousness among my students as a professor of social psychology. It was a particularly timely event as well, given that in two of my courses this week we will be starting our genocide units.”

This transformative program was organized and Chaired by Dr. Ani Kalayjian, President of the Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP) and the Armenian American Society for Studies on Stress and Genocide (AASSSG), Meaningfulworld.

**Gratitude to sponsors:** The permanent Mission of the Republic of Armenia to the UN, ATOP, Armenian American Society for Studies on Stress & Genocide, Voices for Freedom, The Armenian General Benevolent Union of America, and Institute for Multicultural Counseling & Education Services. Inc. (IMCES).

**Gratitude to UN Team:** Carol Raff, Jane Kearns, Renoude Charles, Joyce Fan, and Blanka Argyal, Mileka Ackie, Katrina Martinez

**Gratitude to AASSSG Board:** Dr Gergerian, Dr Shahinian, Harry Milian, Seta Papazian, Susan Markarian, & Marian Weisberg and Antonia Gentile.

**Next event:** 6 June 1:30 PM Mind-Body-Eco-Spirit Health Festival, and graduation of the Meaningfulworld Ambassadors.

Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention, Meaningfulworld is a not-for-profit 501 (c)3 charitable organization founded in 1990 & affiliated with the United Nations Department of Public Information. ATOP has been serving communities in distress locally, as well as internationally in over 30 calamities, presented over 1500 lectures, workshops and conferences on healing, educating, empowerment, transforming generational trauma, creating peace, and visionary leadership. With its innovative 7-step Integrative Healing Model, the Biopsychosocial and Eco-Spiritual Model, ATOP has successfully treated, trained, and transformed generations. ATOP has over 100 publications, 4 books, 7 films, and an ancestral healing meditation CD.

**Our Motto: When one helps another Both become stronger**