

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the millions of Armenians who were deported during the Armenian genocide in 1915, and the 1.5 million men, women, and children who were killed. April 24, 2015, marks the Centennial Remembrance Day of the Armenian genocide, and my thoughts go out to the descendants of the victims and all of the Armenian people as the world commemorates this tragedy.

As we reflect upon this horrific period in history, we are reminded of the importance of promoting tolerance and standing firm against hatred and discrimination. That is why I have always recognized the terrible atrocities that took place in Armenia as genocide and why I consistently support resolutions in the Senate to remember the anniversaries of the Armenian genocide. I will continue to support these resolutions and speak about this issue so we never forget the families who were torn apart and destroyed due to brutal intolerance.

Nevada is home to a vibrant community of thousands of Armenian Americans. Through churches and other organizations, Armenians in Nevada have demonstrated a commitment to working to improve their communities and serve others. For instance, the Armenian Relief Association in Las Vegas has dedicated years to serving the Las Vegas community and providing Saturday school for children to learn Armenian history. Kirk Kerkorian, an immensely successful Armenian American businessman and philanthropist, has shaped Nevada's booming tourism industry and created jobs with his investments on the Las Vegas Strip. Kirk has also generously donated to organizations across the Nation and in Armenia through his charitable foundation, the Lincy Foundation, to support important causes such as public education, health care, and infrastructure development. Another well-known Armenian American, the late Jerry Tarkanian, will long be remembered in Nevada not only for his success leading the University of Nevada, Las Vegas basketball team, but also for his dedication to teaching young college athletes to be better people and proudly represent their city.

I am proud that, for years, Nevada has officially recognized the Armenian genocide, and that Nevada continues to find ways to honor this strong community and Armenian history. I am grate-

ful for the efforts of the Armenian American Cultural Society of Las Vegas, which raised thousands of dollars for an Armenian Genocide Monument at Sunset Park in Las Vegas, Nevada. The monument will represent the 12 provinces where Armenians were slaughtered during the genocide, and will provide Nevadans with a place for reflection for years to come.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I wish to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

Between 1915 and 1923, the Ottoman Empire carried out genocide against the Armenian people. Over the course of 8 years, more than 1.5 million Armenians were marched to their deaths in the deserts of the Middle East, murdered in concentration camps, drowned at sea, and forced to endure unimaginable acts of brutality.

Over the years, this deliberate massacre of the Armenians has been well-documented and confirmed by scholars and experts. And there are countless testimonies from victims who lived to tell of their harrowing experiences.

In his memoirs, Henry Morgenthau, the American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire between 1913 and 1916, wrote: "When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact."

Despite an irrefutable body of evidence, the U.S. Government has refused to call the deliberate massacre of the Armenians by its rightful name. Mr. President, 100 years have passed since the beginning of the Armenian genocide. It is long past time for our government to finally acknowledge one of the greatest atrocities of the 20th century for what it was—genocide.

This year, I am proud to be an original cosponsor of a Senate resolution calling on the President to "ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide."

But each day that goes by without full acknowledgement by the United States prolongs the pain felt by the descendants of the victims of the Armenian genocide, as well as the entire Armenian community.

By affirming the Armenian genocide, the United States would join countries across the globe—including Argentina, Canada, France, Italy, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, and Venezuela—as well as the Holy See and 43 U.S. States in standing on the right side of history.

For years, I have urged both Democratic and Republican administrations to finally acknowledge the truth of the Armenian genocide. Today, I reiterate my call and I hope that this year the United States will finally correct this century-old injustice.

During a recent mass commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, Pope Francis said:

It is necessary, and indeed a duty, to honour their memory, for whenever memory fades, it means that evil allows wounds to fester. Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it!

On this April 24, as we take time to remember and honor the victims of the Armenian genocide, I hope the United States will heed the eloquent words of Pope Francis by formally and unequivocally affirming the incontestable fact of the Armenian genocide.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I wish to solemnly observe the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

One hundred years ago, one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th Century began when the young Turk leaders of the Ottoman Empire executed more than 200 Armenian leaders and intellectuals. What followed was an 8-year systematic campaign of oppression, which by 1923, left an estimated 1.5 million Armenians dead and over a half a million survivors exiled.

These atrocities affected the lives of every Armenian living in Asia Minor and, indeed, across the globe, and many called for the United States to take action. The U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during this dark time, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., unsuccessfully pleaded with President Wilson to take action, and later remembered the events of the genocide, saying:

I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915.

Former President Theodore Roosevelt also called for an American response, saying, "Until we put honor and duty first, and are willing to risk something in order to achieve righteousness both for ourselves and for others, we shall accomplish nothing; and we shall earn and deserve the contempt of the strong nations of mankind."

Unfortunately, the United States and the world did not intervene. It is a testament to the unbreakable spirit of the survivors of the Armenian genocide that they persevered and went on to enrich their countries of emigration, including the United States. That is why today we not only commemorate this grave tragedy, but we celebrate the traditions, the contributions, as well as the bright future of the Armenian people. Indeed, my home State of Rhode Island continues to be enriched by our strong and vibrant Armenian-American community.

Denial of this history is inconsistent with our country's values and as we mark this centennial, I once again join with my colleagues on a resolution that encourages the United States to recognize the Armenian genocide. We must continue to guard against hatred and oppression so that we can prevent such crimes against humanity. I would

note that, earlier this month, Pope Francis held a mass to recognize this centennial and described this mass atrocity against Armenians as the first genocide of the 20th century. On this, the 100th anniversary, the United States should similarly recognize this horrific tragedy as genocide, joining the ranks of the many countries that have already done so.

I remain committed to supporting efforts, as ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee and as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, to provide assistance to Armenia to promote economic growth, strengthen security, and support democratic reforms and development.

I am pleased that on May 7, at my invitation, His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Worldwide Armenian Apostolic Church and the Great House of Cilicia, will serve as guest Chaplain before this body and continue this important message. We must find a way to come together to recognize what happened a century ago and show our unwavering support to those facing persecution today. I hope we can do that.

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate and reflect on the centennial anniversary of the beginning of the Armenian genocide. With great sadness, we remember the beginning of the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks who died 100 years ago. On April 24, 1915, the campaign targeting the Armenian people began. They, along with Assyrians and Greeks, were viewed as threats to the Ottoman Empire and driven from their homeland. The persecuted minorities were uprooted from their way of life leaving behind generations of family history, property, and memories. The Armenians were then force-marched into the desert without proper rations and supplies, with most dying along this brutal passage. The remaining survivors were detained in concentration camps rampant with disease and hunger. These mass killings are historically documented and served as a tragic prelude to the Holocaust.

This solemn anniversary offers us a chance to renew our commitment to the principle of “never again,” a vow that surfaced after the Holocaust. And so today I rise to proclaim never again can an ethnic group be targeted due to race, religion, or ethnicity.

BANGLADESH RANA PLAZA ANNIVERSARY

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, April 24 marks the 2-year anniversary of the Rana Plaza building collapse which resulted in the death of over 1,130 Bangladeshi workers and the injury of approximately 2,500 more. To date, this remains the single largest disaster of its kind. Since 2013, many in the governmental, nongovernmental, private, and business sectors have pledged their financial resources and time to addressing the numerous issues

and problems surrounding the ready-made garment industry. Even though progress has been made, many promises remain unfulfilled, especially in providing Bangladeshi workers the rights they deserve.

As a long-term U.S. ally, I want Bangladesh to be prosperous because only through a growing economy that delivers shared prosperity to its people can stability be ensured.

The country’s garment industry is now, and will be for the foreseeable future, the engine of economic growth as it accounts for close to 80 percent of foreign exchange earnings. The United States, which remains the single largest country buyer of Bangladeshi garments, has an important responsibility to ensure that those garments are made in a way that do not put people’s lives at risk and that fairly rewards workers for their labor.

Domestically, while there has been progress in conducting safety inspections and hiring additional inspectors, much work remains in providing for freedom of association. On this front, I have been very disappointed by the role played by the government of Bangladesh. The record over the past 2 years shows that the Bangladeshi government has failed to keep promises it made to our Government and to the European Union.

It has failed to pass a labor law in line with international labor standards and has not promulgated implementing regulations for the law that exists.

Workers still have no rights to form unions in Export Processing Zones and once again the government is saying it has no power to change regulations because of contractual obligations to companies.

The government of Bangladesh has made little progress with regard to the inspection of well over a thousand factories that it agreed to inspect for fire safety.

The government of Bangladesh personnel responsible for investigating unfair labor practices are not doing so and some police have refused to accept cases filed by labor organizers who experience violence from management-hired thugs. Such antiunion behavior on the part of employers is common throughout many developing countries but in the case of Bangladesh, it is compounded by the government’s actions which actively abet such behavior. For that, the government of Bangladesh must be held responsible.

There needs to be a clear, consistent and transparent union registration process. While approximately 300 factory-level garment unions have been registered in the last 2 years, more than 100 unions that filed for registration have been rejected by the government, many for arbitrary or unfair reasons.

The people of Bangladesh need mechanisms where workers can swiftly get the justice they deserve when their rights are violated. Bangladeshi authorities need to properly investigate,

address and, if necessary, penalize employers for unfair labor practices to end the culture of impunity that surrounds employer resistance to legally protected union activity.

So as my colleagues can see, much work remains.

Until substantial progress is made, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative has rightfully decided to keep in place the suspension of Bangladesh’s Generalized System of Preferences—GSP—trade benefits with the United States. I support this decision.

The “Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh” and the “Alliance on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh” are two private sector initiatives made up of American and European retailers which have conducted safety inspections in more than 2,500 factories. As a result, some factories have adopted new safety practices and have made physical improvements such as the installation of fire doors to make it safer for workers to evacuate when fires occur. These inspections have resulted in the full or partial shutdown of a number of unsafe factories. The private sector has a critical role to play in changing the RMG culture in Bangladesh and I strongly urge both coalitions to focus on how workers’ rights can be improved in the coming years.

Aside from ensuring that improvements are made to prevent another Rana Plaza, it is critical that full compensation is paid to the victims and their families. As of today, the “Rana Plaza Donors Trust Fund” has received roughly \$21 million from a variety of donors, including both large global brands and the Bangladeshi Prime Minister’s Fund. While \$21 million sounds impressive, the fund is suffering from an approximate \$9 million shortfall. Because of this, some victims and their families have only received approximately 70 percent of the money they are entitled to. I am happy to hear that Benetton has recently agreed to donate to the Fund. I hope that other companies that had business at Rana Plaza come forward and contribute, or continue contributing, their fair share.

It is encouraging to see different elements of the international community come together to support the garment factory workers in Bangladesh. Real progress in the RMG sector will require continued vigilance on the part of the international community. Earlier this year, we were once again saddened by the news of yet another tragedy involving the collapse of a building in Bangladesh. On March 12, in the town of Mongla, a cement factory collapsed and tragically killed eight people while injuring approximately 60 others. Whether in a garment factory or cement factory, we must remain vigilant to ensure that workers’ safety and workers’ rights are top priorities of the U.S. government and international buyers in Bangladesh.