

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.

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT DEATHS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I wish to discuss an enormous human tragedy: another boat carrying desperate refugees and migrants capsized in the Mediterranean Sea and, in this most recent instance, over 850 men, women, and children have died. It is profoundly heartwrenching to view the anguished images of innocent refugees and migrants, men and women, old and young, who embarked on this desperate journey bound for a more hopeful future, but which instead ended in death on the Mediterranean Sea for so many people.

In 2014, we know that well over 218,000 refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea, many fleeing violence, conflict, and persecution in Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and elsewhere, traveling on overcrowded and unseaworthy boats. Last year, over 3,500 women, men, and children died or went missing in their desperate attempts to reach Europe. According to the International Organization on Migration, IOM, this year's death toll in the Mediterranean Sea is believed to have surpassed 1,750 victims already—a drastic spike when compared to the same period last year. During the first 3 weeks of April alone, more than 11,000 people have been rescued.

This is a journey of unimaginable peril, and only the most despairing families with nothing to lose would sacrifice their lives in the hopes that this voyage will deliver an escape from misery. From Syria to Iraq, from South Sudan to Yemen, multiplying conflicts, gross human rights violations, statelessness, the effects of climate change, and food and water insecurity are all contributing to millions of people being forced from their homes in search of safety and survival.

The international community is witnessing the enormous costs of unending wars and the failure to resolve or prevent conflict. The number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people worldwide has, for the first time in the post-World War II era, exceeded 50 million people, according to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, UNHCR.

This massive increase is largely driven by the war in Syria, which is now in its fifth year. The Assad regime's ruthless attacks on Syrian civilians—compounded by horrific violence by armed extremists—has led to Syria's disintegration and massive internal and external displacement of its people.

Europe, facing conflicts to its south in Libya, east in Ukraine, and southeast in Syria, Iraq and the Horn of Africa, is currently seeing the largest numbers of refugees and migrants arriving by boat across the Mediterranean. To confront this enormous challenge, European Council President Donald Tusk called on member states on Monday, April 20, to meet their funding commitments for Trident, the European Union's, EU, naval operation

in the Mediterranean. EU leaders also agreed to meet on Thursday, April 23, to consider increasing resources for rescue operations and the 10-point action plan on migration proposed by the Joint Foreign Affairs and Home Council.

The proposed plan would alleviate pressure on the member states receiving the majority of those rescued and also aims to combat trafficking and smuggling.

The EU's proposed 10-point plan is an important first step, but a bold and comprehensive response is urgently needed. First, rescue at sea is and should be the top priority. It is a moral imperative based on European values, as well as a fundamental principle of maritime law. A robust search and rescue operation, comparable to Mare Nostrum, that focuses on saving lives must be reinstated. While the reinforcement of the Joint Operations in the Mediterranean is welcomed, border surveillance operations are not an answer to this crisis.

Second, there needs to be a credible and firm commitment from countries both in Europe and across the globe to resettle significant numbers of refugees. Moreover, efforts to encourage legal alternatives to such dangerous voyages must be pursued. These include enhanced family reunification, private sponsorship programs, and study and labor migration programs for people in need of international protection.

Finally, I urge the U.S. Government to provide robust assistance, and to work closely with our European partners, so that we might all rise to the demands presented by this humanitarian crisis and commit to the measures needed to prevent tragedies such as the drowning deaths of 850 men, women, and children off the coast of Libya this past weekend.

NATIONAL MINORITY HEALTH MONTH

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I wish to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing April as National Minority Health Month. 2015 marks the 30th anniversary of this event, which provides us with an opportunity to celebrate the progress we have made in addressing minority health issues and health disparities in our country and to renew our commitment to continue this critically important work.

Minorities now make up more than 35 percent of the American population and that number is expected to rise in the future. However, study after study has shown that minorities, especially African Americans and Latinos, continue to face significant health disparities in diseases such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and asthma.

Currently, over 26 million Americans suffer from diabetes. But African Americans are twice as likely to be diagnosed with, and to die from, diabetes compared to non-Hispanic whites. Afri-

can Americans are also more than 2½ times more likely to suffer from diabetes-related end-stage renal disease than non-Hispanic whites, and are more likely to have other complications, such as lower extremity amputations.

Obesity, which increases the risk of developing diabetes, is also more prevalent in minority communities. Nearly 4 out of 5 African-American women are overweight or obese, as well as 78 percent of Hispanic men. It is no coincidence that, nationwide, 27.2 percent of African Americans and 23.5 percent of Latinos lived below the Federal poverty line in 2013. Limited means and the lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables in "food deserts" prevent many people from accessing the nutrition they need to lead healthy lives.

Those living in impoverished areas are also much more likely to be exposed to polluted air, which exacerbates respiratory conditions like asthma. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, in 2012, African Americans were 20 percent more likely to have asthma versus non-Hispanic whites.

HIV and AIDS, which are especially prevalent in low-income neighborhoods with widespread drug use, continue to devastate minorities across the country. African American women are 23 times more likely to have AIDS than their white counterparts and Hispanic women are four times more likely to be infected. In Maryland, African Americans are diagnosed with HIV at more than 10 times the rate of white Marylanders.

The role that access to resources, proper nutrition, and clean air plays in our well-being cannot be overstated. According to a 2012 report about Baltimore neighborhoods from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, those living in higher-income parts of the city live, on average, nearly 30 years longer than their neighbors in impoverished areas.

Fortunately, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, ACA, we have recently made health coverage more accessible and affordable than it has been in decades. By reducing the number of uninsured Americans across the country, the ACA is working to address health inequalities. Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of uninsured Latinos dropped by 7.7 percent, and the percentage of uninsured African Americans fell by 6.8 percent.

Also, as a result of the ACA, increased funding is available for community health clinics. Mr. President, 300,000 Marylanders, including more than 140,000 African Americans and 38,000 Latinos, are served by these clinics.

Under the ACA, preventive services, which are critical to the early detection and treatment of many diseases that disproportionately affect minorities, are now free for 76 million Americans, including 1.5 million Marylanders.

In 2011, African American women in Maryland died from cervical cancer at