MEDIA RELEASE

Sydney – 9 August 2011

On Friday 5th August, 2011, a seminar commemorating Assyrian Martyrs and Genocide Day was organised by the Assyrian Universal Alliance-Australian Chapter in cooperation with the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (AIHGS) at the Parliament House of New South Wales. The evening was hosted by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile MLC. Representatives of Armenian, Greek and Assyrian organisations were present.

The Assyrian Martyrs Day, which is commemorated on the “Seventh of August” was designated by the Assyrian Universal Alliance as the international Memorial Day for victims of the Assyrian Genocide. Over 750,000 innocent Assyrian victims were slaughtered by the Ottoman Turkish army during and after World War I because of their ethnicity and faith. On this day Assyrians also memorialise those Assyrians who were heartlessly martyred by the Iraqi Army in August 1933, only a year after Iraq declared its independence.

The Master of Ceremonies, Miss Edora David, started the program by calling on Mr Hermiz Shahen, the Regional Secretary of the Assyrian Universal Alliance for Australia and New Zealand. Mr Shahen welcomed the audience and thanked Rev. the Hon. Fred Nile MLC for hosting the conference and for all his help and support during the past several years. He also welcomed Dr Anahit Khosroeva, An Assyrian born in Armenia, who is a member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars along with Dr Panayiotis Diamadis, Director, of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. He commended them both for their courageous stance which has resonated throughout the world to fight the evils of genocide. Mr Shahen indicated that because of the continued persecution and intimidation by the successive dictators and brutal regimes that have ruled the occupied Assyrian lands till this day, unlike the Armenians, the helpless Assyrians have been late in lobbying for recognition of the Genocide perpetrated against them by the Ottoman Turks in 1914-1918. Equally is the fact that the government of modern Turkey has continued in ignoble denial and refusal to acknowledge its Ottoman predecessor's involvement in these crimes against humanity.

Mr. Shahen talked about the Turkish Government’s aggression and intervention to stop the construction of the Assyrian genocide monument last year; “We are pleased to say that the action of the Turkish
government resulted in a strong coalition between the Assyrian Universal Alliance, the Armenian National Committee and the Australian Hellenic Council in Australia in opposition to genocide and its subsequent denial. We value this friendship and we pledge to broaden and deepen this relation until we get the proper recognition”.

Mr Shahen concluded his remarks by calling on the Federal and the State Parliament of New South Wales to recognise and condemn the genocide perpetrated against the Assyrian, Armenians, and Hellenes.

Next, Rev the Hon. Fred Nile followed with a notable and inspiring speech, pledging his support to the recognition of the Assyrian genocide when tabled in Parliament. This was followed by reassuring speeches and supportive messages by Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Senator for New South Wales, The Hon. Victor Dominello MP, Minister for Citizenship and Communities and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, The Hon. Marie Ficarra, MLC, representing the Premier of New South Wales the Hon. Barry O Farrel MP, Mr Varant Meguerditchian, Executive Director, Armenian National Committee of Australia, Mr Craig Kelly MP, Federal member of Hughes (NSW), Dr John Kaye, MLC and The Hon. David Clarke, MLC., Parliamentary Secretary for Justice.

Following the members of Parliament, the international keynote speaker, Dr Anahit Khosrooeva delivered her paper titled “The Assyrian Genocide in the Ottoman Turkey (Late 19th Earlier 20th Century)”. Dr Anahit presented a great deal of weighty evidence about the Assyrian genocide. She mentioned that “at the end of the 19th and the early 20th century, according to the criteria of international law, a real genocide was implemented in Ottoman Turkey toward the Assyrian nation. With the criminal connivance of the Great Powers, and taking the opportunity presented by the martial law, Turkey committed the gravest crime against humanity - genocide. The criminal policy of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the Young Turks against Assyrians permits to conclude that during this period the Ottoman state developed into a genocidal state and became the cradle of genocide. The sources show that before 1895 the Assyrians living in Turkish-controlled and adjacent territories during Ottoman times to be about one million. During 1895-1896 massacres up to 55,000 Assyrians were killed by the hands of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and 750,000 Assyrians were subjected to genocide by the Young Turks cruel government. Assyrians lost 2/3 of their people during this period.”

Dr Anahit was followed by the next guest speaker, Dr. Panayiotis Diamadis, Director, of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Dr. Diamadis’ presentation was titled “Australian Rescuers of Assyrian Genocide Survivors”. He highlighted the roles of Australians in the Assyrian Genocide. He brought to light the heroic and benevolent stories of the Australian servicemen who rescued an estimated 40,000 Assyrians and Armenians in 1918. Dr. Diamadis showed irrefutable facts of genocide against the Assyrian people recorded meticulously and precisely in the National Archives of Australia. Dr Diamadis encouraged the members of Parliament to follow the lead of the International Association of Genocide Scholars and the South Australian Parliament to recognise the Assyrian, Armenian and Hellenic
genocide, and to pressure Turkey to acknowledge and apologise for the genocide committed against these three nations.

Notably, a moving speech was delivered by 7 years old, Miss Breteil Tigris David, student of the Assyrian Diglat School, which deeply touched the hearts of all attendees. A short film was also screened titled “The Forgotten Pages of One Nation” produced by the late Miss Lena Yakubova.

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