

Armenia

A History of Pain



Ethnic Cleansing and Forced Circumcision

Devshirme (Gathering) in the 15th - 19th Century



Boys being taken for forcible circumcision

Under the Ottoman Empire, the Devshirme System was implemented by Turkish invaders, where young Armenian boys were apprehended every three to seven years and were forced to take a ceremonial oath to convert to Islam. They were given Turkish names, turned into slaves, and forcibly circumcised.

Eventually these Armenian boys were brainwashed into becoming fanatic followers of Islam, and were placed in the Sultan's Yeni Ceri ("New Army") or "Jannisaries". They were not permitted to marry or have children, and were forced by the Ottoman Turkish officials to kill their own people.

The Genocide of 1915: Circumcision as the Mark of Conversion

Before Rwanda and Bosnia, and before the Holocaust, the first genocide of the twentieth century happened in Turkish Armenia in 1915, when one and a half million Armenians were annihilated. Armenian women and children were coerced and "escorted" by Turkish Gendarmes in death marches across Anatolia.

Those who escaped the death marches (mostly children) received assistance from those who have come to be known as "good Turks." However, these children paid a steep price for their freedom. On top of losing their families, their cultural identities and sexual innocence were stolen from them. Surviving children were coerced into denouncing Christianity and becoming Muslims; were given Turkish names; and were subjected to forced circumcision.

Sources: Avetis Papazian, *Turkish Documents About Armenia and Armenians from 16-19th Century*; Speros Vryonis, *Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme*; Jay Winter, *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*; Roudolph J. Rummel, *Death by Government: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900*; Armenian National Institute, www.armenian-genocide.org; Donald Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*

A Survivor Speaks...

"...They said, you either have to become Muslims or you will be sent out to a death march.

My aunt said, "Let's become Muslims, it's better than dying.

So they took us to the mosque and placed our hands on a Koran. They changed our names. My new name was Khalim. They recorded it in the ledger and reported to the government that all were Islamized and there were no longer any Armenians left.

Now I was supposed to be a Muslim...and Muslims had a practice of circumcision. When the man came to circumcise me I ran away to the hills."

- Hagop Zhamgojian



We must speak out, too.

The history of forced circumcision of Armenians is one that must be acknowledged. The historic precedent of non-circumcising populations being forcibly circumcised by dominant cultures and during times of war continues in our modern times; circumcision was forced upon East Timor Christians in 2004.

During male circumcision, a boy's penis is rubbed and penetrated inside of the prepuce by the circumciser's fingers, metal probes, and knives. The prepuce, or foreskin, is then torn off of the glans and cut off. The child cries out in agony and suffers the lifelong physical and psychological consequences that accompany male genital mutilation.

Source: *The Armenian Genocide* documentary film, Atlantis Productions, Inc., 1991

Stop Male Genital Mutilation

www.mgmbill.org