

## Stephen Pound MP Calls for Genocide Recognition and Centenary Commemoration in House of Commons



On the evening of Monday 23rd March 2015, Mr Stephen Pound (Labour), the Member of Parliament for Ealing North, secured a Debate in the House of Commons on the Armenian Genocide.

During the course of the Debate, Mr Pound provided a clear and succinct history of the tragic events, detailing the circumstances that led to the Genocide of the Armenian people, and forcefully calling on the British Government to ultimately recognise the massacres as Genocide, and to commemorate the Centenary of it in the House of Commons.

Mr Pound said “the subject of this Adjournment Debate is the commemoration of one of the most appalling, heinous acts that has ever been committed on this earth: the Armenian genocide ---”; “One and a Half Million people were driven to die in the burning sands of the Syrian desert in a death march to two concentration camps, in which the men were killed first. The then Interior Minister said, “kill the men, the women and all the children up to the height of my knee.” If that is not genocide, I really do not know what is. In Trabzon—or Trebizond—14,000 were killed. Many of them were put into boats, which were dragged into the Black sea and sunk”.

Mr Pound noted also that the British Government, at the time, had acknowledged the very seriousness of the actions of the leaders of the Ottoman Government, in a specially set up Court in Malta, had made an attempt to try over 40 members of the then defeated Ottoman Government for the crimes that had been committed.

In support of Mr Pound's Motion, Mr John Whittingdale (Conservative), the Member of Parliament for Maldon and Chairman of the British-Armenian All Party Parliamentary Group, spoke to echo Mr Pound's comments and to emphasise to the House the importance of recognising the events as Genocide.

In replying for the Government, Mr David Lidington, the Minister of State for Europe, began by recounting that on April 24th 1915 leading members of the Armenian community were arrested, and that this marked the beginning of a campaign of forced deportations of Armenians during which over a Million Armenian men, women and children were killed. The Minister speaking for the United Kingdom Government stated: "From 1915 to 1916 during the course of the deportations to the Syrian desert, it is estimated that well over 1 million Ottoman Armenians lost their lives as a result of massacres **by soldiers** or irregulars, forced marches, starvation and disease." In outlining that the British Government at the time condemned these deportations and crimes, Mr Lidington went on to state "**The British Government of that time robustly condemned the forced deportations, massacres and other crimes. We continue to endorse that view.**"

Mr Lidington went on to say "The appalling nature of the events of 1915-16 were brought home vividly to me when I visited the Tsitsernakaberd memorial museum in Yerevan during my first ministerial visit to Armenia in 2012. When I went back to Armenia last year, I laid a wreath at the memorial to pay my respects to those who had died and those who had suffered."

With regard to British Government representation in Armenia at the Armenian Government's commemoration of the Centenary of the Genocide, Mr Lidington said " --- in this centenary year my honourable Friend the Member for Maldon, as chair of the British-Armenian all-party group, and our Ambassador to Yerevan will be present at the Armenian Government's commemorations on 24 April in the Armenian capital."

Attending the Debate as observers, on Mr Pound's invitation, were Mr. Ara Palamoudian, Chairman of the Armenian Community Council, Messrs Armen Liloyan and Ara Margarian, representing the Armenian Embassy, and the Very Reverend Father Aren Shaheenian. Also present were Mr. Vahan Krikorian and Mr Sevan Artin, respectively the Chairman and the Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of the United Kingdom.