

# People march in memory of Armenian Genocide

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Charles Poochigian, R-Fresno, in a statement. Poochigian, who was instrumental in drafting the legislation, spoke at the rally Thursday.

For almost three weeks, students, young professionals and even a grandmother put their lives on hold to remember the lives of others.

While recognition at the state level is a big step, the ultimate goal of the march was to convince the governments of the United States and Turkey to recognize the genocide. The Turkish government maintains that the atrocities committed against Armenians were unfortunate casualties of World War II and not a genocide, while the United States, taking care not to alienate an ally, has also refrained from recognizing the genocide as such.

These Armenian-Americans walked the 215 miles from Fresno to Sacramento to honor those killed and displaced by Ottoman Turkey between 1915 and 1923 during the Armenian Genocide.

"Our goal is to get ... the message out that we want the denial to end," said Ani Garibyan, a fourth-year history student at UCLA who walked for two weekends and helped organize the march.

The participants in "March for Humanity" ended their journey Thursday morning at the state Capitol, after walking about 15 miles each day since April 2. They were greeted by California legislators and invited onto the floors of the House and Senate, both of which unanimously approved legislation establishing April 24 as the "California Day of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide."

A core group of 16 people walked the entire way from Fresno to Sacramento. They were joined by others at various points throughout the journey, Garibyan said. At one point, she said, there were 150 people walking.

"We must never forget the 1.5 million innocent Armenian victims who perished and others who were tortured and driven from their historic homeland," said California Sen.

Some nights, the marchers were provided with a place to rest at



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Marchers reached Sacramento on Thursday, where legislation was passed in California marking April 24 as a day of remembrance of the Armenian Genocide.

churches, community centers and homes. On other nights, they simply pitched a tent near the road.

Garibyan said she was participating to honor the memory of her family.

"Toward the end, your feet really start hurting," Garibyan said.

"It's my duty to my ancestors, so hopefully they can rest in peace,"

she said. While some marchers were acting out of obligation to family members, many also had in mind other human rights abuses.

Raffi Kassabian, president of the UCLA Armenian Students Association, said recognizing the Armenian genocide is one way to help prevent future injustices.

"Without recognition, there's this pattern of genocide," he said, citing the current atrocities being committed in the Darfur region of Sudan, whose status as genocide is also being contested.

Politicians supporting the legislation agreed that recognition is key.

"It's vitally important that false depictions of the tragedies of the genocide are rejected," Poochigian said.

The effort to solicit support from the federal government will continue in the form of letter-writing campaigns to senators and representatives, but, Garibyan said, Thursday's recognition by the state government was a major achievement.

"Everyone's really tired, but it was very exciting," Garibyan said.