

Armenian youth prep 18-day trek

By VANESSA COLÓN

THE FRESNO BEE

They've kept strict diets and shed a few pounds to prepare for Saturday, when they'll take off on a trek to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

Christian Torossian and Raffi Birindjian of Fresno will walk shoulder to shoulder for a 215-mile, 18-day journey to remember the 1.5 million Armenians who were executed between 1915 and 1923 at the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

"It's something we feel that needs to be done for the 90 years of denial," Torossian said. "We want to get the message across."

Serouj Aprahamian, a march project coordinator in Los Angeles, said it's one of the biggest events ever put on by Armenian youth.

And it's for all victims of genocide, including the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide, the Rwandan genocide and the killings in the Darfur region of Sudan.

"It's an unprecedented event. ... We want to make an impact that the youth is still determined," Aprahamian said. "We see today a genocide [unfolding] in Darfur. We are allowing it to go on, and we are not putting a stop to it. Unless we, the younger generation stand up, it will continue."

Hundreds of marchers and supporters are expected to participate in the trek.
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pected from across the nation and Canada to join the March for Humanity.

It starts in Fresno at 9 a.m. at Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church on Ventura and M streets.

They hope to capture the attention of the Bush administration to acknowledge the Armenian genocide.

Once in Sacramento, marchers will gather at the state's Capitol to thank the state Legislature for recognizing the genocide.

Marchers will walk for about 15 miles each day, rain or shine.

They will sleep in community centers, churches, schools and tents on the roadside.

Torossian, 19, said he's been on a diet of oranges, bananas, broccoli, green beans and wheat bread for five or six weeks.

"Things that don't make you fat but will give you energy," Torossian said. "I've tried to stay

away from the sodas."

Birindjian says he weighs eight pounds less than he did two months ago.

"I feel great," said Birindjian, who now carries 197 pounds on his 5 foot, 10 inch frame.

Birindjian, 22, said it's been tough eating turkey sandwiches and yogurt for lunch.

After it's all over, McDonald's might be one of the first places he visits.

"It will probably taste good after this. ... I plan to go back to normal food. I'm getting sick of making my own lunches," he said.

Torossian, who sits on the executive committee of the Fresno chapter of the Armenian Youth Federation, said they hope to raise a quarter of a million dollars through sponsorships. Similar to the Lance Armstrong yellow wrist bands, black wrist bands with the word 'revolution' on them will be sold for \$3 each,

Torossian said.

The money will go toward providing food, shelter and clean clothes for the marchers, he said.

Birindjian said the project is one of the biggest he's seen involving youth.

"We can't let those 1.5 million who died go unrecognized," he said. "And there's a lot of people out there that don't know what happened."

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