

## OUR VIEWS

# March of history

Genocide anniversary brings renewed call for action.

**I**t's been nearly a century since some 1.5 million Armenians perished at the hands of the Ottoman Turks. Many died on forced marches from their ancestral lands in northeast Turkey toward the deserts of Syria to the south, in the years between 1915 and 1923. They died of starvation and dehydration, and many were killed because they could not keep up. Thousands of the victims of the marches — perhaps most — were women and children.

Thus the march that began in Fresno this past weekend is freighted with symbolism. To celebrate the 90th anniversary of the genocide, marchers set out from the historic Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church in downtown Fresno. The goal is to walk all the way to Sacramento, a 215-mile, 18-day act of remembrance for the victims of the genocide.

A few of the marchers will make the entire trek; they'll be joined for shorter stretches along the way by hundreds of others from all over North America.

The marchers will mostly be Armenian Americans, descendants of the lucky ones, the victims who made it out of the hands of their persecutors and safely to distant shores. But the memory of the genocide is, in real measure, a shared memory for all human beings. The huge death toll among Armenians foreshadowed, in grim tones, the even larger Holocaust that was inflicted on the Jews of Europe a generation later, by

a Nazi regime that learned its brutal lessons well from the Ottoman Turks, among others.

The march has another purpose, one we share. The present-day Turkish government has bitterly resisted any suggestion that it acknowledge historical events that the world knows to be true. They might be wiser to follow the example of the late John Paul II, who personally apologized — with extraordinary grace — for past excesses committed by the Catholic Church.

But no. Turkey can't bring itself to admit that the genocide really happened. In this, the Turks have been abetted by a series of U.S. administrations more concerned with geopolitics than with human rights and honest history.

For decades during the Cold War, the United States invested great importance in its alliance with Turkey, since that nation sits on the southern edge of the old Soviet Union, and shares the strategic Black Sea with Russia.

In addition, Turkey — a secular democracy — has been a valuable counterweight to authoritarian and undemocratic regimes in the rest of the Middle East.

But the Cold War is over, and if Turkey's democracy is so fragile that it cannot support an honest admission of this historical truth, then perhaps it is time to reassess the value of the relationship between the nations.

As the marchers' banner says, "Turkey, tell the truth, acknowledge the Armenian genocide." To which we add, "United States, turn up the heat."