

# ‘With the Ink of Their Blood’: Lemkin’s Armenian Collaborators and the Genocide Convention

While it has become widely accepted in recent years that the World War I destruction of the Armenians influenced Raphael Lemkin’s work, the efforts of Armenians in support of Lemkin’s campaign to secure the adoption of the Genocide Convention and its ratification by parliaments around the world have received little attention. In this article, part of a larger project, I explore the role of the *Hairenik* newspapers in this effort, focusing on three of Lemkin’s close collaborators: editors James G. Mandalian and Reuben Darbinian and correspondent Levon Keshishian.<sup>1</sup>

## From Nemesis to ‘Genocide’

In the absence of a Nuremberg trial equivalent for the Armenian massacres, the survivor generation also took justice into its own hands. Trials were held in Allied-occupied Istanbul sentencing perpetrators to death in absentia, but most Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) leaders were beyond reach, having fled the country (many to Germany), while those the British had imprisoned in Malta were released as part of a prisoner exchange deal. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) decided in 1919 to assassinate the perpetrators. By 1922, the ARF had gunned down Ottoman Turkish leaders implicated in the genocide in Berlin, Rome and Tiflis: Interior Minister Talaat Pasha, Ottoman Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha; Minister of Navy Cemal Pasha; CUP founding member Bahaeddine Shakir; and Trebizond governor Cemal Azmi. The project, dubbed “Operation Nemesis,” made headlines around the world<sup>2</sup>, influencing a Polish-Jewish university student named Raphael Lemkin to pursue the task of establishing an international law against attempted annihilation of ethnic groups.

Reading about Talaat Pasha’s murder in newspapers in 1921, Lemkin felt that Soghomon Tehlirian, the Operation Nemesis assassin, “upheld the moral order of mankind”:

*But can a man appoint himself to mete out justice? Will not passion sway such form of justice and make travesty of it? At that moment, my worries about the murder of the innocent became more meaningful to me. I didn’t know all the answers but I felt that a law against this type of racial or religious murder must be adopted by the world.<sup>3</sup>*

Lemkin’s search for answers culminated in the coinage of the term “genocide” in 1943 and his lifelong struggle to pass a law against it. Two months after the third count of the Nuremberg Indictment stated that defendants had “conducted deliberate and systematic genocide,” the Armenian-language daily newspaper *Haratch* in Paris published an editorial providing the readers with background on the term “génocide,” using information from the French newspaper *Le Monde*. “A new word was used in the Nuremberg trials, which means Tseghasbanutyun,” founding editor of *Haratch*, Shavarsh Missakian, wrote. He then referred to Lemkin’s efforts toward punishment and prevention and lamented:

*We read these lines, we follow the Nuremberg trials, and our mind instinctively wanders to a faraway world, where “war crimes” took place thirty years ago ... Where were the jurists and judges back then? Had they not discovered the word, or was the blood-thirsty monster so powerful or unreachable that they could not punish him?<sup>4</sup>*

After the UN General Assembly adopted the Genocide Convention in December 1948, the *Hairenik Weekly* in Boston published an editorial that argued, “To have any meaning at all, the decision to outlaw genocide must go

deeper. It must also offer remedy to the wronged parties. To outlaw genocide, but to sanction the basic aims and results of the action is only a half measure.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Levon Keshishian**

Although this was the dominant sentiment in the Armenian press from the Middle East to North America, Armenians around the world strove to secure the adoption of the Convention at the UN, and then its ratification by parliaments around the world. Lemkin recounted how:

*“[T]he Armenians of the entire world were specifically interested in the Genocide Convention. They filled the galleries of the drafting committee at the third General Assembly of the United Nations in Paris when the Genocide Convention was discussed. An Armenian, Levon Keshishian, the well-known UN correspondent for Arab newspapers, helped considerably through his writings in obtaining the ratifications of many Near Eastern and North African countries.”*<sup>6</sup>

Keshishian and Lemkin first met after the UN adopted the Genocide Convention.<sup>7</sup> Here’s how Keshishian describes the encounter:

*Lemkin is a law professor, divides his time between Boston, New York and Washington. My meeting with him was short, but it was most interesting. He wanted to see the Arab News Agency. He asked, are you the same Levon Keshishian of “Hairenik Weekly.” I replied yes. He then confesses that the “Weekly” has been one of the outstanding newspapers supporting the Convention of Genocide and paid full credit to editor Mr. James G. Mandalian. Then coming to the point, he said, “You are an Armenian.” After a long pause he said: “You will therefore understand how important this Convention is.”*<sup>8</sup>

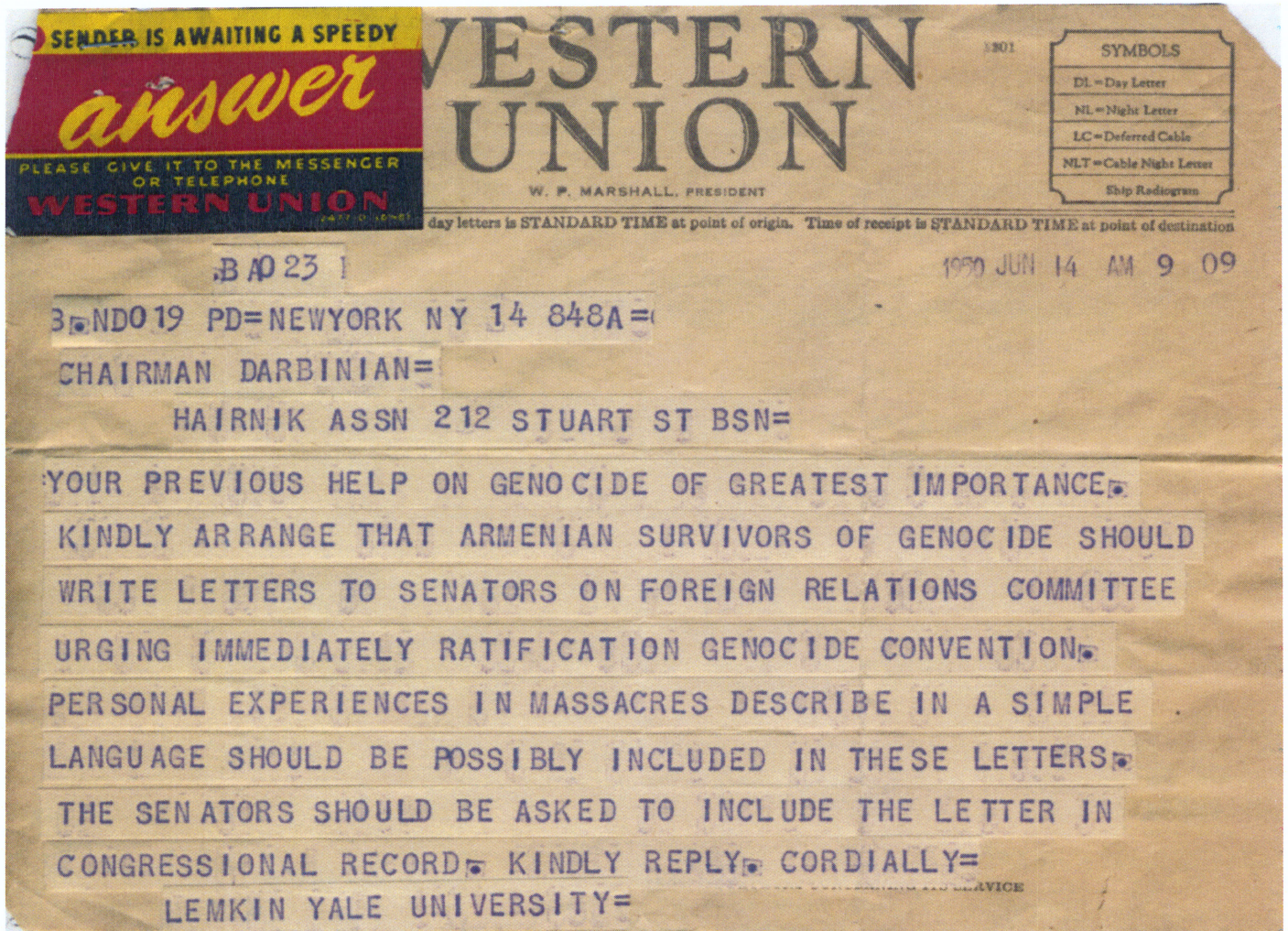
Keshishian filed dozens of reports in Middle Eastern in North American publications when parliaments ratified the convention, when Lemkin delivered lectures and made public statements, and even when he privately advocated for the Convention. He also connected Lemkin to political figures in the Middle East and beyond and then reported on Lemkin’s communication with them. Keshishian reported, for example, about how “Prof. Rafael Lemkin, father of ‘genocide’ has written to Lebanese deputy Dicran Tosbath (Armenian) asking him to work for the ratification of the Convention of Genocide by the Lebanese Parliament.”<sup>9</sup>



Hairenik correspondent Levon Keshishian, President of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Armenian American philanthropist George Mardikian. Photo taken at a meeting in Heliopolis, Cairo in June 1958. (Source: ARF Archives in Boston)

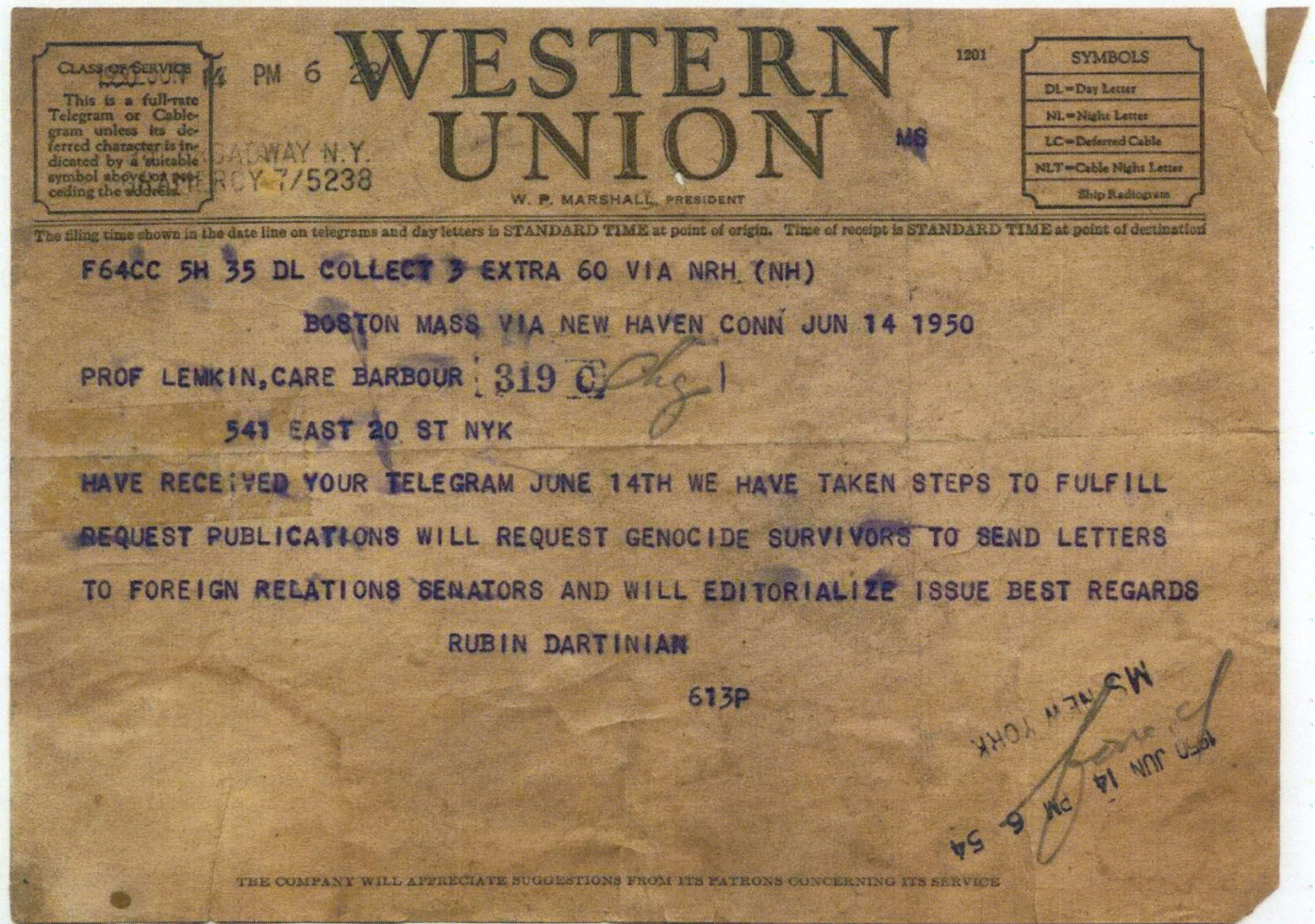
### Hairenik editors Mandalian and Darbinian

Reuben Darbinian and James G. Mandalian, the editors of the *Hairenik Daily* and *Hairenik Weekly* respectively, had an even longer history of collaboration with Lemkin.<sup>10</sup> Their correspondence with the Father of the Genocide Convention dates back to the late 40s and offers insight into how Lemkin mobilized thought leaders in communities affected by genocide to advocate for the ratification of the Convention by the US Congress and parliaments around the world.



Telegram from Lemkin to Reuben Darbinian, then editor of the *Hairenik* newspaper, dated June 14, 1950. (Source: Haigazn Khazarian Archive, National Association for Armenian Studies and Research Mardigian Library)

In a telegram to Darbinian in June 1950, Lemkin noted that the *Hairenik* editor's "previous help on genocide [was] of greatest importance." He then requested that Darbinian "kindly arrange that Armenian survivors of genocide... write letters to Senators on Foreign Relations Committee urging immediate ratification [of] Genocide Convention."<sup>11</sup>



Darbinian's response to Lemkin's request, dated 14 June 1950.

Darbinian responded, "We received your telegram... We have taken steps to fulfill request.... Will request genocide survivors to send letters to Foreign Relations Senators and will editorialize issue."<sup>12</sup>

A week later, Mandalian wrote a letter to Lemkin in which he said:

*In compliance with your request, our Armenian language newspaper the Hairenik Daily published an editorial call, inviting our readers to write letters to the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urging them to do their utmost [sic] for the ratification of the Genocide Convention. The Enclosed letter which I sent to Senator Lodge was translated and published in our Armenian Daily as a sample, to give the readers an idea of how they should write. I am happy that Senator Lodge was very prompt in his reply to me, the copy of which you will find enclosed.*<sup>13</sup>

Telephone Liberty 3650

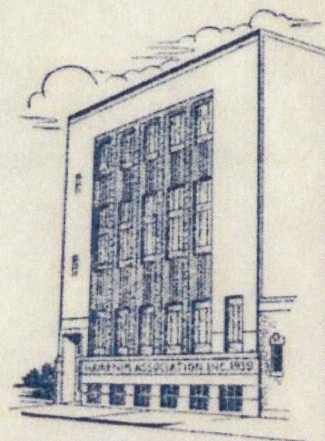
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THE HAIRENIK WEEKLY  
THE ARMENIAN REVIEW



June 21, 1950

Prof. Raphael Lemkin  
Yale University  
New Haven, Conn.

Dear Prof. Lemkin:

In compliance with your request, our Armenian language newspaper the *Hairenik Daily* published an editorial call, inviting our readers to write letters to the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urging them to do their utmost for the ratification of the Genocide Convention. The enclosed letter which I sent to Senator Lodge was translated and published in our *Armenian Daily* as a sample, to give the readers an idea of how they should write. I am happy that Senator Lodge was very prompt in his reply to me, the copy of which you will find enclosed.

Sincerely yours,

*James G. Mandalian*  
James G. Mandalian

James G. Mandalian's letter to Lemkin, dated 21 June 1950.

On 12 November 1953, the *Hairenik Weekly* published yet another editorial arguing for US Congressional

# THE HAIRENIK Weekly



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• A WEEKLY EXCLUSIVE:  
**Dr. Lemkin, Father of Genocide Convention, Reviews Work Relating To Turkish Massacres**

We are honored herewith to present an evaluatory commentary on the recently published "Les Memoires of Mgr. Jean Naslian" sent to the Weekly by Dr. Raphael Lemkin, the world-famous crusader for the United Nations Convention Against Genocide, an extraordinary international document now ratified by fifty-eight nations.

By DR. RAPHAEL LEMKIN

The history of the atrocious crime perpetrated by the Turks in 1915 which claimed the lives of more than one million Armenians has been substantially enriched by the recent publication in Vienna (Imprimerie Mechithariste, Les Memoires de Mgr. Jean Naslian, 2 vols., 1639 pages, in French) of the memories of a remarkable Catholic spiritual leader, Monsignor Jean Naslian, the late Bishop of Trebizonde. The Armenians as a community are known to be very religious, and in the supreme test of their lives they clung closely to their spiritual leaders, whether of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Roman Catholic or Protestant faiths. These leaders did not fail their flocks.

Monsignor Naslian describes the plight of his people in great detail. He places responsibility for the origin of the plan to destroy the Armenian people on the young Turkish committee called Ittihad, a political party which became prominent in Turkey in 1912. It was a very nationalistic movement which wanted to effect the fusion of all races and religions into one homogeneous entity, the Turkish nation which would reign supreme. There was no room in this new creation for the ancient Armenian people whose first trace of historical existence goes back to the 15th Century B.C. The Armenians in Turkey had grown into a highly cultured, cohesive, industrious and prosperous community which could not easily be integrated.

The first ominous sign came with the deportation from Constantinople of 270 Armenians—intellectuals, writers, artists, editors, teachers—into the interior of Turkey, where most of them were immediately massacred. In order to deprive the Armenians in other parts of Turkey of their leadership as well, the Armenian intellectuals elsewhere were arrested at the same time. With one blow the brain of a people was damaged. From this deported group, Aram Adonian survived to publish after the first World War a book with authenticated documents revealing the governmental orders for these massacres. In the course of the war he managed to send information to America (this reviewer had the privilege of meeting Adonian and obtaining from him a rare publication on the Armenian case).

The second phase of destruction came soon when the Armenian population was rounded up in all cities of interior Turkey and marched into the Syrian desert. During this march most of them were mowed down by the guns of the escorting police. Pope Benedict XV intervened on behalf of the Armenians but he succeeded only in preventing the mass destruction of the Armenians in the capital city of Constantinople.

The U.S. Ambassador in Turkey, Henry Morgenthau Sr., did a yeoman's job in attempting to save the Armenians. He got nowhere, however, with the Minister of Interior, Talaat Pasha. In his own memoirs the former American

## FRIENDS GREET LEYLEGIAN, SARKISSIAN AT RELEASE

NEW YORK CITY, Dec. 17—This morning, the Messrs. Nishan Sarkissian and Mattios Leylegian were released from prison, and were met by their relatives and close friends who found the two men healthy and their spirits high.

As announced in the Armenian American press, the sentences of the two men were commuted December 12 by His Excellency, Governor Averill Harriman, of New York. The Messrs. Leylegian and Sarkissian had spent twenty-five years in prison.

Release of the two men terminates an incident which rocked the Armenian American community.

(Announcement that the two men have been released strikes a note of happiness among all patriotic Armenian Americans. The Hairenik Weekly expresses its gratitude once again to Mr. Harriman, and to the spirit of justice which is part of the generic nature of America).

• A FIRST:  
**Mooradian Made Mayor of Canada's "Atomgrad"**



DR. ARA MOORADIAN

DEEP RIVER, Canada, Dec. 22—Dr. Ara Mooradian, 36-year-old atomic scientist, has been elected Mayor of Deep River, the residential community connected with Canada's atomic city, Chalk River.

The election of one of Canada's youngest and most brilliant nuclear physicists to head a community where the per capita rate of Ph.D.'s in residence tops that of any other Canadian community, is otherwise historically important and interesting since Dr. Mooradian thus becomes the first Canadian of Armenian ancestry ever to be elected to the Mayoralty of a city.

Dr. Mooradian is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John (Hagop) Mooradian, of Hamilton, Ont., Can., both of whom are well-known in Canadian and American Armenian patriotic, church and charitable circles, as members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnakstapan Party), and the Armenian Relief Society, respectively.

## THE A. R. F.— PAST AND PRESENT

Armenia, the oldest historical land in the Near East having as its center the Biblical Mt. Ararat, now has only one real supporter—and that is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Today, the nations of the world and even a large part of people of Armenian background population have recognized that the flame of Armenian liberty burns only in the hearts and souls of the members and supporters of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

In the years just previous to 1890, Armenians were largely under the domination of the Turks in Turkish governed territory once the lands of the Armenians. The base injustice of the Turkish treatment of Armenians despite numerous promises to local, national, international government and private authorities to the contrary, became more and more unbearable.

Rather than submit to the Turks, and fearless of cruel reprisals meted out by the Turks, Armenians during the latter part of the nineteenth century began to show resentment of the apparent discriminations and periodic massacres by resorting to sporadic and later to organized resistance.

Just as the liberty-loving patriots of colonial days in

(Continued on page 5, columns 4-5)

## ALIENS MUST REPORT ADDRESSES BY JAN. 31

District Director, John F. Mulcahey, of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Boston District office advised today that the annual alien address report program is again under way and will end on January 31, 1959.

According to Director Mulcahey, 155,756 aliens reported their addresses last year in the tri-state area of New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. The number this year is expected to be slightly smaller by at least 5,000 because many of last year's registrants have become naturalized citizens.

The Immigration official pointed out that the address reports are required by law annually during

Forms with which to make the reports are available at all Post Offices and Immigration Offices. It is an easy matter to fill out one of the cards and return it to the same office.

Director Mulcahey added that trained personnel will be on hand in all the Immigration Offices listed below to answer any questions the reporting aliens may have regarding immigration and naturalization matters. Sufficient trained personnel are not available to furnish this service in all Post Offices. Room 406, 150 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., Tel.: Liberty 2-5600, extension 362, Room 501, 839 Elm Street, Manchester, New Hampshire, Tel.: National 2-5942, Room

**The front page of the Hairenik Weekly’s 1 January 1959 issue, featuring an exclusive article written by Raphael Lemkin.**

He added, “One million Armenians died, but a law against the murder of peoples was written with the ink of their blood and the spirit of their sufferings.”<sup>15</sup>

Lemkin continued working with Armenian leaders to secure the United States’ ratification of the convention until his death in August 1959. US ratification only came in 1988. But with the 50th anniversary of the 1915 nearing, Lemkin had equipped Armenians, primarily in the diaspora, with a powerful weapon to push for justice.

The Armenians, who had helped Lemkin attain the ratification of the Convention by legislatures around the globe, now engaged in yet another struggle: a decades-long battle for the acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is partly based on a [lecture delivered at NAASR](#) in 2011. For a biography of Raphael Lemkin and his campaign for the Genocide Convention see, for example, John Cooper, *Raphael Lemkin and the Struggle for the Genocide Convention* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). For Lemkin and the Armenian genocide, see Steven L. Jacobs, “Raphael Lemkin and the Armenian Genocide,” in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2003), 125–135; Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Peter Balakian, “Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27:1 (Spring 2013), 57-89.

<sup>2</sup> I recently curated [a selection of newspaper clippings](#) about Talat’s assassination for the Armenian Weekly.

<sup>3</sup> Donna-Lee Frieze, ed., *Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 20.

<sup>4</sup> “Editorial,” *Haratch newspaper*, 9 December 1945, 1

<sup>5</sup> “Editorial: Exit Genocide,” *The Hairenik Weekly*, 30 December 1948, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> “A Weekly Exclusive: Dr. Lemkin, Father of Genocide Convention, Reviews Work Relating to Turkish Massacres,” *The Hairenik Weekly*, 1 January 1959, 4 (continued from page 1).

<sup>7</sup> The two had several other meetings in the 1950s. See, for example, “Leaders of ANCHA Visit UN Official,” *The Hairenik Weekly*, 12 November 1953, 2.

<sup>8</sup> “Honduras is 35th Nation to ratify Genocide, but Life of Convention is Menaced,” *The Hairenik Weekly*, 13 March 1952, p. 3 (article continued from page 1). For more reporting by Keshishian on the Genocide Convention see, for example, Keshishian’s column “This and That from New York,” *The Hairenik Weekly*, June 5, 1952 and 20 August 1953, p. 3;

<sup>9</sup> “This and That from New York,” *The Hairenik Weekly*, 28 August 1953, p. 2. Lebanon ratified the convention a few months later. The *Weekly* reported the news on its front page. “Lebanon is 43rd Nation to OK ‘Genocide,’” *The Hairenik Weekly*, June 5, 1952 and 7 January 1954, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Darbinian served as the [editor of Hairenik Daily](#) for more than four decades. Mandalian was the [first editor of the Hairenik Weekly](#), as well as a founder and first editor of the *Armenian Review*.

<sup>11</sup> Telegram from Lemkin to Reuben Darbinian, then the editor of the *Hairenik* newspaper, dated 14 June 1950. Haigazn Khazarian Archive, National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) Mardigian Library.

<sup>12</sup> Telegram from Darbinian to Lemkin, dated 14 June 1950. Center for Jewish History, Raphael Lemkin Collection, Box 2, Folder 3.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from James G. Mandalian to Lemkin, dated 21 June, 1950. Center for Jewish History, Raphael Lemkin Collection, Box 2, Folder 3.