



**CALIFORNIA CONTENT  
STANDARD 10.5.5**

## *Human Rights Violations and Genocide*

**Specific Objective:** Discuss human rights violations and genocide during World War I, including the Ottoman government's actions against Armenian citizens.

**Read the summaries to answer questions on the next page.**

### **Atrocities on Both Sides**

- The Allies accused the Germans of committing atrocities, or terrible crimes, against Belgium, a neutral nation. The British government issued a report investigating the situation. It was later shown to have overstated many of the claims. Still, the Germans admitted to using harsh measures in achieving their goals. An estimated 5,500 Belgians were killed. Many towns and buildings were destroyed or plundered. Charges of German atrocities were used as propaganda in neutral countries.
- Many Allies also pointed to other examples of Germany's inhumane tactics. These included the use of poison gas and the sinking of passenger ships such as the American *Lusitania*. Yet the Allies themselves soon started using poison gas. The *Lusitania* was carrying weapons as well as passengers.
- The Allies blocked trade with Germany for five years. This blockade caused great suffering for the German people. German government records show that 763,000 people starved to death as a result of this Allied action.

### **The Armenian Genocide**

- The Armenians were an ethnic minority of about 2.5 million in the Ottoman Empire ruled by Turkey. As Christians in a mainly Muslim land, they were also a religious minority. They had long been denied basic rights and wanted to be independent. When war broke out, they pledged to support the Allies, the enemies of the Turks.
- Just before the war began, a group of extreme nationalists took over the Turkish government. They vowed to create a Turkish-only state. On April 24, 1915, the government began forcing Armenians from their homes. Some Armenians were killed outright. Many others, sent on forced marches to the Syrian Desert, died of starvation or disease. Virtually all who survived were left homeless. The persecution continued from 1915 to 1918 and arose again from 1920 to 1923. At least 600,000 Armenians died between 1915 and 1916 alone.
- The murder and planned murder of an entire group of people, especially an ethnic group, is called genocide.
- Many foreigners in the Ottoman Empire witnessed this destruction of the Armenian population. They told the outside world of the horrors they had seen. The international community officially condemned the genocide. Yet they made no forceful effort to save the Armenians.

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Directions: Choose the letter of the *best* answer.

- 1 Stories of German atrocities in Belgium were used as propaganda, meaning that the stories were used to**
  - A encourage Belgium to support the war.
  - B make the Germans look worse than they were.
  - C convince neutral nations to fight for the German army.
  - D show that the Germans treated civilians humanely.
  
- 2 Which statement *best* describes the existence of atrocities during World War I?**
  - A Both sides followed the rules of warfare and avoided civilian deaths.
  - B Germany was the only member of the Central Powers that killed civilians.
  - C The Allies were fighting for democracy and did not harm civilians.
  - D Both sides justified the use of harsh tactics to achieve their military goals.
  
- 3 The Armenians in Turkey were a minority group partly because they were**
  - A atheist.
  - B Christian.
  - C Jewish.
  - D Muslim.
  
- 4 The Ottoman Empire was ruled by**
  - A the Armenians.
  - B the Germans.
  - C the Turks.
  - D a European coalition.
  
- 5 What was the political position of the Armenians at the beginning of World War I?**
  - A They supported the Turks.
  - B They supported the Allies.
  - C They wished to remain neutral.
  - D Their position was unknown.
  
- 6 How did the international community respond to Turkey's actions against the Armenians?**
  - A It supported the Turkish government's actions.
  - B It tried to keep Turkey's actions secret until after the war.
  - C It did not know about the actions until after the war.
  - D It condemned Turkey but did not fight to save the Armenians.