

On April 24, 1915, the Ottomans rounded up and killed a group of Armenia's best and brightest, marking the beginning of what historians now recognize as a wider plan of eradication. Nearly 1.5 million Armenians were killed, in massacres and in forced marches into the Syrian Desert. Another half million Armenians were driven from their ancient homeland.

The slaughter of innocent Armenians was genocide, plain and simple. Indeed, our modern term "genocide" was first coined in the 1940s to describe both the Jewish Holocaust and the plight of the Armenians under Ottoman persecution in World War I.

Theodore Roosevelt called the Armenian Genocide the "greatest crime" of the Great War. And perhaps prophetically, he wrote in 1918 that the failure to honestly account for the perpetration of that crime would mean that "all talk of guaranteeing the future peace of the world is mischievous nonsense."

Words matter. The historical record matters. I believe that by properly accounting for crimes against humanity we stand a better chance of preventing them in the future.

His Holiness Pope Francis, known for his unwavering sympathy for victims of suffering, recently acknowledged the Armenian genocide, noting that "Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it."

Today we gather to seek an honest appraisal of a painful past.

It is this terrible chapter, more than any other single event, that led to the Armenian diaspora, including in the United States and my home state of Rhode Island. I am proud to call myself a friend of the Armenian community in Rhode Island and in the United States. Over the years, I've had the pleasure of being welcomed into the community, and for that I am grateful.

Senator Jack Reed, too, is a great friend of the Armenian community. He has worked for years to elevate the issues that are most dear to the Republic of Armenia and to the Armenian-American community in Congress.

When I first came to the Senate in 2007, one of the first bills I cosponsored—along with Jack Reed—was the resolution calling on the President to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States appropriately reflects the realities of the Armenian Genocide. It was a privilege to do so. And I have signed onto similar legislation in every session of Congress since then.

To this day, too many people are unaware of this tragedy, due in part to the unwillingness of some to call it what it was. This solemn recognition is important not only to so many Armenians in Rhode Island and throughout the world, but to our human obligation to the truth.