Dear Committee Members,

Although we strongly support Brown University’s genuine attempt to look into its past, we are
disappointed to see that the report itself has been turned into an exemplary of injustice. The
report falls short of reflecting the ongoing heated debate on the Armenian “genocide”,
presenting it as an undisputed historical fact. It is well known that the “genocide” claims have
been rejected by many prominent scholars of Ottoman history. These historians are not a
bunch of lunatics but academicians at prestigious institutions in the United States and Europe.
We believe, Brown University students deserve to know that there exists a debate on this
issue and are multitude of sides to it. Likewise, we hope the committee members believe in
the capacity of Brown students in making informed and independent decision once they heard
the different viewpoints to an issue, rather than indoctrination, so that the report will be
revised to reflect our concerns.

Sincerely,

Cagatay Demiralp, Cengiz Pehlevan, Mert Akdere, Seckin Kara

Notes:

The "Slavery and Justice" report claims in several places that its object is "to provide factual
information and critical perspectives to deepen understanding". Below, we discuss some of
the objections to the genocide claims as well as present the factual mistakes we found in the
report.

- Quoting 45th page of the report:
  "...Turkish government’s continuing insistence that the Armenian genocide of 1915-
1917 never happened, a claim flatly contradicted by thousands of eye-witness
accounts, newsreel footage, and an abundant documentary record. (Under current
Turkish law, anyone asserting that the genocide occurred is liable to prosecution for
the crime of “denigrating Turkishness", an offense punishable by up to three years in
jail.)"

This statement is not factual in several different respects:

  a. Turkey's opposition is to the usage of the legal term "genocide" to describe what
happened. Turkish scholars and politicians accept the fact that a terrible tragedy has
happened to the Armenians (and to the other Muslim and non Muslim ethnic groups of
Ottoman Empire), but say that this was not the result of an intention from Ottoman
authorities to eliminate in whole or in part the Armenian people indiscriminately, thus
not a genocide, which is a legal term as also defined on the 36th page of the report.
The website of Turkish Embassy in Washington says
(http://www.turkishembassy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=64&Itemid=257) "...A century of ever-increasing conflict, beginning roughly in 1820 and
culminating with the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, characterized the
disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire participated in no fewer
than a dozen named wars, nearly all to the detriment of the empire and its citizens. The
empire contracted against an onslaught of external invaders and internal nationalist
independence movements. In this context -- an imperiled empire waging and losing
battles on remote and disparate fronts, grasping to continue a reign of over 700 years
-- must the tragic experience of the Ottoman Armenians of Eastern Anatolia be
understood. For during these waning days of the Ottoman Empire did millions die,
Muslim, Jew, and Christian alike." and “The totality of evidence thus far uncovered by
historians tells a grim story of serious inter-communal conflict, perpetrated by both
Christian and Muslim irregular forces, complicated by disease, famine, and many other
of war’s privations. The evidence does not, however, describe genocide.”

The report counts "Truth Commissions" as one of the rubrics of reparative justice. It
should not be forgotten that in March 2005, Turkish Prime Minister invited Turkish,
Armenian and international historians to form a Commission to establish the events of
1915. The offer was rejected by Armenia. Report discusses histories of several truth
commissions in detail, but does not mention this offer, while stating that Turkey is
continuously insisting on denial. We think that this is unjust.

b. The claim of genocide is not 'flatly contradicted' and is still a debate among
historians. Distinguished scholars of Ottoman history like Roderic Davison, J.C.
Hurewitz, Bernard Lewis, and Andrew Mango have rejected the appropriateness of the
genocide label for those occurrences. Among the many sources that says the opposite
of the report’s claims, we will cite a letter to the U.S. House of representatives
opposing the House Joint Resolution 192 which defines the events of 1915 as

".. From the fourteenth century until 1922, the area currently known as Turkey, or more
correctly, the Republic of Turkey, was part of the territory encompassing the multi-
national, multi-religious state known as the Ottoman Empire. It is wrong to equate the
Ottoman Empire with the Republic of Turkey in the same way that it is wrong to equate
the Hapsburg Empire with the Republic of Austria. The Ottoman Empire, which was
brought to an end in 1922, by the successful conclusion of the Turkish Revolution
which established the present day Republic of Turkey in 1923, incorporated lands and
people which today account for more than twenty-five distinct countries in
Southeastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, only one of which is the
Republic of Turkey. The Republic of Turkey bears no responsibility for any events
which occurred in Ottoman times, yet by naming Turkey in the Resolution, its authors
have implicitly labeled it as guilty of "genocide" it charges transpired between 1915 and
1923; As for the charge of "genocide" no signatory of this statement wishes to
minimize the scope of Armenian suffering. We are likewise cognizant that it cannot be
viewed as separate from the suffering experienced by the Muslim inhabitants of the
region. The weight of evidence so far uncovered points in the direct of serious inter
communal warfare (perpetrated by Muslim and Christian irregular forces), complicated
by disease, famine, suffering and massacres in Anatolia and adjoining areas during the
First World War. Indeed, throughout the years in question, the region was the scene of
more or less continuous warfare, not unlike the tragedy which has gone on in Lebanon
for the past decade. The resulting death toll among both Muslim and Christian
communities of the region was immense. But much more remains to be discovered
before historians will be able to sort out precisely responsibility between warring and
innocent, and to identify the causes for the events which resulted in the death or
removal of large numbers of the eastern Anatolian population, Christian and Muslim
The signatures under this statement include scholars from institutions like UCLA, Columbia, Princeton and Chicago universities and prominent historians like Bernard Lewis, Halil Inalcik, and Stanford Shaw (whose house was bombed by the Armenian terror organization ASALA in 1977). Clearly, the issue is not settled among the historians and still is of debate.

c. The report makes a reference to Turkey's infamous Article 301. We think that it is far from being democratic and needs to be changed. Here is a translation from Amnesty International (http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR440352005):

"1. Public denigration of Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and three years.
2. Public denigration of the Government of the Republic of Turkey, the judicial institutions of the State, the military or security structures shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and two years.
3. In cases where denigration of Turkishness is committed by a Turkish citizen in another country the punishment shall be increased by one third.
4. Expressions of thought intended to criticize shall not constitute a crime."

The wording in the report indicates that this law is particularly for the claims of Armenian genocide, however there is no mention to this issue in the law. Furthermore, nobody in Turkey has been prosecuted for asserting that the genocide occurred based on this law. On the contrary, numerous Turkish scholars and authors have classified the events of 1915 as genocide in Turkey, organized conferences in universities and published many books. Works of scholars like Dadrian have been translated to Turkish and can be found in the bookstores, or be bought online. Even though there is still much public opposition, legally there is no obstacle against "asserting that the genocide occurred" in Turkey.

The report's discussion of specific events related to the events of 1915 on page 36 are of bias.

a. The report quotes Hitler, "Who after all speaks today of the extermination of the Armenians?". Heath W. Lowry, a professor of Ottoman and Modern Turkish Studies in Princeton, questioned the validity of this quote and concluded that "there is no historical basis for attributing such a statement to Hitler" [2]. What's worse is that the committee is also aware of this fact: This quote is cited on page 95 with the remark "perhaps apocryphal"! Still, the committee goes on and says "The lesson was certainly not lost on future genocidaires, including Adolph Hitler." and then uses this "apocryphal" quote as a proof. We do not think that this is a way of "providing factual information.

b. The report talks about Turkish courts convicting several perpetrators in absentia in 1920's. The objectiveness of these courts are of historical debate. Quoting from, for example, Guenter Lewy's (a professor emeritus of political science in University of
Massachusetts), paper "Revisiting the Armenian Genocide" [3]:

"...At the time, the victorious Allies considered them a travesty of justice. The trials, British high commissioner S.A.G. Calthorpe wrote to London, are "proving to be a farce and injurious to our own prestige and to that of the Turkish government." [22] In the view of Commissioner John de Robeck, the tribunal was such a failure "that its findings cannot be held of any account at all." [23] When the British government considered holding trials of alleged Ottoman war criminals in Malta, it declined to use any evidence developed by the 1919-20 Ottoman tribunals...."

Besides, no international court has found Ottoman officers guilty of Armenian genocide. On the contrary, after WW I, British failed to bring Ottoman officers to court in Malta, simply because there was not enough evidence, as Bilal Simsir (a former Turkish diplomat) clearly concludes in his article, based on British official documents kept in Public Record Office, London [4].

We think that an objective treatment of the Turkish Martial courts of 1919-1920 should also include these points.