

Commemorating World Events: Report on Recognizing Genocides and Massacres

Date: August 11, 2017
To: Executive Committee
From: City Clerk
Wards: All

SUMMARY

City Council requested a report back to the Executive Committee on the appropriateness of recognizing historical events described or classified as "genocides" or "massacres", and that such a report consider whether only historical events recognized by Global Affairs Canada shall automatically receive recognition by the City of Toronto.

This report recommends that City Council recognize only violent world events that are designated with special observance by Canadian parliamentary or Government of Canada initiatives. It also recommends that the City of Toronto declare each April as "Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention" month, in honour of all those impacted by systemic violence. This practice is similar to Canada's recognition of April as *Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month*.

By adopting this standardized and transparent approach to the commemoration of violent world events Council is adopting a framework that seeks to balance the interests of various communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Clerk recommends that City Council:

1. Direct that upon receipt of a request, City programs and services provide commemorative recognition only of violent world events that are designated with special observance by Canadian parliamentary or Government of Canada initiatives, provided that such request meets all other City of Toronto bylaws, policies, guidelines and criteria for the applicable activity, service or program.
2. Declare each April as "Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month".

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

The Deputy City Manager & Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial impact statement.

DECISION HISTORY

On January 31, 2017, City Council directed the City Manager to report back on the appropriateness of recognizing historical events described or classified as "genocides" or "massacres," and whether only such events recognized by Global Affairs Canada should automatically receive recognition by the City of Toronto.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX21.18>

COMMENTS

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Lack of overarching direction for the City's commemorative recognition of violent world events

There is currently no overarching City direction regarding the commemorative recognition of violent world events. This has resulted in ad-hoc responses that may have cultural, political, intergovernmental or international implications.

Staff conducted research to identify practices used by Canadian provinces and municipalities to recognize violent world events. This research did not identify any consistent approaches or overarching policy for the recognition of violent world events. However, observances of some violent world events are designated through Canadian Parliamentary or Government of Canada initiatives. Examples include: the Holocaust Memorial Day Act, the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide ("Holodomor") Memorial Day Act, the Armenian genocide recognition resolution, the Rwandan genocide resolution and the Srebrenica genocide resolution.

RECOMMENDED DIRECTION

This report recommends that the City of Toronto:

- Recognize only violent world events that are designated for observance by Canadian Parliamentary or Government of Canada initiatives upon receipt of a request; and

- Declare each April as "Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month" to broadly honour all those impacted by systemic violence.

This will enable an efficient, transparent and standardized approach for the commemorative recognition of violent world events. This standardized approach is similar to other Council-approved City policies, such as the [Public Art and Monuments Donation Policy](#) and the [City's Flag Policy](#), which follow federal direction on matters related to global affairs. By deferring to Canadian Parliamentary or Government of Canada initiatives, this ensures alignment with appropriate jurisdictional authority and helps to mitigate potential intergovernmental and international implications. This approach also seeks to help mitigate ad-hoc City determinations that may be highly sensitive and contribute to tensions and disagreements between community groups.

The following are examples of events and activities that will be governed by this report.

[Commemorative Tree and Bench Program](#)
[Flag Raising](#)
[Greetings from the Mayor Program](#)
[Half-Masting Policy](#)
[Individual and Corporate Naming Rights](#)
[Proclamations](#)
[Property Naming Policy](#)
[Public Arts and Monuments Policy](#)
[Street Naming Policy](#)

Declaring April as "Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month" would affirm Toronto's commitment to the prevention of human-rights abuses, while ensuring that diverse groups and communities are honoured. It would provide an annual opportunity for the City to pay inclusive tribute to all those impacted by genocide and systemic violence without recognizing a specific event.

Implementation points

The City Clerk will take the required actions to ensure "Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month" is declared each April.

Division Heads will be responsible for ensuring applicable City of Toronto programs and services are in compliance with Council's direction. The City Clerk will serve as a resource for City divisions that require support to ensure compliance.

The City Clerk's Office will also work with Strategic Communications to develop communications materials to ensure that City divisions and the public are aware of Council's direction.

Equity impact statement

The recommended month-long tribute by the City of Toronto will be a pro-active, inclusive initiative to pay tribute to the lived experiences of diverse communities. The impact of Council's decision on equity-seeking groups will be evaluated by monitoring

any concerns raised by the public with City divisions assessing requests for commemorative recognitions. The City's [Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination Policy](#) applies.

CONCLUSION

Commemorative recognition of violent world events can provide opportunities for reflection, dialogue and human rights promotion. Declaring each April as "Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention" month and adopting the approach of recognizing only violent world events that have been designated for special observance by Canadian Parliamentary or Government of Canada initiatives provides a framework that seeks to balance the interests of various communities by providing a standardized and transparent approach to considering requests for commemorative recognition of violent world events.

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SIGNATURE

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