



**ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ
ΠΟΝΤΙΑΚΩΝ
ΣΩΜΑΤΕΙΩΝ
ΑΥΣΤΡΑΛΙΑΣ**

**FEDERATION OF PONTIAN
ASSOCIATIONS OF AUSTRALIA**
Established 1989

Organisation Number:
A0041281V

Presidency – Προεδρείο:
674 Torrens Road, Pennington,
South Australia, 5013, Australia

Telephone - Τηλέφωνο:
(+61 8) 8393 4117

Direct - Mobile
0419 335 008

Direct - Fax
08 8393 4367

Web - Ιστοσελίδα:
www.pontos.org.au

E-mail - Ηλεκτρονικό Ταχυδρομείο:
info@pontos.org.au

Adelaide, Australia, 24 March 2009

Senator the Hon Alan Ferguson
Senator for South Australia
Liberal Party of Australia

Parliament Contact:

Phone (02) 6277 3658
Fax (02) 6277 5822

Electorate Office:

Commonwealth Parliament Offices
100 King William Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Email: senator.ferguson@aph.gov.au

Toll Free 1300 301 634
Phone (08) 8237 7180
Fax (08) 8237 7188

SUBJECT: YOUR SPEECH IN THE AUSTRALIAN SENATE ON 18 MAR 2009

Dear Senator Ferguson

It is disappointing that you have chosen to take a political stand based on a personal relationship and a lack of historical understanding. You commit the very sin you are criticising. I think you will by now have understood the folly of your words, but it is too late.

I suggest you have a further discussion with your friend the Turkish Ambassador and ask him why is it that though you value this 'friendship' so highly and respectfully, he however is quite content to send you into the abyss with misinformation, half-truths and outright lies? You likely know now that the Attorney-General, Hon Michael Atkinson MP, was not making a simple "speech to the Greek association in South Australia" (?) but unveiling the first plaque in Australia, one of many around the world, to commemorate the victims and survivors of the events of 1914-1923. Why did you hesitate to mention this fact to the Senate? Did you know? Did you research? Just a little would have shown how wrong and one sided your reaction really was.

The plaque was installed by the Pontian Brotherhood of South Australia on its 50th anniversary. During that time I was its President and I proudly led my members to gather there on that day to mourn, cry for and honour our grandparents. Yes, our grandparents. That's how close to us, to our generation, these events are. You make them sound like a millennium ago, but it was only yesterday when we heard our grandparents sing a melancholy dirge, mourning lost children who died on the marches, parents, siblings, strangers who became family. Just as Australia did not forget the Anzacs in a single generation, neither will we forget our families.

My speech on that day began "We are gathered here today. Think on that. We are gathered. That is more than our forefathers could have dreamed of all those years ago, facing nightmare after nightmare." You will say that you don't ask us to forget but that judgement in modern times with modern morals cannot be passed on old events. This country was built from people who stole as little as a loaf of bread and yes we don't apply the same standards today. But when one pays the ultimate price with his life, Mr Ferguson those standards haven't budged one inch. I defy you to name anyone that can state the Pontian, Armenian and Assyrian genocide was acceptable back then. Germany did not and does not feel that way regarding the Jews. What about Japan and their war crimes? England was condemned for losing sight of their human rights standards when dealing with the IRA in the 1970s. What does Turkey

ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ ΠΟΝΤΙΑΚΩΝ ΣΩΜΑΤΕΙΩΝ ΑΥΣΤΡΑΛΙΑΣ
FEDERATION OF PONTIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF AUSTRALIA

fear now? Perhaps an inward turning scrutiny is not something this country can sustain. It is clear Turkey is not ready to be the European it purports.

Senator, you go on to say that “we should not be passing judgement til we know the full facts.” Perhaps you should have practised what you preached because you showed yourself to be very biased in your information gathering. There are eyewitness reports available from any number of Western sources of the day condemning the events of those years. They applied judgement and morals of the day to their condemnation of Ottoman Turkish actions.

In light of the resolution passed by the International Association of Genocide Scholars, how is it possible you would risk political embarrassment to support a vague and biased notion of one person, friend or no? The Attorney General carried out his own research, as I’m sure did the department that supports him and is in no way garnering votes. He has certainly achieved a respected status for his boldness, courage and honour in supporting a cause that is beset on many sides from funded lobby groups from Turkey.

As you can imagine, the South Australian Migration Museum has its own regulations for the wording of the plaques they display on their wall and carries out rigorous research before approving a plaque. You feel that months of their planning was wasted? Wrong? You and your ambassador could have done better? That is insulting to the professionalism and independence of the staff of the Museum and they deserve your apology for the insinuation in your remarks.


You have also singlehandedly offended the over one million Greek-born and Greek-decent Australians with your biased siding with one personal friend and your guest trip to Turkey. Don’t you care about Australia’s relationship with Greece? Don’t misunderstand; I have many Turkish friends and work colleagues, some of whom joined us on our 50th year anniversary dance. This doesn’t have anything to do with current day relationships, but to remember those who died and suffered under the Ottoman Empire. Like many Pontians in the safety of countries like Australia I don’t need to research what happened during those events. My grandparents told me the facts. I heard and felt their pain first hand. Matter of fact I cried writing this letter to you, their stories came flooding back. In Turkey, there are any number of reports from human rights activists of the oppression of freedom of speech and incarceration of journalists who speak out about these very events. Others of minority groups are not allowed to practise their cultures and languages openly and hide in fear. You need to do your research.

So Mr Ferguson, you owe the Australian public an apology, especially those of Greek-decent, to Pontians all over the world, to my grandparents and most importantly those 353,000 Pontians who lost their lives during the genocide.

I write to you as the President of the Pontian Brotherhood of South Australia of the time, as the current President of the Federation of 12 Pontian Associations in Australia, as a Vice President of the Confederation of Greek Pontians, as a member who served this great country in the Australian Defence Force and as an Australian of Pontian decent.

It is time for you to show us all that you have some real “ticker” and do what’s right.

Regards



President: Harry Tavlaridis