

Pope Francis to commemorate Armenian genocide



(AGI) Vatican City, April 8 - On April 12, Pope Francis will celebrate a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica to mark 100 years since the Armenian genocide. Under the rule of the Ottoman empire, roughly 1.5 million Armenians were killed in 1915 in a methodically executed plan to annihilate the entire people, its culture and its history. Earlier, the Pontiff called the genocide a "terrible tragedy" in a message sent to Vatican expert Franca Giansoldati. In June 2013, he said the first genocide of the twentieth century was that of the Armenians, leading to a protest by the Turkish government. "The Turkish ministry has responded to the words of the Holy Father, expressing its disappointment through diplomatic channels," reported Il Sismografo, a website dedicated to the activities of the Pope and the Holy See. "Today the simple fact of stating this historical truth unleashes strong if not violent objections in Turkey," said the website. So the country is expected to complain about the upcoming Mass, which will be attended by two Armenian Catholics, Karekin II and Aram I, as well as the President of the Republic of Armenia, Serge Sarkissian. The latter visited the Pontiff a few months ago, when he invited him to visit Armenia. When announcing her new book about the genocide, Vatican expert Giansoldati announced that an apostolic letter will be released about the issue. Pope Francis wrote to the author on March 3, 2015, saying: "I hope that your thorough research and documentation will be adequately appreciated as a work of historical investigation, invaluable for the recovery of memory as a form of justice and a way towards peace." To commemorate the events of 1915, Patriarch Karekin II recently published an encyclical letter which he will use on April 24 to canonise the victims.

Giansoldati acknowledges in her book that the genocide is a difficult question to deal with. "Of course it is a delicate issue for Pope Francis to address, as it was for John Paul II and Benedict XVI...especially due to the inevitable complications in diplomatic relations with Turkey. For example, during the Pope's visit to Turkey in November 2014, President Erdogan asked the Pontiff in private not to pronounce the word 'genocide' in public meetings. On his return flight, during the usual press conference, I was able to ask the Pope a question about the centennial, asking him to explain to the world his thoughts on the Armenian genocide." This is the answer he gave on that occasion: "Today I went to an Armenian hospital to visit the Armenian archbishop who has been sick for a long

time. During this trip I have been in contact with many Armenians. The Turkish government made a gesture last year: the then Prime Minister Erdogan wrote a letter that some have deemed too weak, but in my opinion he reached out. And that is always good. One can reach out this way or that way, waiting for what the other says to avoid embarrassment." (AGI) .