



## **US Lawmakers Pressure Obama on Armenian Issue**

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- Several U.S. lawmakers have written to President Barack Obama urging him to follow up on campaign statements and label the 1915 massacre of Armenians as genocide.

The pressure on Obama comes ahead of an expected presidential trip to Turkey, which has warned that such declarations by the United States would damage relations.

Turkey denies that up to 1.5 million Armenians suffered genocide at the hands of Ottoman Turks during World War One. Turkey accepts many Armenians were killed, but denies they were victims of a systematic genocide.

Ronald Reagan was the only U.S. president to publicly call the killings genocide. Others avoided the term out of concern for the sensitivities of Turkey, an important NATO ally.

Four members of the House of Representatives urged Obama to make a statement ahead of the 94th anniversary of the killings on April 24.

"As a presidential candidate, you were ... forthright in discussing your support for genocide recognition, saying that 'America deserves a leader who speaks truthfully about the Armenian genocide and responds forcefully to all genocides.' We agree with you completely," the letter said.

It was signed by Democrats Adam Schiff of California and Frank Pallone of New Jersey, and Republicans George Radanovich of California and Mark Kirk of Illinois.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on a visit to Turkey last week, said Obama would visit "within the next month or so" in his first trip as president to a Muslim country.

During Clinton's visit, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said Turkey would consider mediating between the United States and Iran over Tehran's nuclear program.

The foreign minister also said in a recent television interview that he saw a risk that Obama would describe the Armenian deaths as genocide, because Obama had done this during his campaign. But Babacan said the United States needed to understand the sensitivities in Turkey.

Another consideration for Obama will be that both Turkey and Armenia say they are close to normalizing relations after nearly a century of hostility.

Other members of the administration, including Clinton and Vice President Joe Biden, have in the past supported calling the Armenian killings genocide.

Democratic aides said they also expected several lawmakers to reintroduce a resolution branding the massacre of Armenians as genocide. Armenian-Americans have been pushing for passage of similar proposals in Congress for years.

Two years ago, a resolution was approved in committee but dropped after Turkey denounced it as "insulting" and hinted at halting logistical support for the U.S. war effort in Iraq.

By Susan Cornwell