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UKRAINE'S AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES, OLEH SHAMSHUR, DELIVERS A LECTURE ON UKRAINE'S FAMINE-GENOCIDE AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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Washington, DC - The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, the Petrach Program on Ukraine, and the Project on History, Memory and the Politics of the Past of the George Washington University hosted a lecture by His Excellency Oleh Shamshur, Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States, on "Stalin's Policy between the Two Wars: Genocide of Ukrainians".

The lecture was delivered as a part of a Ukraine-led worldwide commemoration program for the 75th anniversary of 1932-1933 famine-genocide perpetrated in Ukraine by the communist regime. According to the most recent estimates, in the span of 17 months around 10 million Ukrainian people, including 3 million children, died from forced starvation by Soviet authorities, which made up 25% the country population at that time. Ambassador Shamshur provided an analysis of the historical events leading to the *Holodomor*¹ and exposed a mechanism of its infliction by Stalin's communist apparatus along with other Soviet measures to consolidate control over Ukraine. Finally, His Excellency discussed demographics of the human toll of the tragedy and world reactions to the horrors in Ukraine in 1932-1933. Ambassador Shamshur also emphasized in his lecture the detrimental effect to the Ukrainian psyche caused by the genocide which subsequently led to the atrocities of the pre- and World War II period.

The historical context surrounding the events of 1932-33, Ambassador Shamshur states, led Stalin to conclude that the two emerging forces in the Ukrainian society of the time - the newly formed rural businessmen class and the new intellectual elite - presented a real threat to the communist regime insofar as they were able to pull Ukraine away from the Soviet sphere of dominance into independency. The new class of small village entrepreneurs appeared in Ukraine as the results of the New Economic Policy (NEP) developed by the Soviet government to counter acute economic crisis in the aftermath of the civil war. NEP encouraged farmers to boost their private agriculture production and engage in market interactions. But the growing economic independence of well-off peasants soon became blight in the eyes of the all controlling regime that hoped to impose a new anti-capitalist economic order.

However, the threat of political overturn was more palpable for the communist authorities amidst young national Ukrainian elite. This was a generation of intellectuals that flourished briefly in early 1920s, a time of short-lived courtship of the power gripping communist leaders with local national movements, which would allow the Soviets to gain more legitimacy and reinforce its dominant status. But then with such brief yet potent national revival, all the more the regime started to hear from Ukrainian economists, historians, activists and even local communists a disturbing "Away from Moscow!" slogan. A plan of retaliation was immediately forged by Stalin and his entourage: the Soviet power must eliminate this Ukrainian double danger by exterminating the inconvenient. Translated in

¹ Ukrainian '*holodomor*' from 'holod' –famine and 'mor' – slow and painful death, plague etc, often inflicted.

Stalin terms of state management philosophy this meant: "No man, no problem!" In the place of the eliminated a new race of a uniform Soviet man should rise, with no ethnic attachments and alternative political or economic aspirations.

Stalin and his cronies conceived a multiple step plan to crush the Ukrainian nation. First, the annihilation of the elite was launched with accusations in anti-state activities and staged trials of writers, church leaders, academics and many others. Started in 1929, these court cases culminated in 1930, and were later followed by indiscriminate arrests, imprisonments, deportations and executions in late 1930's. Only in the 1932-33 period, around 200,000 of the intelligentsia are believed to have suffered at the hands of the regime.

Secondly, the Soviet authorities undertook a statewide collectivization, ripping peasants of their private property which was declared to pass from there on to newly created collective farms under state ownership. Small businessman and other private owners were viewed as a corruptive element, subversive to the new Soviet economic vision, and so were ordered to abandon their properties, their lands and leave into exile. As the result out of 1 million wealthy Ukrainians of that time about 830,000 were forcibly deported away from their homeland with no right to return.

The next step in Stalin's plan, Holodomor, may be viewed by some as simply a tool of continued collectivization with unpredicted consequences. However, a careful historical analysis reveals that in reality the collectivization in Ukraine was already completed by 1930. Hence, the clear intentionality of this horrendous action, the magnitude of human loss and the cruel character of death inflicted through starvation all point out in one clear direction: Holodomor was a premeditated government action gradually enforced with the intent to break down the Ukrainian nation and leave no chance of its possible revival as a distinct people in an independent state. This communist intent can be traced to its archival evidence in the communist correspondence of the time: Stalin's' telegrams to Ukrainian communist leaders; political discourses of lower-lever bureaucrats and other key documents. Contrary to assertions of the communist propaganda of later years, there were no poor harvests in 1932 or 1933 to blame for the tragedy. On the contrary, among other evidence, the archival proofs testify that the Soviet Union was able to increase its export of grain from Ukraine to the West in these years and gain profits that were spent on refitting Soviet army and boosting the ongoing industrialization.

The mechanism of famine-genocide was graduated: first, the Soviet authorities established unfeasibly high quotas for grain to be collected from Ukrainian villages. Since the demanded amount was not reached, the local communists proceeded to seize the seed grain and any extras from village farms. Yet the state request for grain was not completed either, and so as a punishment the communist squads started to raid peasant homes and confiscate "food fines" –anything edible: grain, vegetables and any other food items, even dry fruits.

The infamous law of August 7, 1932 tightened the punitive measure even further: an imprisonment of up to 10 years was threatening to those who dared to glean a few wheat stalks on a collective farm field after the harvest was reaped. Villages that fell greatly behind in delivering government commanded quotas were put on a blacklist: they were cut off from any supplies coming from outside, barred to engage in trade with neighboring communities and cordoned off by a regiment of Soviet army or secret police. When 25,000 people were dying every day from starvation, innumerable others were suffering from hunger syndrome and many fell victims to cannibalism, the Law of January 22, 1933 still limited their chances for survival: the Ukrainian peasants who tried to move around in search for food were banned migrate or leave their places of residency. This was also the beginning of USSR system of passports and residency records which forbade anyone to relocate without an official state permit.

Although no statistics were kept at the time, the estimates of the human loss in this tragedy ranges from 3,8 million (according to some Russian demographers) up to 10 million people who died in the famine-genocide. Ambassador Shamshur remarked that although historically significant, the disagreements about the exact figure are not of paramount import, since even the mere fact that losses are counted in millions and millions of victims is a clear indication that the events of 1932-1933

carried a genocidal character against Ukrainian people. The most reliable source to help us estimate the magnitude of the Holodomor are the Soviet censuses collected in 1926, 1937 and 1939. Among them the most dependable is the former, since the figures of the 1937 census are known to have been doctored after Stalin was presented its results and, unsatisfied with them, ordered to execute with the commissioned demographers. The 1926 census states that the population of Ukraine was 29 million, the 1939 census gives us the figure of 30 million. Considering the comparable birth rates in neighboring Belarus and Russia, the estimates for Ukraine are that the population should have constituted 7, 5 million of people more at the given year and these are the victims lost to the horror of famine genocide. However, the corrected real figure of Ukrainian population for 1939 suggest that the actual population size was 27,5 million, which is another 2,5 million short from what the expected birth rate should have brought us to. Hence, the total adds up to 10 million victims who died the cruel death by starvation in 1932-1933.

The Holodomor, Ambassador Shamshur pointed out, for long was or even remains an inconvenient truth. In Soviet Union this truth was buried until perestroika, in the West unfortunately it was misrepresented and believed to be a hoax or a lie in the time when it was going on, with some rare exceptions, as for example were the reports of German and Italian diplomats from Ukraine of that time. The truth was too inconvenient for the West to take any action in the time when it was watching cautiously the emergence of the USSR as a new military and political power to its east. "But, Ambassador Shamshur remarked,"if the civil society was more active on this issue ... then perhaps [the] Holocaust could have been avoided." When in our modern world we continue to face tragedies of Rwanda and currently of Darfur, no doubt that the topic of genocide remains globally relevant and important, Ambassador Shamshur added. And so the goal of Ukraine's continued work with the international bodies is to find the acknowledgement of the Ukrainian famine-genocide so that the world would be able to draw lessons from it for future.

In the Q&A part of the session, Ambassador Shamshur expounded on commemorative events of the Holodomor which are to take place in the United States.

In hope of promoting understanding about the events of 1932-1933, the "Inextinguishable Candle" will be launched in Australia with the passing of a commemorative candle on the American soil: from Seattle to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Detroit, Cleveland and other cities with significant Ukrainian representation. This candle will end its tour through the continents in Kyiv in late November 2008 when the victims of the Holodomor are traditionally remembered in Ukraine in the course of special ceremonial events.

Among other cooperative efforts with the U.S. public in this direction is the production of an English-language documentary expected to be completed by the end of 2008. Also, the Embassy of Ukraine works towards and hopes to see a U.S. Congress Resolution on the Holodomor's 75th anniversary. The International Genocide Torch Relay, as a part of commemoration of the victims of the Holodomor, is scheduled to take place in New York on May 27. Finally, in cooperation with the U.S. National Park Service, the Ukrainian community in the United States has made significant progress to undertake the construction of Holodomor Memorial in Washington, DC.