

Statement by Dr. Alexandra Hrycak

Oregon Senate
Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs
Hearing on
SB583: Holodomor Remembrance Day

March 7, 2023

I write in strong support of the proposition designating the fourth Saturday of November of each year as Holodomor Remembrance Day. Today it is particularly important that the Oregon legislature is taking action to facilitate remembrance of this tragic event. Russia through a full-scale invasion of Ukraine is currently once again attempting to commit genocide in Ukraine. To prevent such actions, it is vitally important to spread public recognition and understanding of the Holodomor.

I am chair of the Department of Sociology at Reed College (Portland, Oregon). I joined the department in 1998 after receiving a PhD degree at the University of Chicago for research conducted in Ukraine. In addition to conducting ongoing research in Ukraine, I am a board member and past president of the American Association for Ukrainian Studies. I am also a board member and chair of the section on law, history, and political studies of the Shevchenko Scholarly Society, an academic society based in the USA that works to promote scholarship on Ukraine. For two decades, I coordinated and organized panels on Ukrainian studies for the annual convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, one of the premier international conferences for scholars of Ukraine and neighboring countries.

Through these activities, I have observed careful and systematic efforts by researchers to document and understand the Holodomor as a gross human rights violation and attempted genocide of the Ukrainian people.

The recognition and documentation of the Holodomor, a state-engineered famine that killed millions of Ukrainians, is a direct result of many decades of work of legal, human rights, and historical experts.

Chief among the initiators of this work is the eminent expert in genocide, the lawyer and human rights advocate Raphael Lemkin. Born in 1900 to a Jewish family in what is now Western Ukraine, Lemkin coined the term genocide and worked to initiate the United Nations Genocide Convention, which recognizes genocide as a legal category. This resulted in the following definition that is used in international disputes in which charges are made that a state is centrally involved in coordinating organized mass extermination against an entire population:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group ;

- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Lemkin's early work led to the Holocaust being recognized as genocide. Lemkin also sought recognition for the Holodomor as genocide, as he argued that the pattern of state-organized violence he witnessed the Soviet state apply against civilians in his homeland constituted genocidal according to the legal definition.

In 1953, Lemkin wrote an analysis of the pattern of state violence in Ukraine in which he contended that while it manifested differently than the Holocaust, it nonetheless bore the markers of what the United Nations would classify as a state-engineered effort to exterminate an entire nation. Lemkin provided abundant evidence of each category of state violence, making repeated comparisons to the extermination of European Jewry by the Nazi regime. He identified what he considered to be the core within the repressive repertoire the Soviet state had created for carrying out this mass extermination as "the tools of mass murder, deportation and forced labour, exile and starvation." As evidence, he described a pattern of repression involving state-organized waves of violence leading to the arrest and eventual extermination of nearly all Ukrainian leaders ("in 1920, 1926 and again in 1930–1933, teachers, writers, artists, thinkers, political leaders, were liquidated, imprisoned or deported."), mass starvation leading to the deaths of what he estimated as five million Ukrainians, and a system of deportations, forcible transfers of children into state children's homes, and state-led mass immigration of non-Ukrainians that was used by the Soviet state to destroy the culture and historical memory of the Ukrainian people within their homeland.

I strongly support Oregon Senate Bill 583 making the fourth Saturday of every November Holodomor Remembrance Day. Until the collapse of the USSR, very little came of the efforts of Raphael Lemkin and others seeking recognition of the Holodomor. These efforts were blocked by the USSR. They continue to be blocked by the state of Russia. Russia continues to oppose Holodomor recognition and commemoration through ongoing propaganda campaigns of denial and distortion of the historical facts.