A NEW MILESTONE FOR THE 'SORRY' CAMPAIGN IN TURKEY: "I'M NOT ONLY APOLOGIZING; I AM ALSO RETURNING ALL MY ESTATES!"

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By Sabri Atman, SEYFO CENTER, posted in Assyrian International News Agency, 6 February 2009

Around a year ago, Mr Berzan Boti, a permanent resident of Turkey, began to write to SEYFO CENTER, the main organisation that undertakes investigative research on the Assyrian Genocide. He expressed that he genuinely wishes to make an apology towards the Assyrian people for the Genocide and is willing to return all the estates (house, land, etc.) he inherited, to their actual owners from which they were originally confiscated. In December last year one of the hot topics which was present amongst the public and prominent in Turkish media headlines was the 'Sorry' campaign directed in recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Contrary to this came the chauvinist wave that escalated from the Prime Minister to the military's Chief Commander.

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We have been corresponding with each other for two years. Finally he passed onto us the deed he had made on the 6th October 2008, through the Notary Public's Office which was the complete transfer of house/land title.We are planning to announce this new step to the international public, sometime in May this year through a press conference in the Swedish Parliament, with the presence of Mr Berzan Boti himself.Unfortunately, due to the discussions and debates surrounding the matter within and outside Turkey, it is necessary for us to make a preliminary statement prior to our planned press conference.Let this be known, the 1915 Genocide did not simply target people of Armenian nationality. The Assyrian people (also known as Chaldean and Syriac) were also massacred and exterminated along side the Armenian people. However this has not been widely discussed. This is similar to the accounts of crimes against Rumanians during World War II being passed over in history. Forgetting the atrocities committed against the Assyrian people during the 1915 Genocide is not understandable nor is it acceptable.

Yet, more than half of the Assyrian Nation, alongside with the Armenians were exterminated with the same mentality which proposed that 'an onion is an onion; therefore it must be chopped off'. Thus the Ottomans did not differentiate amongst the Christians. In this the case, then, why there is no mention of the Assyrians, at all?

Nowadays in Turkey, you will find a new generation of individuals who are trained in naming the main streets and public squares in the main cities of Ankara and Istanbul after Talat Pasha, who to the Assyrians and Armenians is considered the Turkish counterpart of Adolf Hitler; and that questions about the statues of Kemal Bey (Lord Kemal) and crippled Osman (Othman) which are erected in other cities like Giresun and Bo?azl?yan are never raised. You can understand that this large group of people will not come to the truth easily. What about the intellectuals?

Weren't the men and women, young and old, with different religious beliefs and particular ethnicities murdered from Istanbul to Hakkari, in 1915 and onwards? These systematic massacres were merely a planned programme and executed with the decision of a central authority. As much as the (Turkish) authorities may interchangeably intend to call these actions as a big tragedy or cataclysm; however, could this event itself hide out the real truth it holds where it costed the lives of over two million people and that wiped out majority of ethnic Christian minorities from this part of geography?

Here the intended emphasize is this: in order to reach reconciliation for the genocide, requires the parties involved enter into settlement. People need to be educated in this line and try to meet the requirements for apology. It is not sufficient enough just to say 'Sorry' even though this may seem a positive step forward in apology. The fundamental principle and important element is to meet the essentials of the apology. The issue is not an argument about whether or not the genocide happened in Turkey. The actual matter which needs to be addressed and discussed is what steps forward Turkey can take to ease the pain and sorrow of the victims of the genocide.

We, the Assyrians, more importantly would like to underline this: settling up with history is another measure of democratization. If you don't face up and settle with history, you cannot reveal the importance of the day. In this essence Turkey should settle with its own recent history. Therefore it must apologize for what it did in the 1915 (and onwards) to the Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks and Yezidi's. More importantly it should meet the essentials of this apology.

Inasmuch as Turkey won't settle up with its own recent history or apologizes to the people that were victims of genocide, it will not prevent future genocides nor will it be democratized. What we seek is for Turkey to come clean about every aspect of the Genocide.

On 18 March last year Germany's Prime Minister Angela Merkel bowed down at Israel's Parliament, the Knesset, in reference to the Holocaust, in which 6 million people were killed, said in Hebrew:

"The Holocaust is shame and a disgrace for us! With all my respects to all victims of the massacre, I bow down."

On the contrary, the Turkish Republic's Prime Minister, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdo?an says to those

involved in the 'Sorry' campaign: "they must have committed the genocide so that they are apologizing". What a shame! This attitude shows the degree of maturity between the Turkish Republic's Prime Minister, Mr Erdo?an as compared to that of Germany's Prime Minister Angela Merkel.

The Prime Minister should come to the realisation that the only means through which Turkey can establish a democratic future is to stop more years passing in which no apology or reconciliation is made for the atrocities of the recent past. The Prime Minister Tayyip Erdo?an, by learning a few words of the victimized people's language, in this case the language that Jesus Christ spoke, which was Aramaic (Syriac) and should say: "Aa'mo Suryoyo, Shoupqono!" meaning, "Assyrian people, Sorry!". This will not humilate him. On the contrary, such an apology will herald the dawn of a new age of maturity for Turkey. ?n brief this means in due course, if the inner dynamics of Turkey won't lead it into action, then the outer dynamics will force Turkey to do so. Let it be known to that.

The esteemed Mr Berzan Boti, being a very honourable man, has placed his signature to a very FIRST in history which paves the way the rest of Turkey. He has brought in all the necessary official documents, signed and certified by the Notary Public's Office (in Turkey) and transferred his properties to the Assyrian Genocide Research Centre, the SEYFO CENTER. In addition to these documents, the letter he wrote to the attention of General Public contains the following lines:

"As of 6th October 2008, in Turkey's south-eastern province of Siirt, the sub-division (……), I have officially transferred my house/land titled (……) in the Notary Public's Office to the SEYFO CENTER, nominating it to its director Mr Sabri Atman. In my letter below, I would like to share with you the general public the reasons why I have transferred my land to Seyfo Center.

World War I is a well known event by the international public. This event took place in the late Ottoman Empire in 1915; genocide was carried against all Christian minorities living there. My village ……, was another place where these unfortunate events occurred. I have personally researched this event from many different aspects. Today in Turkey this subject is still, not only denied and distorted for over 93 years, but to speak about it or mention it is considered taboo. I did not just rely on what historians wrote or documented; I have also witnessed the confessions of the live witnesses who not only witnessed this tragic genocide, but who took part in the killing role in these mass massacres; where these individuals can be described as the 'guilty party'. I have met these people face to face and listened to them just before their deaths. During the genocide years, the murdered Assyrians in my village had their lands confiscated and the little number of them who survived was Islamized. The grand children of those who were Islamized are still living in our village.

I found out that the land which was inherited by me and my brothers and sisters from my father actually was the land of the people (Assyrians) who were massacred in 1915. It did not belong to us. I now cannot

find the right words that describe the shame, guilt, qualm and the pangs of conscience state I live in. Before taking my decision of transfer, for many years I have thought about it and have placed myself in the shoes of those people who became victims of the genocide. Despite of me personally apologising to the many Assyrian and Armenian individuals that I came across with and said 'sorry' to, I could not leave the moral pressure of conscience I inherited behind. Even though today I do not have a direct connection with the then genocide; I came to the conclusion that I have to do something beyond apology. That is why the estate I have inherited from my forefathers, I am returning it back to its actual owners, the Assyrians, to one of their organizations, the Seyfo Center which sacrifices altruism in recognition of the genocide…"

We have now presented you with a section of Mr Berzan Boti's two page letter. Furthermore, we are planning to present you the rest of the letter and other developments in April at a press conference in the Swedish Parliament, in presence of politicians, historians, scientists and other important figures.

It seems that there are two factions in Turkey of late. One holds the view of individuals like Berzan Boti's and the other is the ones who name some of the main streets and public squares after Talat Pasha, in the major cities including Ankara and Istanbul.

Mr Berzan Boti has done two admirable things. First, he apologized and secondly, he fulfilled all the essentials required of an apology. This exemplary attitude reminds us: What about Mr Osman Feriduno?lu, the grandson of Crippled Osman, the one who killed the Greeks in the city of Giresun, displacing them from their homelands; confiscating their goods, possessions and estates; will he do the same thing that Mr Berzan Boti has done?

In no way! The grandson of Crippled Osman, Mr Osman Feriduno?lu (the 2007 tax record-bearer of Giresun) has added to his fortune the captured properties he inherited from his grandfather. Following that, he has built a monument in honour of his grandfather together with the detainee of terror organization, Ergenekon, Mr Veli Küçük. These people are busy with denying the genocide and keeping alive the memories of murderers and criminals.

The hurdle is very clear. Certainly, not every Turkish individual is directly responsible for the events of the past. Nor can be considered as complicit and guilty. However, obviously there is a collective responsibility in question that lies upon everyone. Every Turkish individual is responsible for urging the Turkish Government to recognize and accept the 1915 Genocide of Assyrian, Armenian and Greek Christians.