ANSWERING THE DEVIOUS DOUBLE ACT

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Category: Opinions

The Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC), 6 May 2014

Over the past two weeks Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu have made statements regarding what they refer to as the "events of 1915" as they concern the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire.

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Both Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoglu suggest that Armenians and the Republic of Armenia must use these statements as opportunities to begin discussions with Turkey about what happened in 1915. The Armenian people do not need any more opportunities to enter into a conversation with the Turkish people based on the Turkish government adopting a position that what happened to the Armenian people should not be considered a genocide.

Nine decades of study of these events have led all independent observers to conclude that what happened to the Armenian people from 1915 to 1923 was a systemic attempt by the Ottoman government and its successors to eradicate the Armenian population of Anatolia. Offers to put in place independent panels of historians are nothing more than ploys by Turkey to buy time before the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and to preempt the research of dozens of historians working on this topic, even within the Republic of Turkey.

The time for study has long passed. By 1919, even Turkish military tribunals of the leaders of the Young Turk government concluded that what was happening to the Armenian people was a crime against humanity. In the 1920s, all Western governments recognized clearly that the Ottoman government had engaged in an attempt to exterminate its Armenian population. In the 1940s, Raphael Lemkin used the fate of the Armenian people as one of the cases in formulating the definition of "genocide".

If the Turkish government was sincere in its attempts to reconcile with the Armenian people, it would take concrete steps to deal with the legacy of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey.

These steps would include repealing Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code which criminalizes discussion of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey, putting on trial the killers of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink and ending all assistance to extremist groups that continue to occupy the Armenian populated region of Kessab in Syria.

Most importantly, the Turkish government can end the 90 year campaign of cultural genocide that it has been waging on the historically Armenian populated regions of Asia Minor. To this day, Armenian churches are converted to mosques or used as stables, Armenian artifacts are destroyed or appropriated as Turkish and the history of the region is rewritten in museums and tourist materials to completely ignore the Armenian presence.

The Armenian National Committee of Canada welcomes the day when Armenia, the Armenian diaspora and Turkey can discuss together how to deal with the consequences of the Armenian Genocide. That day may come very soon, but it will come in spite of, rather than due, to Prime Minister Erdogan's attempts to confuse the international community and his own people.

Every day there are more and more reports of dialogue between Armenians and Turks about the Armenian Genocide, every day additional Turks come to their own conclusion about the Armenian Genocide when they ask what happened to the Armenian people with whom they shared Anatolia and every day Turkish papers, websites and television programs present reports about the Armenian Genocide despite the government's strict censorship.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the international community and Canada must remain steadfast in their support of the Turkish people's sincere efforts to better understand what happened to the Armenians during the dying days of the Ottoman Empire and immediately afterwards. Canada must not allow Prime Minister Erdogan's cynical condolences and poisoned offers of historical commissions to distract us from working with the elements of Turkish society that genuinely seek the truth.

ANCC welcomes all efforts by the Canadian government to combat Turkish government censorship and promote press freedom so that one day the Turkish people will understand their own history and be able to have an open conversation with the Armenian people about the Armenian Genocide and about writing the next page in their shared history.