

COMMEMORATION OF THE 93RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE GENOCIDE OF ARMENIANS IN ISTANBUL

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By Ayse Genaysu



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Ayse Gunaysu is a Human Rights activist in Turkey. The following report about the commemoration is reproduced in Kegart.com with her permission

There was heavy police presence around the building, and very strict security measures were taken at the entrance. However, unlike the Armenian conference held at the same place two years ago, this time there were no nationalist demonstrations. This is perhaps because the leaders of the most active nationalist groups are in jail now.

While people were taking their seats at the conference room, a piano and violin performance of the Komitas' Krounk was being played from a CD (by violinist H. Davtian and pianist A. Aharonian).

There was great media interest in the event, especially in Ara Sarafian's presentation, with TV cameras and mainstream press members waiting in line to interview him.

The conference room, which could host 250 people, was full even though it was a work day.

Eren Keskin opened the panel by saying that we, Turks and Kurds, owed apology to the Armenians and now, on the anniversary of the Genocide, we all pay homage to and honor the memory of the Armenians who lost their lives.

Ragip Zarakolu talked about Teotig and his account of the arrests on the 24th of April and Erdogan Aydin underlined the importance of facing history.

Ara Sarafian summarized the Genocide by saying: "Given the presence of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, when we talk about the Armenian Genocide, we refer to the destruction of over 2,000 Armenian communities—through the expulsion and killing of people, the ruin of communal infrastructure such as schools, libraries, and churches, as well as the loss of private property. If one were to go to the provinces of modern Turkey today—where most Armenians in the world lived before WWI—practically nothing can be seen or is acknowledged of the historic Armenian presence there."

Then he gave an account of what happened to those who were arrested on 24th April.

During the Q&A session, there were only a few people who challenged Sarafian's views, saying that Armenians were not the only ones who suffered, all answers given by Sarafian received long applause, especially when he said Hikmet Ozdemir and others were not historians but "memurs" (civil servants) of the government. All other contributions from the audience were in agreement with Sarafian and the speakers. After the meeting Sarafian was again surrounded by press members and requests of appointments for interviews.

This was the first time April 24 was commemorated in Istanbul at a public meeting apart from Human Rights Association's press conferences at the association offices in 2006 and 2007

Istanbul, 24 April 2008.

Keghart.com's supplemental notes

Bilgi University in Istanbul is in the forefront of calling into question the Turkish state's official version of the past. In September 2005 a conference entitled *Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy* was held at the university. It was the first of its kind in Turkey.

Since then, within a very short period of three years, tangible changes have occurred. Many intellectuals and human rights activists have become more vocal in speaking out openly about the tragic fate of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

This year on the 24th of April, the Human Rights Association (Istanbul Branch) held a commemoration at the same Bilgi University. In its press release of 24 April 2006 the organisation states,

"Turkey will not be able to take even one step forward without putting an end to the continuity of the Progress and Union manner of ruling. No human rights violation can be stopped in Turkey and there will be no hope of breaking the vicious circle of Kurdish uprisings and their bloody suppression unless the Turkish state agrees to create an environment where public homage is paid to genocide victims, where the sufferings of their grandchildren is shared and the genocide is recognized."

"Today we, as the human rights defenders, would like to address all Armenians in Turkey and elsewhere in the world and tell them "we want to share the pain in your hearts and bow down before the memory of your lost ones. They are also our losses. Our struggle for human rights in Turkey is at the same time our mourning for our common losses and homage paid to the genocide victims".

