COMMEMORATION OF THE GENOCIDE IN TURKEY

Posted on April 24, 2011 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Hürriyet Daily News
Vercihan Ziflioğlu, 24 April 2011

Commemorations of the tragic events of 1915 are held in a variety of cities across Turkey including Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Diyarbakır, Bursa and Bodrum. 'Intellectuals are not sufficient for Turkey to face itself; the NGOs need to have a clear stance. Facing the Armenian taboo will mean Turkey will have to face its own history,' an NGO member says.

The 'Say Stop to Racism and Nationalism!' initiative gathered at Taksim Square. Their slogan was, 'This pain belongs to all of us.'

Hürriyet Daily News
Vercihan Ziflioğlu, 24 April 2011

Commemorations of the tragic events of 1915 are held in a variety of cities across Turkey including Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Diyarbakır, Bursa and Bodrum. 'Intellectuals are not sufficient for Turkey to face itself; the NGOs need to have a clear stance. Facing the Armenian taboo will mean Turkey will have to face its own history,' an NGO member says.

The 'Say Stop to Racism and Nationalism!' initiative gathered at Taksim Square. Their slogan was, 'This pain belongs to all of us.'

Commemorations of the traumatic events of 1915 were held in six cities across Turkey on Sunday, as small gatherings came together to mark April 24, the annual date recognized internationally for remembering the victims of violence at the end of the Ottoman Empire.
Apart from two events in Istanbul, sit-ins were held simultaneously in Ankara, İzmir, Diyarbakır, Bursa and Bodrum. Prayers for the tragedies were conducted in all Armenian churches in Istanbul after the Easter prayer. The churches limited their commemorations to prayers and no statements were made.

The first of the events in Istanbul was held in Sultanahmet by the Human Rights Association, or İHD, in front of the Turk Islam Artifacts Museum at 2 p.m. The crowd gathered with red cloves and read a press statement. The cloves had the names of Armenian intellectuals who were taken from their homes in Istanbul on April 24, 1915, and died in exile. The black banners held by the crowd read, "The Museum – prison of 1915" and "The intellectuals were held before sent to the journey of death." The names of 250 intellectuals were read and the crowd left the cloves and banners near a tree in front

of the museum before disassembling.

Ayşe Günarsu, member of the İHD Istanbul branch and the Commission Against Racism and Discrimination, spoke to the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review. She said they were there to refresh a memory that society was made to forget. "This location where the museum stands used to be İbrahimpaşa Palace in those years; also called the Central Prison. The intellectuals were gathered here and then sent to exile from Haydarpaşa train station. Many of the intellectuals never returned." Günaysu said the Turkish intellectuals are too late "to commemorate the genocide." İHD held a protest at Haydarpaşa last year.

"This is a matter of conscience," said İhsan Kaçar, another member of the commission. "Intellectuals are not sufficient for Turkey to face itself. The NGOs need to have a clear stance on this matter. Facing the Armenian taboo will mean Turkey has to face its own history."

Lawyer Ahmet Tamer, member of İHD, said: "No punches are pulled when the Jewish genocide or Native American genocide is mentioned, but, and who knows why, we hesitate to speak about the genocide experienced in these lands. I guess it is hard for us to face ourselves."

At 5 p.m., the "Say Stop to Racism and Nationalism!" initiative gathered at Taksim Square. Their slogan was, "This pain belongs to all of us," and the attendants included well-known faces from Turkish press, politics, literature and art circles alongside members of several NGOs. The event consisted of a sit-in strike and was silent by nature; no slogans were shouted like last year. The attendants stood up one by one and voiced the names and professions of the Armenian intellectuals. Easter cookies and eggs were handed out during the event.

The People's Liberation Party, or HKP, staged counter-demonstrations at Taksim, İzmir and Ankara at the same locations, arguing that the events of 1915 is a "lie of imperialism" by slogans.

Demonstration in Ankara

Press Release Human Rights Association Istanbul Branch

Today, 24th of April, is recognised worldwide as the date signifying the Armenian Genocide. Only in Turkey it indicates a taboo. The Turkish state mobilises all its resources to deny the meaning of this date.

At diplomatic platforms Turkish officials and their advocates claim that they recognise the "big tragedy" and they only object to its being named as a "Genocide". That's not true. At every occasion in Turkey not only the Armenian Genocide, but also the great agony of the Armenian people is denied and attempts are made to justify the genocide.
It was only last month that during a Symposium on the Armenian-Turkish relations the denialist official theses were voiced one after another, offending the Armenians in Turkey and elsewhere and insulting the memory of their grandparents. Lies were told in the name of "science", like "Armenians

have always sold their masters", "deportation was a means of crisis management", "death toll of deportation is comparable to the death toll of flu epidemic in England that time", "there is no other people as noble as the Turkish nation in the world, it is impossible for them to commit a genocide" and many more, humiliating a people who was one of the most advanced in science, art, literature, and in all other aspects.

Denial is a constituent part of the genocide itself and results in the continuation of the genocide. Denial of genocide is a human rights violation in itself. It deprives individuals the right to mourn for their ancestors, for the ethnic cleansing of a nation, the annihilation of people of all ages, all professions, all social sections, women, men, children, babies, grandparents alike just because they were Armenians regardless of their political background or conviction. Perhaps the most important of all, it is the refusal of making a solemn, formal commitment and say "NEVER AGAIN".

Turkey has made hardly any progress in the field of co-existence, democracy, human rights and putting an end to militarism since the time of the Union and Progress Committee. Annihilation and denial had been and continues today to be the only means to solve the problem. Villages evacuated and put on fire and forced displacements are still the manifestation of the same habit of "social engineering". There has always been bloodshed in the homeland of Armenians after 1915. Unsolved murders, disappearances under custody, rapes and arrests en masse during the 1990's were no surprise, given the ongoing state tradition lacking any culture of repentance for past crimes against humanity.

Similarly the removal of a public prosecutor and banning him from profession just for taking the courage to mention an accusation against the military, a very recent incident, is the manifestation of an old habit of punishing anybody who dares to voice any objection to the army. And today's ongoing military build up of some 250,000 troops in the southeast of Turkey is the proof of a mindset which is unable to develop any solution to the Kurdish question other than armed suppresion.

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 agree to create an environment where public homage is paid to genocide victims, where the sufferings of their grandchildren is shared and the genocide is recognised.

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 a homage paid to the genocide victims".