FACING HISTORY, ADL AND SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

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Category: Opinions

> *David Boyajian, 5 December 2011*
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Alerted by an Armenian-authored Open Letter to FHAO, many Armenians urged the group to withdraw its partnership with Foxman. I myself spoke to FHAO, without success.

FHAO's Form Letter

Instead, FHAO responded to Armenian Americans with a form letter which claimed, disingenuously, that Foxman had acknowledged the Armenian genocide. FHAO didn't even bother to address the ADL's hypocritical opposition to the Armenian genocide resolution, which Foxman continues to call a "counterproductive diversion."

Though Foxman's notorious August 21, 2007 statement mentioned the "G word," it also implied that Armenian deaths in 1915 were a "consequence" of wartime conditions rather than intentional. "Intent," however, is what United Nations law requires for an act to be considered genocide. Foxman knew that when he issued his statement.

Prompted by human rights activists and Armenian Americans, a dozen Massachusetts cities and the Massachusetts Municipal Association condemned Foxman's rhetorical sleight-of-hand, and from 2007-2008- after Foxman's statement - cut ties with the ADL's "No Place for Hate" program.

Open Letter to the Genocide Education Project

A second Open Letter (Oct. 31, 201l) requested the San Francisco-based Armenian organization, theGenocide Education Project (GEP), whose primary mission is teaching the Armenian genocide, to ask FHAO to drop its co-sponsorship of the Foxman event.

Why GEP? Because it and FHAO's advisory boards overlap: Professors Peter Balakian and Richard Hovannisian are on both boards. And FHAO executives Adam Strom, son of his group's founder, and Jack Weinstein, are on GEP's advisory board.

I contacted GEP, which said that it would decide how to proceed and get back to me. It never did. Other Armenians, too, pressed GEP to ask FHAO to not co-sponsor Foxman. I later made another attempt to reach GEP, without success. Ultimately, GEP remained silent. GEP owed answers to a concerned public. Silence invites speculation. Did it fear losing FHAO's friendship? If so, should an Armenian American organization collaborate with such organizations if that prevents it from speaking out?

Fortunately, the Coalition to Recognize the Armenian Genocide, composed of Armenians and Jews, rose to the occasion. At the ADL event, it distributed flyers urging "all organizations and officials to spurn the ADL until it unequivocally recognizes the Armenian Genocide" and "ceases lobbying against" the Armenian genocide resolution.

Interesting questions and issues arise from the sad spectacle of the FHAO-ADL partnership and GEP's silence.

Human Rights as a Cover

If an organization recognizes, and even teaches about, the Armenian genocide, is that recognition principled and consistent? Or is it mainly a vehicle to advance the

organization's own goals?

We do know, after all, of organizations that use human rights or genocide education to disguise their real agenda. The ADL is one such example.

The ADL has lots of nice-sounding, "politically correct" programs: "No Place for Hate," "Combat Bullying," "Making Diversity Count," "Workplace of Difference," "Stories of LGBT History," and more. These programs, along with its ample funds and alleged prestige, have enabled the ADL to gain entry to thousands of public elementary and high schools, colleges, corporations, cities, and governments. (FHAO, incidentally, has several programs similar to the ADL's.) Teaching human rights is not, however, the ADL's real aim. ADL programs are just a backdoor way to instill familiarity and sympathy with itself, the concerns of the Jewish people, the Holocaust, and Israel.

How do we know this? Because no genuine human rights organization would ever work closely - as the ADL has done - with the human rights-abusing, genocide-denying Turkish government to defeat a Congressional resolution on the Armenian genocide, especially while advocating Holocaust recognition and reparations in Congress.

And must we surrender to the "taboo" against critiquing Jewish groups such as the ADL, even when they're clearly adversaries?

That taboo could explain the reluctance, 3 - 4 years ago, of many Armenian American political groups, leaders, and academicians, especially on the West Coast, to emulate Massachusetts' hugely successful, internationally-recognized campaign against the ADL's anti-Armenian bias.

When Armenian American leaders avoid criticizing influential adversaries, are they defending the community's interests or their own?

Another question: when an individual recognizes the Armenian genocide, is that recognition principled and consistent? Or is it mainly a vehicle to advance his or her interests? Public officials are, of course, the most obvious examples.

Genocide 'Bait and Switch'

Presidential candidate Barack Obama recognized the Armenian genocide and promised to do the same as president. As a result, he garnered several Armenian American endorsements. Once in the White House, he quickly forgot his promise. And consider Jane Harmanwho as a Congresswoman (D-CA)supported the genocide resolution before she deceitfully undermined it. Then there's Richard Gephardt, at one time the U.S. House Majority Leader. As a Congressman (D-MO), he supported the Armenian resolution. He even spoke at an Armenian genocide commemoration on Capitol Hill. Nevertheless, after leaving Congress in 2005, Gephardt became a paid consultant for Turkey and lobbied against the Armenian resolution that he once supported. And recall Samantha Power, the alleged genocide expert and "friend" of Armenian Americans.

Reluctance to Critique

Three years ago Power very publicly urged Armenian Americans to vote for Barack Obama because as president he would recognize our genocide. She now heads the White House's "Office of Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights" (while her husband and longtime Obama friend, Cass Sunstein, is the president's "regulatory czar.") Our "friend" Samantha hasn't been heard from in years. By now, Armenian American organizations should have made some kind of critique of America's "Human Rights" sweetheart. But, no, they're as quiet as she is. The lesson is not lost on Power or anyone else contemplating self-serving rhetoric and promises to Armenians.

And could self-interest, rather than the Armenian people's best interests, explain why more diasporan Armenian "leaders" and organizations haven't been more critical of corruption among Armenia's government officials and oligarchs?

Armenian Americans expect their political leaders and organizations to speak up strongly when our interests are at stake. Fear of offending those who offend us is a poor excuse.