GATHERING IN SOLIDARITY AT QUEEN'S PARK

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Report, 21 April 2018

Today daring the unusual traffic congestion due to the closure of DVP – one of the major arteries in Toronto – around two hundred Toronto Armenians gathered at the Queen's Park – Ontario's parliament – to voice their solidarity with the civic movement in Armenia. Predominantly young participants along with their older brethren carried flags and banners # Մերժիր Սերժին (Reject Serzh) in reference to former president and present prime minister of Armenia.

Several speakers made short statements denouncing the oligarchic regime of Armenia calling for the ousting of Serzh Sargsyan who for the past ten years symbolized the oppressive rule of the regime that exploited the citizens in more ways than one can count, supervised sham elections and changed the constitution to guarantee the regime's perpetuity.

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Arusyak Karapetyan, one of the speakers, stated, "Armenian people have woken up from decades of slumber and have taken their fate into their hands. And this will change our collective forever!" Similar sentiments were pronounced by others.

The below declaration was read on behalf of the attendees,

"We, Canadian Armenians, have come here today to support the peaceful protests taking place in Armenia and strongly condemn the violence that's been committed by the police against peaceful protesters.

The people of Armenia are protesting against permanently falsified elections and the authoritative system shaped through a falsified constitutional referendum, and against the election by the Armenian Parliament of a new Prime Minister, Mr. Serzh Sargsyan. The Prime Minister, not the President, is now the head of the state, based on Constitutional Amendments made in 2015.

The Amendments were initiated by the ruling Republican party and were adopted through a referendum which was marred by widespread fraud, including bribery and ballot stuffing. The Amendments changed Armenia's governance system from semi-presidential to parliamentary system.

In 2014, Mr. Sargsyan, then President of Armenia, declared the following: "I, Serzh Sargsyan, will never again put forward my candidacy for President of the Republic of Armenia." He continued that if the country voted for a parliamentary system in the 2015 Referendum, "then I will not seek the post of Prime Minister either."

After the Referendum, he re-affirmed that he would not be seeking the office of Prime Minister. However, Mr. Sargsyan, whose second and final consecutive term as President expired on April 9th, was fooling the people once again. On April 17th the Armenian Parliament, stacked with loyalists, elected him as the country's new Prime Minister. Even many members of the largest "opposition" group voted for him.

In hindsight, Mr. Sargsyan's intentions have been clear. Constitutional changes he enacted in 2015, grant the Prime Minister nearly all the powers previously held by the President. The amendments also scrapped direct elections for the Presidency, ensuring that this post too is occupied by one of his men.

A stunningly low percentage of Armenian citizens, a mere 10 percent, believe that the country has fair elections (based on surveys, for example the annual Caucasus Barometer survey) while over 90 percent do not have trust in Mr. Sargsyan.

We believe Mr. Sargsyan and his current regime are illegitimate and we support the protesters' calls for new elections in the country. At the same time, we condemn any attempt of violence and provocative action by the authorities. We urge the authorities to adhere to the principles proclaimed in the Declarations on Human Rights and Political Freedoms adopted by the United Nations and other international organizations and to stop any threat against the peaceful demonstrators."

The gathering lasted about two hours. To follow the ongoing discussion and view an array of pictures click on Facebook.