HRANT DINK--RATIONAL, FAR-SIGHTED THINKER

Posted on January 20, 2014 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Dr. Agop J. Hacikyan, Professor Emeritus, The Royal Military College of Canada, January 2007

When they gunned down Hrant Dink, they killed the most courageous and influential journalist of the Armenian-Turkish press - a beloved husband, precious father, brilliant thinker, and a heroic individual who made his voice heard, condemning the injustices of the past and present taking place in Turkey.

Hrant Dink was the only Turkish-Armenian journalist who had been courageous enough to comment rationally and objectively on the mass killings of ethnic Armenians by the Ottoman army which began in the 1890s and culminated in 1915 - events that a number of foreign nations have officially recognized, and which the majority of reputable historians accept as genocide, but which the Turkish government still denies and calls 'casualties of war'.

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It is deplorable that the Turkish government maintains its aggressive policy of denial in the face of all evidence and against the tide of international opinion. It is doubly deplorable that the US administration remains totally mute, instead of speaking with moral clarity about the Armenian genocide or, at least, making a vigorous protest against Hrant Dink's prosecution. The State Department continues to block the US Congressional Armenian Genocide Resolution and last year recalled the US Ambassador to Armenia, John Evans, for speaking the truth about this crime when he publicly acknowledged the genocide and broke with the government's position. Needless to say, politics, foreign policy and inter-governmental relationships weigh heavier than truth and moral integrity.

Elif Shafak, the Turkish novelist who was also prosecuted, like Dink, for 'insulting Turkishness', observed in the Washington Post that 'Turkey today is experiencing a cultural clash. On one side are those who want an open and democratic society . . . and support Turkey's bid to join the European Union; on the other side are those who speak the language of fear . . . turn the country into an insular, xenophobic state . . .' Those who speak the language of fear are fewer in number but capable of

manoeuvring the political agenda and smearing the country's reputation before the international community.

It is more than regrettable that as long as the government of Turkey cannot come to terms with its historic past and multi-ethnic heritage, tragic events such as Hrant Dink's assassination along with unjust prosecutions and persecutions will continue to devastate the country and shock the international community.

The bullets of a seventeen-year-old Turkish teenager, Ogun Samast, stopped Hrant Dink's voice, but other voices will continue to speak out even louder throughout the world. PEN, the international association of writers, Amnesty International, and many other groups and individuals will go on with their relentless combat against the enemies of human rights and freedom of speech. Neither Article 301, nor teenage nor adult bullets, nor attempts to block resolutions will be able to stop the promotion of justice or pollute history with lies.

Hrant Dink's death is a universal loss and a huge deprivation for his family with no possible consolation. As his beloved daughter asked loud and clear before her father's slain body: "Now that you've killed my father, is your blood purified?" Indeed - have the haters achieved catharsis?

Hrant Dink's fortitude in confronting the facts of the Armenian genocide, and his noble mission to bring impartiality to the Armenian Passion have now become exemplary pages in the history of the defence for human rights and freedom of speech.

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