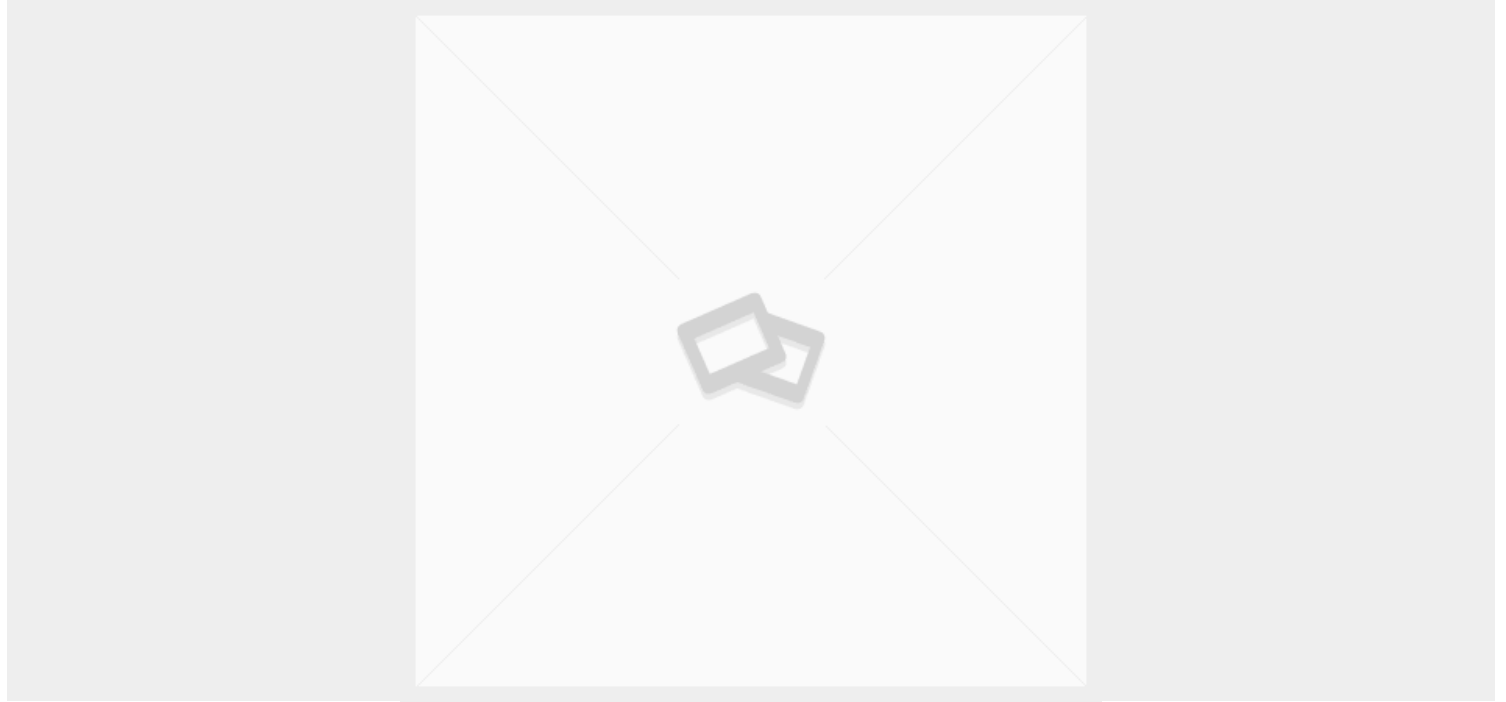


INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND INTEGRITY IN ARMENIAN STUDIES

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Category: [Opinions](#)



[Armenian Weekly](#), 13 August 2009

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The following statement was endorsed several weeks ago by the Society for Armenian Studies and the International Association for Armenian Studies in response to misleading and slanderous pronouncements on Armenian television and the internet by individuals in Glendale, Calif. Despite the provocation, it seemed preferable at the time not to distribute this statement to the media in the hope that the smear campaign would run its course and disappear. That indeed seemed to be happening until July 28, when an Armenian newspaper received and unsuspectingly printed a report from the Yerevan news agency Armenpress regarding alleged statements ascribed to the Director of the Armenian Studies and Humanities Division of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences Dr. V. Barkhudaryan critical of certain Armenian studies scholars abroad. Although it soon became apparent that the Armenpress report had been fabricated and that Dr. Barkhudaryan had made no such statements, the Glendale group again went on television to proclaim that the leadership of Armenia had handed a crushing defeat to the "falsifiers of Armenian history" and even went so far as to liken its significance to the "Battle of Avarayr." Academician Barkhudaryan has refuted the report, stating that he has given no such interview with Armenpress or any other organ, labeling such ascriptions as "fabricated intrigue" (shintsu sadrank). In view of these recent developments, we feel compelled to circulate our statement to the media and to call on the public to join the 250 scholars in Armenia and abroad as well as the 30 Armenian studies programs and cultural/educational organizations that have signed the declaration in support of the freedom of academic inquiry and against totalitarian-style censorship.

We, the undersigned scholars and supportive cultural-educational organizations, deplore the recent activities and statements of certain individuals and groups that aim at discrediting the reputation and work of Armenian studies scholars and scholarship, especially in the United States.

In recent months, we have witnessed an intensification of their anti-intellectual activities. When taking note of the slanderous videos placed on YouTube beginning in January 2009, the recently-emerged so-called "Armenian Progressive Students Union" and the "Armenian Nationalists' Union,"

the fabrications and manipulations of a Glendale-based Armenian television commentator, and various petitions addressed to authorities in Armenia, it is apparent that the campaign has become larger in scope than initially thought.

The current attacks are based on gross distortions and intellectual dishonesty. One does not have to agree with the conclusions or views of particular scholars on any given subject to insist that (a) statements by scholars should not be taken out of context or even turned around to give a directly opposite meaning from what is actually written; (b) dissent or responses should be based on research and be articulated with civility; and (c) differences should not be turned into campaigns that border on intellectual terrorism. It is obvious that this movement now goes far beyond the realm of criticism and accepted norms of discussion and dissent.

Scholars in Armenian studies, including those who are currently being maligned, have produced research that has secured Armenian history and culture their legitimate places in academia and the wider world community. They have been a most effective voice in international forums and media regarding issues critical to understanding of past and present Armenian history.

Whatever the motivations behind the attacks, they can have only negative consequences for all concerned. Equally important, this offensive seems to be promoting a monolithic reading of Armenian history under a single authority, creating a situation in which any deviation from that imposed interpretation might be labeled as treachery. Such an approach is objectionable because (a) it runs counter to the concept of research and research-based analyses of history; (b) it closes the opportunity to look at the past in all its complexities and as yet unexplored dimensions; (c) it makes historical and cultural studies irrelevant to the understanding of the present and to the choices regarding the future.

It is clear that this is no longer a problem of the specific scholars under attack or even of Armenian studies, generally. This is a problem for Armenian culture in the widest sense of the word. In view of this ideologically bankrupt assault to discredit scholars and impose uniformity of interpretations so detrimental to Armenian studies, as well as to the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian people,

We, the undersigned,

- (1) Insist on the freedom of grounded research, opinion, and interpretation;
- (2) Call on those in positions of authority both in Armenia and in the Diaspora—civic and governmental officials, scholars, media, academic institutions and their leaders, and cultural-educational organizations—to join us in rejecting attempts to dictate monolithic views in Armenian studies and in supporting the right to inquiry, intellectual freedom, and cultural tolerance.

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Society for Armenian Studies (SAS), and

Association Internationale des Etudes Armeniennes (AIEA)

And the Armenian Studies Programs of:

Boston University
California State University, Fresno
California State University, Northridge
Clark University
Columbia University
Harvard University
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
University of Chicago
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
Tufts University

And the Civic and Educational-Cultural Associations:

Analysis, Research and Planning for Armenia (ARPA)
Armenian Bar Association (ABA)
Armenian Center, Columbia University
Armenian Cultural Foundation (ACF), Arlington, Massachusetts
Armenian Dramatic Arts Alliance
Armenian Educational Foundation (AEF)
Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA)
Armenian Librarians and Libraries Information Committee (ALLIC)
Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), Watertown, Mass.
Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan-Dearborn
Center for Armenian Remembrance, Los Angeles
Institute of Armenian Studies, University of Southern California
Moscow Armenian Student Association
National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR)
Nor Serount Cultural Association, California
Oesterreichisch-armenische Studiengesellschaft, Vienna
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