INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GENOCIDE AND INTERNATIONAL LAW CONCLUDES

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By Asbarez Staff, 8 September 2009

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This long-planned conference began on Sept. 2, with an inaugural speech by the President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus, Marios Garoyan who stated that his presence as the guest speaker of the conference was driven by his country's "commitment to international law, peace, security and stability, but also the determination to continue to condemn, on every possible occasion, any infringement of International Law by acts of Genocide."
During the next two days of the conference, 13 experts in the fields of Genocide and international law from the US, Canada, Switzerland, Ireland, Armenia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Lebanon joined more than 80 local political scientists, activists, sociologists, historians, religious leaders, educators, academicians, international correspondents, journalists and students, in taking an important step forward in addressing the consequences of the Armenian Genocide and promoting a fair perspective through international law.

In a profoundly academic atmosphere, the conference covered such topics as genocide denial and recognition issues, Turkish nationalism and the politics of denial, as well as the economic aspect of the genocide and the issues of lands and assets. Within the framework of international law, the conference discussed the general topics of genocide and crimes against humanity, retribution, and preservation of the Armenian cultural heritage.

Conference panoramic (Medium)More specifically, Dr. George Charaf from the University of Lebanon lectured on the problem of minorities and majorities, discussing the case of the Ottoman Empire.

Dr. Ugur Ungor, from the University of Sheffield, talked about demographic engineering in the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Genocide.

Dr. Mohammad Rifaat, from the University of Alexandria, discussed the Armenian Question according to Arab sources.

Dr. William Schabas from the National University of Ireland discussed the problems and prospects of the Genocide and international law, 60 years after the International Genocide Convention.

Dr. Alfred De Zayas, from the Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations, elaborated

on the issues of justice and international law regarding the Armenian Genocide.

Khatchig Mouradian, a Ph.D. candidate in Genocide Studies at Clark University, lectured on the Armenians, Raphael Lemkin and the UN Convention.

Dr. Taner Akcam's paper entitled, "Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide Issue in Turkey Today" was presented in absentia.

Dr. Ragip Zarakolu, Vice President of Human Rights Association of Turkey, tackled the issue of Genocide denial and law in Turkey.

In the same context, Dr. Seyhan Bayraktar, from the University of Zurich, covered the evolution of the Armenian Genocide denial in the Turkish Press.

A PhD. Candidate, at John Hopkins University, Bilgin Ayata discussed Kurdish-Armenian relations and the Armenian Genocide.

Dr. Roger Smith, a professor emeritus of government at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, lectured on professional ethics and the denial of the Armenian Genocide.

Dr. Henry Theriault, from the Worcester State College, discussed restorative justice and alleviating the consequences of genocide.

And finally, Dr. Richard Hovannisian, from UCLA, covered the issue of universalizing the legacy of the Armenian Genocide.

The sessions were moderated by Dr. Arda Ekmekji, Dr. Naila Kaidbey, Giro Manoyan, Dr. Rania Masri, Dr. Joseph Bayeh, Dr. Ohannes Geukjian, Antranig Dakessian and Dr. Haig Demoyan.

Haigazian University President, Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian said that such conferences will always keep the Genocide issue alive, giving an increasingly growing international momentum to it. Haidostian said that "the topic of Genocide, and this conference in particular, will hopefully open the door to further academic studies and research, activating deeper study in the economic, social and legal aspects of inter-state relations."
On the sidelines of the conference, public lectures were held spanning over three evenings on related topics.

Conference organizers announced that the presentations were expected to be published in a volume.

The inaugural session of the conference took place at the hall of the First Armenian Evangelical Church of Beirut.

Among the capacity audience were present Minister Alain Tabourian, representing the Lebanese

President Michel Suleiman, Parliament Member Hagop Pakradouni, representing the Parliament Speaker Mr. Nabih Berry, Minister Jean Oghasabian, representing the President of the Council of Ministers, Fouad Sanioura, Member of Parliament Sebouh Kalpakian, representing the appointed President of the Council of Ministers, Saad Rafic Hariri, Parliament Member Shant Chinchinian, ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Cyprus, Uruguay, the Czech Republic, President of the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, Rev. Megrdich Karagozian, Prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Lebanon, Bishop Kegham Khatcherian, the president of the Armenian Protestant community in Syria, Rev. Haroutune Selimian, representatives of embassies, Armenian and Lebanese political parties, cultural associations, former members of parliament and ministers, religious leaders and guests of the conference.

Haigazian University's public relations director Mira Yardemian welcomed the audience, noting that "this conference is being held at a time when world politics and indeed the relations between Turkey and Armenia are witnessing significant change, a season of breaking news."

In his message, the President of Haigazian University Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian emphasized that "the Armenian Genocide is not simply an Armenian problem but essentially an international burden." Haidostian added that, "the victim carries a strong sense of ownership of pain, but human civilization cannot be considered as highly developed if it does not embrace a sense of advocacy for the victimized."

Speaking of Genocide, Haidostian drew the attention to four key points. First, "that injustices of any nation against any other nation are part of the same human manifestation of evil that require joint, and effective global action." Second, "that this international conference convenes in a country, Lebanon, which continues to be a unique land of dialogue and culture despite the ever-present seeds of misunderstanding." Third, giving the example of Haigazian University, and more specifically, giving the name of Armenag Haigazian, a victim of the Armenian Genocide, Haidostian emphasized, "our calling has been and continues to be standing up for new life not only for Armenians but especially for our Arab brothers and sisters, and really, all people of the world." Finally, Haidostian explained that given the fact that this conference is being held at a university it reminds us that no academic community can be value-neutral. "A university may be a neutral medium of dialogue, but it is essentially a forum of passion for deeper knowledge, responsibility, and enlightenment."

In her message, Executive Director of the ANC-ME, Vera Yacoubian, spoke about the efforts of the Armenian National Committee in highlighting the important role of the Armenian community throughout the Middle East and its coexistence with it surrounding Arab and Islamic communities and the efforts it invests in addressing the Armenian question with all its historical, political and judicial implications to public opinion.

Yacoubian expressed hope that this conference would provide a significant breakthrough in analyzing the Armenian Genocide given the fact that it brings together a large group of specialists in

the arena of genocide and international law and because that this conference is taking place in a region which is still suffering the its Ottoman inherited values.

Regarding Turkish-Armenian relations, Yacoubian noted: "we cannot ignore or disregard recent developments and address these pending issues without resolving past history between the two nations." Yacoubian added that "indeed Turkish-Armenian relations carry the heavy burden of the Armenian genocide and there is high level of doubt and mistrust regarding Turkish intentions."

Yacoubian concluded by questioning that in the context of these developments, what are Turkey's responsibilities towards the acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide and the future of the Armenian Question.

Garoyian expressed his gratitude to the organizing bodies, expressing that his presence here is driven by his country's "commitment to international law, peace, security and stability, but also their determination to continue to condemn, on every possible occasion, any infringement of International Law by acts of Genocide."

Garoyian reiterated the fact that "on the one hand, governments and parliaments should act together and closely cooperate in terms of assessing the progress made with regard to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and identify measures to be taken at all levels. On the other hand, it is the States that must cooperate for the prevention and punishing of those responsible for the crime of Genocide."

Garoyian questioned the role that Turkey is playing as mediator, peacemaker and peacekeeper, in the wider Middle East, while Turkey continues to deny the truth of the crimes perpetrated by its Ottoman predecessors.

He noted that Cyprus has always stood by the side of the Armenian people in regard to their struggle for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. In 1975 the Cyprus House of Representatives was one of the first Parliaments in the world to adopt a resolution calling the atrocities inflicted upon the Armenians in and around 1915 as genocide. Garoyian added that Cyprus and its people have many more reasons to understand the injustice of the Armenian Genocide due to, "the implementation of Turkey's policy of ethnic cleansing against Cyprus' population during the 1974 invasion and the continuing occupation of 37 percent of Cyprus' territory."