

NCWA ACTION PLAN FOR CRUCIAL CONGRESS NEXT YEAR

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Launched in 2006, the NCWA held its landmark 3rd Western Armenian Congress following four years of negotiations and preparatory work, and subsequently created the international structure of the NCWA. "These have constituted a major development in the history of contemporary Armenians," said Mr. Seraydarian.

Indicating that the organization had reached a new state in its history, he said: "It is high time we moved to a new qualitative and organizational phase. Today we find ourselves at a turning point. Through our activities and conferences we were able to create an interest in all Armenian circles that agree to the necessity of not postponing any further the question of Armenian rights and claims."

Mr. Seraydarian added: "Whereas, at this late stage, the recognition of the Genocide is secondary, there is no doubt that it remains our major achievement. It is time our activities became more pragmatic, realistic, productive and oriented towards clearly defined objectives."

The NCWA head pointed that his organization must establish public information campaigns and lobbying to meet the organization's principles and strategic approaches. "We should not be repelled from proselytizing. The time is ripe to familiarize Armenians of all strata with the thinking and approach of the NCWA," he said.

The president of the NCWA added that the organization had been conservative in its approach, but now "it's time to extend our activities, to embrace the wider Armenian public with particular emphasis on the largest communities."

In this new phase the NCWA should be willing to "render the organization more proactive, capable of managing collectively and operate at the higher level of competency," he said. Accordingly, the NCWA expects "this assembly to initiate a general policy working group or committee. The members of the committee should have a professional background in political science, history and international law." Thus, said Seraydarian, attendees should prepare and finalize for "this phase of NCWA's strategy and tactics in accordance with the orientation and the thinking of the organization. It should also prepare the draft of the claims document for review and approval by the council and the assembly."

As a result of NCWA activities Western Armenians have started to become more cognizant of their rights and are now demonstrating readiness to act as rightful plaintiffs, said Mr. Seraydarian.

He remarked that, over the years, the NCWA's vision had gradually crystallized. "Due to the work of the working group on relations with Turkish institutions, a network that offers an effective dialogue with Turks and Turkey exists. Moreover, senior representatives of the state authorities of the Republic of Turkey invited us to a dialogue. Hence we believe that we should not hesitate to launch this exchange of views publicly," said the NCWA president.

Explaining his organization's approach to Turkey and Turkish citizens, Mr. Seraydarian said: "We would, as a first step, require that the Turkish civil society, as well as the authorities provide a confidence building gesture. In this context, the NCWA in its publications and declarations has already expressed the need for certain adjustments and amendments in the Turkish legislation, including certain articles of the penal code, the laws and decrees governing the 'abandoned properties' by the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, the legislation concerning citizenship and the right to return in security and in safety for Armenians who wish to do so. Subject to the expression of good will, our claims should be phased in through subsequent steps."



As the NCWA is settling the organizational and related issues and its presence in Turkey is a reality and the NCWA has a "clear vision of our demands, we have to conclude that on the eve of the centenary commemorations of the Genocide starting in 1915 it is important to call for the 4th Congress of Western Armenians in order to move forward with our mission," said Mr. Seraydarian.

He reminded the NCWA members that since the establishment of the preparatory committee in 2006 the main aim of that group has been the establishment of a legitimate and representative organ to pursue the rights of the Armenian descendants of the Ottoman Empire. "The Third Congress, held in Sevres in 2011, founded the NCWA as an international Non-Governmental

Organization (NGO) and registered it as such in Paris so as to become that legitimate representative body. The National Armenian Congress is, however, the supreme institution with its own rights and statutes," said Mr. Seraydarian.

Therefore, he said that the Fourth Congress should confirm the basic decisions and strategies for the future concerning the claims of the Western Armenians. "The NCWA, as a legitimate and representative body, should ascertain through the 4th Congress the present historic moment that is now different from 2006 as well as 2011. It should also evaluate our present concerns and priorities by inviting a large number of delegates from different circles in Armenia and the Diaspora and clarify our demands from Turkey, the state and the Turkish civil society," Mr. Seraydarian underlined.

He also stressed that the NCWA executive was convinced of the necessity to hold the Fourth Congress before 24 April 2015. To meet the target date the NCWA has to expand in the next six months its representation in the larger Armenian communities, Mr. Seraydarian added.

"The legitimacy of the NCWA becomes valid whenever our structure acquires recognized authority. Presently we do not have that authority because of the sparse number of capable, qualified and prominent representatives as well as institutions," said Mr. Seraydarian.

"We did not complete the establishment of branches or similar constructs in the Diaspora. This is imperative. Their absence limits our capacity to address the important issues we are facing. We do have friends and supporters in Lebanon, Argentina, Canada, the US and European countries... but we lack formal organizational structures," pointed out the president of the NCWA.

"As of this meeting and wherever Western Armenians live we will have to organize community gatherings, conferences and symposia and elect delegates. These delegates should be able and committed persons. Their number is not important; it is the quality that we must aim at," said Mr. Seraydarian.

The NCWA's credibility and legitimacy depended on the participation from all countries where there are significant numbers of Armenians, said the NCWA president. "It is also necessary to embrace potential donors as delegates to participate in the financing of our efforts. It is realistic goal provided our members have the required energy and the will to act accordingly. This is imperative. The invitation to the Fourth Congress and the activities described earlier in the communities can be done concurrently. It would require sending representatives to visit these communities and spend time--two to three weeks--and organize with the help of local friends the above-mentioned events.

"Finally, the preparation of the draft document reflecting our claims is a precondition to holding the Fourth Western Armenian Congress," concluded the president of the NCWA.

