

NCWA CHAIRMAN ADDRESSES TORONTO ARMENIANS

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Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 12 February 2014

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Addressing a cross section of the Toronto Armenian community, Souren Seraydarian said the NCWA mission is to initiate and carry out activities related to the defense of the interests and rights of Western Armenian descendants of the former Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire. He added that the NCWA mission is also to define or assist in defining the individual and collective losses and damages suffered in the territory of the Republic of Turkey since 1915. Safeguarding the Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey is also part of the NCWA mission, he said.



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Since its foundation at Sevres, outside Paris, in 2011, the NCWA has pursued a proactive agenda to engage progressive Turkish groups and individuals and to build bridges with the Kurdish leadership, especially in eastern Turkey (Western Armenia). The NCWA is an international NGO with members in Argentina, Armenia, Canada, Lebanon, France, the Russian Federation, the United States and half-a-dozen other countries. Like Armenians from the Middle East and the western world, NCWA members in Armenia and in the Russian Federation are descendants of Genocide survivors. Among the members are judges, lawyers, engineers, businessmen, authors, journalists, politicians from the RoA parliament, military personnel including a retired general who helped organize the Armenian Army during the Armenian-Azerbaijan War in the early '90s. Seraydarian stressed that to expand its work, the NCWA "needs further human and financial resources". He invited attendees to look up the NCWA website and become members of his organization.

In a frank, informal and wide-ranging talk, Seraydarian cautioned attendees not expect dramatic or breakthrough developments on the part of the Turkish government as a result of the centenary of the Genocide next year. "April 24, 2015 is an important date, but it's just a date. What's more important is the day after. What do we do after that date? We have no illusions; we intend to

continue on the long trail our campaign for Turkey's recognition of the Genocide and for compensation re the losses the Armenian nation suffered," he said.

Outlining the recent work of the NCWA, Seraydarian said that his organization is seeking consultative status at UN's Economic and Social Council, in addition to the UN Human Rights Commission. It's also organizing nine Armenian compatriotic associations in Turkey into a single entity, and registering the NCWA as a national NGO in Turkey.

✘ He said the NCWA would soon start legal action in national courts as well as the European Court of Human Rights regarding the Genocide and Armenian rights. Meanwhile the organization will continue the dissemination of information in the Turkish media and strengthen NCWA's co-operation with Turkish institutions and individuals who already recognize the Genocide.

During six trips to Turkey in the past three years, the NCWA leadership has met Armenian community leaders, compatriotic organizations, Islamized/Hamshen Armenians, Turkish lawyers, Freedom of Thought in Ankara, the Human Rights Association in Ankara and Istanbul, the Ismael Beskci Foundation, and the BDP Kurdish party representatives in the Turkish parliament. During its dialogue with civil society organizations in Turkey, the NCWA leaders have put restitution and or compensation to Armenians at the top of their agenda, said Seraydarian.

The NCWA leaders have also met representatives of the recently-created HCP Kurdish party in Turkey, the mayors of Diyarbakir and Van, members of the Hrant Dink Foundation in Istanbul and delegates from the European Union of Turks.

Seraydarian said the NCWA leaders have also made three trips to Armenia and met its president and the Catholicos of All Armenians. He said the latter was less than enthusiastic about the organization's mission. Catholicos Aram I of the Cilicia See in Lebanon was far more enthusiastic, he said. During the Lebanese trip, the NCWA leaders also met the catholicos of the Catholic Cilicia See.

The NCWA leader's informal and frank address, which included a power-point presentation, was followed by a question-and-answer session. The consensus among the more than 50 attendees was that the NCWA is doing important work which all Armenians should support. A number of people enrolled NCWA members while others said they would look up the group's website and most probably become members.

