

NCWA PURSUES WESTERN ARMENIANS' INTERESTS

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Left to right: Gen. Norad Ter-Grigoryants
NCWA President Souren Seraydarian
& V.P. Garen Mikaelyan

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At its national council meeting in Yerevan, on April 26, the National Congress of Western Armenians (NCWA) asserted that for the abrogation of the consequences of the Genocide of Armenians, it is necessary not only to give political and legal assessment to the crime, but also to restore historical justice—primarily by restoring the interrupted millennial presence of the Western Armenians in their homeland.

Acknowledging that in the past decade Turkey has promoted democratic values and the establishment of national consensus among all its citizens, the NCWA said it considers inevitable and necessary the implementation of appropriate steps to address the Armenian issue in the context of the processes of construction and establishment of democratic and liberal Turkey.

The organization also called on civil society in Turkey, the carriers of liberal and democratic values, progressive thinkers, public figures and organizations, conscientious and responsible citizens to participate with the NCWA in the restoration of all the rights of Western Armenians who lost their homeland in 1915 and scattered around the world, as well as of recognition and compensation of their moral, material and territorial losses.

Delegates from Armenia, Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Lebanon, France, and Canada attended the one-day conference at the Noravank Foundation, one of the leading think-tanks of Armenia. The gathering was presided over by its leaders—Souren Seraydarian from France and Garen Mikaelyan and Gen. Norad Ter-Grigoryants from Russia.

"The meeting was successful because we were able to make progress and crystalize our words as to where we are going," said the NCWA President Seraydarian. "Through the council meeting, we formed a consensus that we should work with Turkish individuals and organizations that have recognized the Genocide of Armenians."

Seraydarian added that for far too long April 24 has become a day of death ("Merelots")... a time of mourning. "While we recognize and honor our dead, we should move to April 25 and revive Armenian rights. The Ottoman government made us stateless. This is recognized internationally as an illegal act. We also lost our individual, property, collective, cultural heritage. We were naturally influenced by the countries where we had to settle after the Genocide. Thus we became Argentinian-, Syrian-, French-Armenians. As a result, we don't have the same Armenian culture. We lost our unity."

Seraydarian said that the NCWA hadn't approached the land issue yet, although it is the organization's final goal. "Addressing the land issue is a step-by-step process. The strategy and tactic for the achievement of that goal should be different. Right now we are establishing what we want and how we can get there... in other words, legally what steps are required," said the NCWA president.

Once the NCWA has finalized its goals and strategy, it will discuss that battle plan with other Armenian organizations.

"The centenary of the Genocide is not an end in itself. It's the beginning."

The council also decided to launch a pilot project in Armenia whereby members would pay \$1 per month as membership contribution. If successful, the project will expand to our countries.

✘ As an adjunct event to the national council conference, the NCWA hosted two Turkish journalists—Erdal Dogan and Sait Çetinoğlu. Dogan is also a human rights lawyer, while Çetinoğlu is a well-known Marxist journalist. They said that although in visiting Armenia they were perhaps taking their lives into their hands, they were proud to be in Yerevan. Both insisted visiting the Dzidzernagapert Genocide Memorial and Museum.

Çetinoğlu has recently compiled a list of Armenian towns and cities in Western Armenia which have vanished. He said that he hoped to translate his research in an English-language book.

Dogan, who has acted as a human rights lawyer for the past 15 years, has exposed the killing of missionaries in Malatya and has seen the perpetrators punished by the courts. "The same mentality of 1915 continues in Turkey," warned the lawyer. "The same attitude prevails across the country. It's not just the Deep State. Even so-called democratic left-wing is a secret ally of those who maintain the Young Turk attitude," he said. "Kemal Ataturk and his friends merely changed their masks to create conditions best suited for their infernal work. You can see that policy in the Dersim Massacres of 1936. Many who were killed then were Armenian survivors of the Genocide."

The young lawyer warned press conference attendees that the Deep State and their allies control the Turkish government, organize denialist seminars across the country and intimidate anyone who doesn't agree with them. "They have the ability to change the state agenda. They have infiltrated the judiciary, the universities. The Turkish media and even the British media do not cover their activities. This secret group of 100,000 people includes senior military officers, judges, diplomats, journalists...and even non-Turks. Their core ideology is the denial of 1915," said Dogan.

The lawyer also warned Armenians not to trust Turks who describe 1915 as "tragedy". He said it's a tip that they deny the Genocide. He said he believed it's very important to present the Armenian Question to the international public and to Turks. "Human rights and justice are the basis of the Armenian Question," said Dogan.

Journalist Çetinoğlu said that Kemalist party's finances were based on confiscated Armenian properties and businesses. "In 1919 it was estimated that Armenian property confiscated by Turkey was worth \$50 billion...Today's Kemalists and Islamists are not much different... Today's Turkish generations are the grandchildren of the confiscators."

The Turkish journalist said that Turkey is adept at manipulating antagonists. "On Kurdish issues, Turkey approaches the Kurds as 'Muslim brothers' while to the world it presents the image of a

democratic and secular governance," he said and told the story of an Armenian (Arshag Baghdassarian) of Urfa, who had turkified his name to recover property confiscated in 1915. "He died during the court case. His son continued his father's attempts to regain the family property. The day the court ordered the return of the properties, the son was killed in a hail of bullets.

Addressing the recent liberal mood of Turkey, Çetinoğlu cited the publication of a book about the Genocide. The book was allowed to be published because the judge said there are so few Armenians in Turkey that they can't damage the country.

He said that Armenians should work through the European Union (EU) to regain what belongs to them. "Turkey is linked to the EU and the UN since it's a signatory to judicial agreements. A collective return of Armenians is possible," he said.

Echoing his colleague, Çetinoğlu said Turkish plan for a homogenous nation hasn't changed. He cited the massacre of Dersim, the war against the Kurds, the discrimination of Alevis, Armenians, and Assyrians. "Turkey refuses to recognize the Alevi religion, closes Alevi mosques, bans the teaching of Kurdish...the mindset of 1915 continues. Threats and 301 continue," he said.

When asked whether Armenians should trust the Gulenist movement, which has thousands of schools around the world, Erdal said the Fatheullah Gulen, the founder of the Gulenist organization is a disciple of Imam Said Nursi, a participant in the Genocide. "Over the years, the Gulenists have remained silent about the Genocide. Their silence speaks volumes," said Erdal and chastised "Today's Zaman" (owned by the Gulenist Foundation) for its frequent promotion of the Khojali "genocide" in Azerbaijan. "When it comes to the Genocide of Armenians, 'Today's Zaman' is no different from other major Turkish dailies which deny what actually took place in 1915. Their attitude is this: 'We love you Armenians; don't talk about the Genocide; certain bad things happened in 1915. You committed the Khojali genocide,'" he said.

The human rights lawyer also criticized Armenia for its lack of effort re the plight of Syrian Armenians. "We are witnessing the decline of Christians in the Middle East. The Syrian-Armenian community, the last of the Cilician-Western Armenian culture, might disappear because of the Syrian conflict," he said.

When Erdal was asked why he continued to live in Turkey when his life is threatened and he is surrounded by enemies, the journalist said: "I want to stay on the land. I want to make it a just society, raise my children and remain steadfast in my beliefs."

