OTTAWA, MAJOR CITIES WORLDWIDE REMEMBER H. DINK

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Category: Opinions

Hrant Dink commemorations saw a marked upsurge in participation this year both in Turkey and elsewhere in the world. The demonstration that was organized in front of *Agos* newspaper in Istanbul grew into a mass rally–one of the largest in the recent years–that reached into the Taksim Square late January 19 afternoon.

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By then Turkish police had already closed Gezi Park adjacent to the square to prevent the demonstrators from entering the park–a measure frequently employed by police since they brutally supressed anti-government protests centred in Gezi Park last June. The government's concerns about the indignation of the masses were not unfounded because various Gezi-inspired groups were actively taking part in Hrant commemorations in Istanbul and elsewhere in an effort to expose the government's complicity in stalling the progress of Dink file in Turkish courts.

GEZInIyoruz Network, one of the groups that comprises participants from several Gezi platforms in Europe and North America joined forces with their friends in Istanbul to commemorate Hrant Dink. The group's focus was less a demonstration of mourning than standing for solidarity against those who wanted to wipe out the possibility of peace and brotherhood Hrant paved the way for.

In addition to the commemorative events, panel discussions and film screenings organized in several centres, *GEZInIyoruz* also facilitiated a global campaign through social media and distributed photos taken across the world with posters of "For Hrant, For Justice" and "Buradayız Ahparig" (we're here my brother).

In Ottawa *GEZInIyoruz* joined *Voices in Dialogue*—Armenian-Turkish-Kurdish dialogue group that has been organizing Hrant commemorations in Ottawa since 2008—to co-organize an event in University of Ottawa, Alumni Auditorium. Besides showing solidarity with Hrant's memory, the co-organizers had a dual focus in Ottawa commemoration. One focus was to highlight the legal and political aspects of Hrant's murder and the ongoing trial. For this purpose, a video interview with Fethiye Çetin, Hrant's Dink lawyer, that was shot three days ago in Istanbul for viewing in commemorative events held outside Turkey was shown. The second aim of the event was to honour Hrant's vision of understanding and dialogue. Two documentary films, "I Left My Shoes in Istanbul" (directed by Nigol Bezjian) and "SaroyanLand" (directed by Lusin Dink) were shown for this purpose.

In his opening remarks to the event, delivered on behalf of the organizing team, Mete Pamir thanked

the participants for the spirit of generosity they showed by the simple act of coming to the meeting and raising their voice for Hrant, for justice. In his remarks, Pamir said:

> We're here to celebrate Hrant's vision of peace, understanding and solidarity among Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian peoples–peoples who share a common history and geography and whose relations today carry the injuries of the Great Crime perpetreated against the Armenian people and its ongoing denial by the Turkish government. It has been 7 years since Hrant was murdered. Turkish media, judiciary and government still do not acknowledge their collective responsibility in paving the way to his assasination. The government still plays for time and pays lip service to the outrage that is voiced in Turkey and around the world. They protect the real murderers, they even promote to highest office the officials, the judges and politicians who aided the murder. In the face of this government impunity, it is heartening to see that popular resistance shows no sign of weakening, that we are still here for Hrant, that people of different backgrounds and countries are standing shoulder to shoulder to demand justice, and say 'We're Here Ahparig,' 'We are Everywhere Ahparig.'
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> It is with this demand that we are meeting in the streets in Taksim today and in more than 40 cities in North America, Europe and Turkey. This togetherness is profoundly encouraging for the common sense of humanity we feel as individuals. It is as if we are paying a debt to Hrant by refusing to stay silent against injustice and we are trying to cast off the cloak of silence that exists between Turks, Armenians and Kurds in an effort to repay this infinite debt. This ethical urgency emboldens our determination to continue bearing witness and exposing governments'–any government's–injustice toward whole groups of people."

After giving an overview of the event program, Pamir continued:

> It is not a coincidence that we are begining this event with Fethiye Çetin because she personifies the two broad headings we highlight. She is both a wonderful narrator of a story of self-discovery and an expert on the legal and political implications of Hrant's murder case. Çetin is the author of *My Grandmother*, a memoir that was translated into English 5 years ago. Her book became a bestseller when it was first publised 10 years ago in Turkish. It was popular not only among tens of thousands of Turks who were re-discovering their Armenian origins but perhaps more importantly it was an eye-opener for Turks like myself who were cutoff from the history of genocide, who saw it merely in terms of a tug-of-war between imperial powers. Through Çetin's austere yet powerfully moving narrative of Seher or Heranoush, the Turkish and Armenian names of her grandmother, a whole new generation of Turks connected with the truth and pain of 1915 by way of the personal testimony of survivors. The two films we are screening today echo this adventure of self-discovery by way a connection to a shared homeland.
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> But over and above being an accomplished writer, Fethiye Çetin is a lawyer. She was Hrant's

> lawyer during the trials when he was fighting for freedom of expression, she is also the lead lawyer for Dink family in the murder trial. In fact, she has just published in a second book in Turkish, titled *I am Ashamed: The Story of Hrant Dink's Legal Case*. The approach is very different than the emotional archeological work of personal history in her first book. The second one reads more like a legal and criminal thriller, it tells the continuing story of genocide in daily legal sphere–again not in big general words but by a meticilous chronicle of the banality of Turkish state practice.

In closing his remarks, Pamir stressed:

> Hrant's legal case has much wider political implications especially for the current situation in Turkey. The current AKP goverment that is in power for almost 12 years is in a state of slow motion collapse since the Gezi Uprising of last June. As it is typical in authoritarian regimes, things get more and more uglier toward the end of its rule. The dirty deals at the government's power base become exposed as infighting among its partners in crime becomes intensified. Hrant's murder is at the point of intersection of this infighting, it is a litmus test of sorts that reveals the nationalist consensus that sustains the Turkish power elite for the last 100 years.
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> This is perhaps the main reason the demand for justice for Hrant is taken up by a broad alliance of popular resistance movements. His dissident voice has become the voice of all previous generations and current struggles of freedom. Hrant has become a symbol of all the people who are oppressed and marginalized by an often murderous state. In this sense, he has become much more than a symbol for the destruction of Armenian people in Turkey, he represents the demand of justice for the crimes against the socialists, Alevis, Kurds, lesbians and gays, and women. That is why this broad opposition joins the struggle for his memory in the streets and in meeting halls with increasing numbers, this is why oppressed groups in Turkey and in the Diaspora cry 'We Shall not Forget' on each January 19.

During the intermission of the commemoration, some members of the audience joined the organizers to take a photo for the global "We're Here Ahparig" campaign.

Report filed by Kumru Bilici and Mete Pamir, January 22, 2014 – Ottawa.