


SARKISIAN MUST ACCOUNT FOR ABUSE OF ARMENIAN HUMAN RIGHTS


Posted on October 8, 2009 by Keghart




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 By Professor Henry Theriault, [Asbarez](#), 5 October 2009

Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian has spent the past year of his presidency negotiating a deal with Turkey (1) to accept Turkey's perennial denial that its predecessor state the Ottoman Empire and nationalist forces under Ataturk executed a genocide of Armenians beginning in 1915, and (2) to give up all claim to formerly Armenian territories depopulated of Armenians through the instrument of this 1915 genocide. These two features combine to indicate that no other compensation for the tremendous suffering imposed by the genocide and wealth expropriated by Turks and others through it will be negotiated. There is, of course, no mention of the 1894-96 massacres, significant issues in themselves, nor subsequent abuse of Armenian human rights inside Turkey to this day, including the assassination of Hrant Dink motivated by Turkish penal code Article 301, which is clearly prejudicial against Armenians inside and outside of Turkey. In essence, Sarkisian is completing the work of Talat, Enver, and Jemal by ensuring that (1) all the gains in land and wealth made through the 1915 genocide are retained by Turkey and (2) the genocide will remain unrecognized by Turkey. What even they could not do—break the will of those Armenians who survived so that they would accept the destruction of the genocide and slide quietly into history—Sarkisian is making every effort to accomplish. He is helping the perpetrator group consolidate and make permanent all that it gained through the Armenian Genocide. 

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Yet, can this latest harm to the basic dignity of all Armenians—and, by implication, all victims of genocide around the world—and this dangerous undermining of the viability of both the Armenian Republic and survival of Armenian identity in the future be a surprise to anyone who has watched

Sarkisian in action over the past year and a half? Before Sarkisian began his role in finalizing the genocidal destruction of Armenians, what was he doing? After gaining power in Armenia in an election credible evidence indicates was tainted by fraud, Sarkisian violently suppressed widespread protests. He used government forces to attack protesters, most of whose "crime," by reliable accounts, consisted of exercising their right to dissent in their own society, that is, to exercise the basic rights of (1) freedom of expression, (2) peaceful assembly, and (3) participation in their government enshrined in Articles 19, 20, and 21 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He then jailed numerous political opponents and protesters apparently without legitimate cause or due process.

Sarkisian's actions in the early part of his presidency demonstrate clearly that he has no regard for Armenian human rights and will violate them any time he desires. His actions were little different from those of Turkish political leaders and institutions that today suppress the basic human rights—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, right to property, and even right to life—of Armenians within Turkey. What is more, history shows us clearly that regimes that demonstrate disregard for human rights in one instance almost inevitably repeat this disregard in future instances. The Turkish state and society, in part shaped by the Young Turk perpetrators, has gone on violently to repress basic Kurdish human rights as well as the human rights of many Turks. The Serbs who committed genocide against Bosnian Muslims applied the same mentality and kinds of actions against Kosovo Albanians. The Germans started with a genocide against the Herero and moved on to the Europe-wide Holocaust of Jews and others. The Indonesian government committed politicide against 500,000 to 1,000,000 political dissenters and others labeled as "communists" in 1965, and moved on to genocide against the East Timorese starting in 1975. The English committed genocides against Native Americans and then against the Irish. The United States committed genocide against the Cherokee and then the Navajo and then...

Serge Sarkisian's complicity with genocide deniers and in the genocidal expropriation of Armenian land and movable wealth could have been prevented if enough people inside and outside Armenia had stood up against his initial human rights abuses. I myself am guilty of not doing enough, beyond merely challenging denial of these abuses by the Armenian representative to the UN at the New York City 2008 Genocide commemoration. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) should have understood the lessons of history above—that there is no way to work with human rights abusers to protect human rights—instead of wishfully thinking that it could temper and even change the nature of Sarkisian's abusive rule by participating in the government. This approach never works. And, one has to ask, where were the Swiss then, when they could actually have helped Armenians and promoted democracy and human rights? Instead, they have piled onto the Armenian population around the world to help Turkey push them into accepting the violation of their rights and memory represented by the protocols.

These appear to be lessons for other groups who will face a similar challenge in the future, unfortunately. But that does not mean that nothing for Armenians can be done now. If the Armenian

Republic will be immeasurably weakened by Sarkisian's perfidy, that does not mean that it will cease to exist immediately. Sarkisian is forcing the republic into a desperate political, economic, cultural, and military situation. It will require every effort of its own citizenry as well as the Diaspora to save it. The only way that its citizens can act to save their own society is if Sarkisian's illegitimate abuse of human rights and suppression of their political dissent stops. However great Sarkisian's moral violation against Armenians for complicity in the final consolidation of the Armenian Genocide, it is not a prosecutable crime. Sarkisian's use of state violence against Armenian citizens and the jailing of opposition, however, would seem to be.

To save Armenia and Armenians from the continued rule of a leader so cavalier about violations of their rights, Armenians and Armenian organizations inside and outside of Armenia, as well as international human rights organizations and foreign governments, should begin pressing for a credible investigation into the allegations of Sarkisian's use of violence against protesters and violations of the rights of those jailed for political reasons under his presidency. If sufficient evidence is found that he has violated human rights, he should be indicted and stand trial for his violations. If he is found guilty, he should be punished in accord with the law, including with jail time if warranted by law.

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