THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE: NOT FOR JUST ONCE A YEAR

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Editorial, Zoryan Institute On the Occasion of the 99th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide
Toronto, 21 April 2014

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Many Armenians express their interest and concern in the genocide once a year, around April 24. They feel the need to participate in commemorative events because some feel obligated because of guilt, some do it once a year because they don't want to visit the trauma the rest of the year, and some dread the past altogether and stay away from it throughout the year, but for the sake of keeping the memory alive they feel compelled to attend these commemorative events. There are those who don't commemorate even once a year because they are so divorced from the history. But there is so much more to be done. The Armenian Genocide is a subject vital to Armenians that must be thought about and acted upon every day. Here are some critical reasons.

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1. It is a mass crime that demands recognition and restorative justice for the international criminal

justice system to have any credibility for punishment, deterrence, or prevention.

2. To bring a measure of comfort and closure to the victims and their descendants, who must endure tremendous psychological pain, not only for the loss of life, land, and property, but also for the threat to the sustainability of Armenian culture and civilization.

3. To search for truth and understanding of the Genocide, what happened, how it happened, and its ongoing impact. This is still aggressively denied by the Government of Turkey and its supporters, who treat the Armenians as unworthy of consideration as human beings and perpetuates the effects of the Genocide, as Prof. Roger W. Smith has written so eloquently.

4. The Genocide is the main obstacle to normal relations between Armenia and Turkey today. Turkey has unilaterally closed their mutual border and imposed an economic blockade on Armenia. Ostensibly this is over the Karabagh issue. But, clearly the Genocide is a major aspect of it, as Turkey continues to insist on a historical commission to review the subject. Thus, the 1915 Genocide is national security for Armenia's existence today.

5. Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide is an assault not only on Armenians, but also on truth, on world history, and thus on humanity, itself.

The deniers are at work every day. Prof. Vahakn Dadrian has described there being an "industry of denial." They are supported by the Turkish government in various ways with all the political and economic leverage that a powerful state has at its disposal. They organize conferences, give public lectures, publish books and articles using the forms of scholarship, with appropriate academic language and footnotes, but what they produce is not scholarship; it is anti-Armenian propaganda.Real scholarship follows the evidence—all the evidence—to arrive at conclusions. Real scholarship takes account of the arguments of other scholars and builds on them with new evidence or serious arguments. It does not hide, ignore, or dismiss information or ideas that do not fit a preconceived model. Recently, they have also been active in the courts, seeking legal validation in various ways for their denialist position.

Therefore, it is necessary for us to deal with this issue more than once a year. We must be active in working energetically every day in promoting education and awareness of the Armenian Genocide at every level and to combat its pervasive, well funded denial, racism and hostility towards Armenians.

There is at least one organization that has been doing just that successfully for the past thirty-two years, the Zoryan Institute.

Zoryan has excelled at bringing the key Armenian issues to prominent international settings and publishing groundbreaking books on critical subjects, using original research based on archival

materials. It collected original archival documentation, including some 3,000 hours of oral history testimony of Armenian Genocide survivors on video, providing raw data for future researchers, as well as a link to the eyewitness experience of the survivors for future generations. It was behind such significant international public events as the Permanent Peoples Tribunal in Paris in 1984, the first judicial hearing of the Armenian Genocide. Its verdict found that genocide had been committed against the Armenian people and that the modern republic of Turkey inherited the legal responsibilities for dealing with the consequences.

Among the more than forty books and two journals fundamental to the field that Zoryan has produced, let me mention just a few example. *A Shameful Act* is the first account by a Turkish historian which documents that the mass killings of Armenians during WWI was a deliberate, centralized program of state-sponsored extermination. *Judgment at Istanbul* (in Turkish and English) provides the scholarly documentation and analysis of the Ottoman Military Tribunals prosecuting the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide. *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916* (in German, Turkish and English), pioneering work fourteen years in the making, which led the German Parliament to pass a unanimous resolution acknowledging Germany's role in the Genocide. It also prompted one of Turkey's leading journalists to write, "…if you read the book and look at the documents, if you are a person who is introduced to the subject through this book, then there is no way that you would not believe in the genocide and justify the Armenians." He called it "an extremely important and expensive study."

Zoryan has also been engaged in court cases, participating as an academic amicus curiae, along with other distinguished organizations, to help defend Massachusetts from having to include denial literature in its high school curriculum on the Armenian Genocide. It was involved as an amicus curiae in helping to defend California's law on extending the deadline for payment of life insurance policies for victims of the Genocide. And as recently as a month ago, Zoryan was instrumental in organizing a coalition of major Armenian organizations in Europe and North America in a successful endeavor to persuade Switzerland to appeal the European Court of Human Rights' ruling absolving Dogu Perinçek of Armenian Genocide denial.

This work needs professionals, trained academics and experts involving huge financial resources for identifying, collecting, analyzing, transliterating, translating, editing and publishing, authoritative, universally recognized original archival documents on the history of the events surrounding 1915. This material must be distributed worldwide, especially in Turkey.

No one expects the average person to devote him or herself to such specialized and labor intensive work. But, the denial and as a result, the racism and the threat of security to the Armenians must be resisted by everyone. The only way this can be done is through a professional, successful, highly acclaimed research center such as Zoryan Institute and with the generous financial support of every

Armenian.

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