TIME FOR SOPHISTICATED VOTE-CASTING

Posted on April 18, 2011 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Keghart.com board editorial, 20 April 2011

It is no secret that Armenians in Canada remember with gratitude Prime Minister Stephen Harper's consistent acknowledgement of the Genocide of Armenians. Not coincidentally, Armenian-Canadians also look back with disdain the dithering of the two preceding Liberal administrations of Jean Chretien and Paul Martin, despite the recognition of the Genocide by Liberal-dominated parliaments. Obviously, these facts will be hammered by Conservative politicians and party functionaries to members of the Armenian community during the current federal election.

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The commemoration of the anniversary of the Genocide, so close to May 2, the day of federal election, will be an additional incentive for politicians of all stripes to make their "case" and solicit Armenian votes. The Armenian tragedy will yet again serve as a play thing in the hands of candidates and their parties.
Will Canadian Armenians have the courage and political acumen to look at what is unfolding, without being carried away by emotions? Admittedly, it is a hard call, but it's a must move.

We look at issues with a baggage of expectations that hardly match what politicians or governments, in a variety of countries, will deliver beyond Genocide recognition. Canada is no exception. Recognition is neither an enacted law in parliament nor panacea to our wounds. Mere recognition has outlived its purpose. We have to look beyond.

Let's assert ourselves; let's remind the movers and shakers of international affairs, Canadian politicians, and politicians of other countries that their predecessors made a promise to redress the unjust treatment towards our nation following the Genocide.

Of course, it won't happen overnight, but bit by bit, with small steps, we can reach our goal.

What's wrong, for example, with demanding, during the upcoming town-hall style meetings and behind the scenes, that denial of the Genocide of the Armenians be declared a criminal offense? France and Switzerland have done it. Is Canada less of a just society?

A sizable contingency of Armenians in Canada have close ties with Armenia. They have family and

friends there. They have business interests, charitable, cultural, and educational ties. Thousands of Armenian citizens have made Canada their home over the past decade, leaving loved ones in the Middle East. Don't we deserve to have a Canadian consulate or embassy in Yerevan? In recent years, the only Canadian politician in leadership position who has made such a promise was Stéphane Dione. Unfortunately, his short-lived tenure was flayed by foes and "friends" alike. It's high time the matter was brought back to the table.

Armenia has ceased to exist on Canadian International Development Agency's map. Let alone Artsakh. Why? Shouldn't our powers-that-be and representatives of Armenia in Canada sit down with the experts at the Canadian Armenian Business Council to prepare a cohesive and unified plan, and demand some explanations . . . get promises and follow-ups?

When will we get rid of our tunnel vision? Except for some solitary occasions, have we ever been interested and participated in the affairs of our First Nations? In 2008 there were 30 First Nations federal election candidates. This time around there may be more. To our knowledge the Armenian community has not approached them in a meaningful manner.

A year ago the First Nations University of Canada was threatened with closure. Keghart.com initiated a petition against the short-sighted decision. Some 500 people endorsed it, but only a handful Armenians. Why? Apathy?

Don't we realize that without the support of the First Nations we have very slim chance of achieving Genocide of Armenians recognition in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and probably in other jurisdictions too? We might already be late. Let's study their history and culture; draw parallels between our histories and in a competent and consistent manner develop relations with the First Nations and the Metis. We have to recognize them before attempting to get them to recognize us and our cause. It's not only because of the "give-and-take" exchange but for our true understanding of universal values of human rights.

Strange as it may sound, last year Ankara "historians" launched a propaganda campaign in the United States, claiming that the First Nations of North America are of Turkic origin. They even managed to come with several Turkic words, which they said were identical to those in the language of "American Indians." This bizarre assertion neglected to mention that there were hundreds of "American Indian" nations, each with its own language. Who after all, better than the Armenians can expose this falsehood?

Many other feasible plans and demands can be enumerated, but first we need to commit ourselves to make a crucial decision to grab this occasion of commemoration of the anniversary of our tragedy and upcoming federal elections by the horns. Let's go beyond clapping and listening to the usual praises. Let's move forward and tell point blank what we deserve and what we want.

After all, the Armenian adage says *Chlatsogh manougin gat chen dar* (*"They don't give milk to the child who doesn't cry".*)