

TIME TO MOVE TO THE NEXT CHAPTER

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 **Keghart.com Editorial Board**, 26 December 2012

After nearly 50 years of campaigning for the international recognition of the Genocide of Armenians, we have won the acknowledgment of 22 countries, many parliaments, the vast majority of the American states, the three major Canadian provinces (Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia), regions, and cities around the globe, in addition to a wide acceptance in the media and in academe.



Although we continue to invest a great deal of time and effort to obtain United States recognition, most of us seem to be unaware that all three branches of the U.S. government acknowledged the Genocide long ago. In 1951 the executive branch, in a letter to the International Court of Justice, acknowledged what the Turkish government had done. In 1975 and 1984 the legislative branch adopted two resolutions confirming the historical facts of the Genocide of Armenians and designated April 24 of that year "a day of remembrance for all the victims of genocide, especially those of the Armenian ancestors who succumbed to the genocide perpetrated in 1915." In a 1981 proclamation President Ronald Reagan said, "...like the genocide of the Armenians..."

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Considering all relevant factors it has been a fruitful campaign; but we need to accept that under current international conditions, we have gained almost all the recognition the Genocide will receive. It's time to open the second toolbox of our campaign for justice against Turkey's butchery and continued denial of culpability. After all, international Genocide recognition was always the first step to obtain meaningful justice.

We are not interested in apologies.

We are not interested in a few billion dollars of compensation.

We are not interested in the restoration of a few Armenian churches, intended to polish Ankara's image and to attract tourists to Turkey. Make no mistake about it: the repairs of Ani churches and a handful of others are not conciliatory gestures by Ankara. Erdogan and Co. want to mislead European nations by demonstrating that Ankara/Yerevan relations are improving. Erdogan will say that reconciliation is so likely that even "extremist" Diaspora Armenians are playing tourist in Ani, Van and Mush, while Armenians of Armenia are holidaying in Antalya.

We want our lands back. The lands we have lived on since—at least—2,250 B.C.

And that's the rub.

What do we mean when we say "our lands"?

We are divided in our dreams and demands. Maximalists among us want Cilicia and all of Western Armenia. Minimalists want Mount Ararat and some strip of land west of our sacred mountain. In between the two are demands for the return of Western Armenia or the Six Vilayets or Kars and Ardahan...

We know the herculean effort we need to gain our lands back, but the first step in this gigantic mission is to decide upon a realistic demand, granted that in negotiations parties invariably demand more than they assume they would get. It comes—no double entendre intended—with the territory.

If and when we sit down with Turkish authorities, we have to have a general consensus in Armenia and in the Diaspora, about the lands we want to demand from Turkey.

A good place to start is to forget the return of Cilicia. However, that realistic decision should not preclude compensation for the lives lost, for the lives made miserable, for the properties stolen or confiscated, for a century of exile.

In determining our battle plan for the return of our lands, we should be cognizant of current realities. For example, large areas of historic Armenia are now mostly populated by Kurds—Kurds who are dying every day to gain independence from Turkey. How likely would the Kurds be to share historic Armenian lands with us, if they wrest them from Turkey? This is just one example of a litany of questions which our leaders in Armenia and in the Diaspora have to tackle before they sit down with Turkish representatives.

While our demands are patently justified, there's another reason we should refuel our campaign for the return of our lands. The Republic of Armenia (29,800 sq. km.) is less than one-tenth of historic Armenia (350,000 sq. km). As is, landlocked Armenia is not a viable state. Its tiny size, location, borders spell eventual doom or reduce the country to the status of a welfare state, a glorified colony, a country which—to paraphrase Tennessee Williams—"depends on the kindness of strangers." Armenia receives \$2 billion remittances from Armenians who live in Russia and

elsewhere in the Diaspora, but this revenue stream can go dry as second- and third-generation Armenians living in Russia assimilate or lose their family and spiritual links to Hayastan.

Armenia needs a permanent solution to its economic woes. To become viable, Armenia needs part of Western Armenia. In addition, the peaceful return of our lands would, by definition, be accompanied by a peace treaty with Turkey. Such a settlement would provide landlocked Armenia with easy access to the Black Sea and to the world.

The Republic of Armenia, our Diaspora political parties and leaders should convene to draft a working paper about our just demands from Turkey. We have to move our agenda from Genocide recognition to the return of our lands. We should make our land demands a topic of discussion around the world, among international bodies, among diplomats and in the media. Now that the world public has repeatedly heard of the huge injustice done to the Armenians by Turkey, chances are the world would respond positively to our just demands.

On the eve of the Genocide's centenary, let's bite the bullet. Let's step up to the plate and demand what's ours.

