"TURKEY UNWILLING TO DISCUSS ITS CRIMES"

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Thomas Hammarberg,CE CE Commissioner for Human Rights NewsAm, 23 March 2010

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Atrocities in the past must be recognized, documented and learned from — but not distorted or misused for political purposes.
Gross human rights violations in the past continue to affect relations in today's Europe. In some cases the right lessons have been learned; genuine knowledge of history has facilitated understanding, tolerance and trust between individuals and peoples. However, some serious atrocities are denied or trivialised, which has created new tensions. There are also cases where violations in the past have been exploited in chauvinistic propaganda, causing division and hatred. Bogus interpretations of history have in fact been used to justify discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

"Coming to terms with history is always essential, but particularly crucial in cases of massive atrocities and human rights violations. Such crimes cannot be ignored without severe consequences. Prolonged impunity or lack of acknowledgment over several generations tends to create bitterness among those who identify themselves with the victims. This, in turn, can poison relations between people who were not even born when the events in question took place," said the Commissioner.

He also states that "even more controversial has been — and is — the very description of the enforced mass displacement, the ensuing deaths as well as the outright killings of ethnic Armenians in 1915 under the Ottoman Empire. Even though this happened before the creation of the new Turkish republic, there has been unwillingness there to discuss these crimes. Writers and journalists who raised the issue were brought to trial. Now, the first steps towards recognizing the facts have at long last been taken — through academic discussions — but more needs to be done."

What is important is an honest search for the truth and a sober, facts-based discussion about the different versions. Only then can the right lessons be learned, said Hammarberg.

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