TURKS DEMAND FREEDOM FOR ARMENIAN INTELLECTUAL

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By Vercihan Ziflioğlu, Hürriyet Daily News, 27 December 2009

- Turkish intellectuals have launched an online petition protesting the imprisonment of an Armenian who was arrested after he gave a newspaper interview in 2008.

The petition, published at the gercek-inatcidir.blogspot.com, is an effort to free Sarkis Haszpanyan, who was arrested and imprisoned in Armenia after he gave an interview. The petition was launched by Sait Çetinoğlu, author and editor at Belge International Publishing, and received more than 30 signatures in its first day.

The support is coming not only from Turkish intellectuals living in Turkey but also from other parts of the world. Visitors to the site can read an open letter to Armenian President Serge Sarkisian penned by Turkish intellectuals.

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“Haszpanyan is being punished unjustly. Let this torture end,” said Çetinoğlu, speaking to Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review. “Sarkis was tortured in Turkey in the aftermath of the Sept. 12, 1980, military coup. He escaped to France as a refugee. In 1991, when Armenia gained independence, he went there and put up a struggle. This should not be his fate.”
Temel Demirel, another leader of the campaign, said Haszpanyan is “a part of Anatolia.”

Demirel said he and Haszpanyan were tortured at the same time after the 1980 coup. “Authoritarian regimes that imprison and torture people because of their thoughts are enemies of humanity and democracy,” he said.

What led to his imprisonment was a November 2008 interview published in the Haygagan Jamanag (Armenian Time) newspaper, known for supporting Armenia’s first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian. Armenia was preparing for the presidential elections at the time.

“ Hazspanyan said some people might be planning to assassinate Sarkisian,” Hayk Kevorkyan from the newspaper told the Daily News. “He was arrested right after the interview was published.”

"They were already looking for an excuse to arrest him. The interview played right into their hands," Kevorkyan said, adding that there are currently 15 political prisoners in Armenia. "Bloody events occurred right after the March 2008 presidential elections, which are still waiting to be uncovered. At that time, 150 people were arrested and questioned for completely political reasons."

David Shahnazarian, a representative of the Armenian National Congress, or ANC, congratulated Turkish intellectuals on their efforts. "We want Armenia to respect human rights, democracy and thought as soon as possible," he told the Daily News. Shahnazarian is known as the "right hand" of Ter-Petrossian and was the president of the Armenian National Security Council in the 1990s.

Born in Hatay, Sarkis Haszpanyan was an active member of an outlawed communist organization in Turkey in the 1970s, together with the late Hrant Dink, who was a close friend of his. Dink was assassinated in Istanbul on Jan. 19, 2007

Open Letter to the Armenian President Serj Sarkisian

Dear Mr. President,

We are informed that our comrade Sarkis Hatspanian, that heroic son of Armenian people, is being detained as a political prisoner in a jail in Yerevan since November 2008, due to his political position during the presidential elections.
As you must well know, Armenian revolutionaries have supported the international revolutionary movement from the outset and there are many who have fallen in the struggle. Isdephan (Etienne) Vosgan who has joined the French Revolution of 1789; Paramaz (Matdeos Sarkisian) who cried "Long Live Socialism!" while mounting to the gallows with other Armenian socialist comrades on 1915; Shadarevian (Lebanon), Boğosyan (Bulgaria), Armenak Bakırcıyan (Orhan Bakır – Turkey), who died while supporting revolutionary movements in the countries they live in, after surviving in the genocide of 1915, are among some of these.

Moreover, Armenian revolutionaries did not hesitate to participate to the revolutionary brigades during the Civil War in Spain (1936), and have lost Ashot Artiesian during a heroic battle against the phalanges. And last, but not least, the beloved name of the legendary Commandante Charles, Manouchian, executed by the Nazis during the Resistance, must be mentioned.

Sarkis Hatspanian, one of the last of this revolutionary tradition, born in Alexandrette was raised within the revolutionary movement in Turkey, persecuted, detained and tortured by the military regime of 1980's. On a voluntary self-exile to France, he trained himself and became a prominent artist. Nevertheless, this heroic son of the Armenian people, did not hesitate to turn his back to the comfortable life offered to him in France, to join the struggle to found Armenia. As you may well

know, he did not withold any sacrifice in this effort.

It grieves us much, that our comrade Sarkis Hatspanian is being held in prison since more than one year without being oficially charged and tried. We sincerely wish to believe that you will not abstain any necessary initiative to grant his release and to provide for his return to his family, friends, comrades and his beloved people.

With due respects,

İsmail Beşikçi
Fikret Başkaya
Sait Çetinoğlu
Temel Demirer
Sibel Özbudun
Mahmut Konuk
Mihail Vasiliadis
Ragıp Zarakolu
Attila Tuygan
Erdal Doğan
Emrah Cilasun
Hanna Beth-Sawoce Sweden
Gün Zileli
Güngör Şenkal
Mustafa Kahya
Oktay Etiman
Orhan Miroğlu
Ruşen Sümbüloğlu
Hüseyin Gevher
Ayşen Hadimioğlu
Ali Çetin
Kemal Kutan
Ayhan Altay
Adnan Caymaz
Fatima Akalın
Recep Maraşlı
Raço Donef- Sydney
Yalçın Ergündoğan
Can İkizler -Boston USA
Hüseyin Güngör
Hulusi Zeybel

Mehmet Ufuk Peker
Denis Dion - Dreisbusch
Ceyhan Suvari
Ahmet Önal
İsmail Aydın
Ohannis Conkar
Ayhan Çınar
Murad Mıhçı
Misak Haroian
Hamdi Öztürk
Isabelle Marilier - Union activist - Marseille - France
Zeynep Tozduman
Lerna Ekmekçioğlu
Neda Bebiroğlu
Dr. Tessa Hofmann, Berlin Scholar of Armenian Studies and HR Defender
Vahan Altıparmak
Melissa Bilal