A RIGHTEOUS TURKISH DOCTOR

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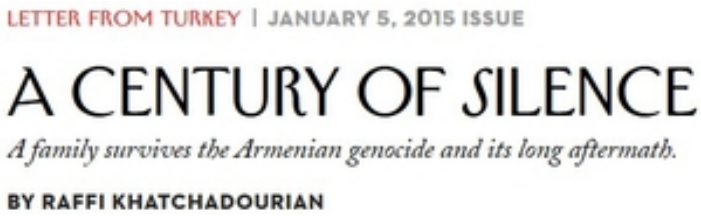
LETTER FROM TURKEY | JANUARY 5, 2015 ISSUE

A CENTURY OF SILENCE

A family survives the Armenian genocide and its long aftermath.

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

Category: Opinions

By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 13 March 2015

Earlier this year, 'The New Yorker' (Jan. 5) published a cover story titled "Atoning for a Genocide" by Raffi Khachadourian. The 22-page article by one of the magazine's regular contributors was about Turkey's denial of the Genocide of Armenians. Three weeks later (Jan. 26) the magazine published a letter from Ahmet Altiner, a medical doctor in New York City. Below is the Turkish physician's letter.—Editor.

"I read Khachadourian's article with sadness, curiosity, and hope. I grew up in Turkey and did not meet an Armenian until I started college, the United States. In high school, the only reference to the Armenian genocide was four sentences in my textbook that briefly mentioned the Teheir Law enacted against the Ottoman Armenians. In 1998, when I was a senior, it would have been unthinkable for a Turkish prime minister to acknowledge the suffering of Armenians, as Recep Tayyip Erdogan did (albeit incompletely). I hope Armenians in the Diaspora know that there are many Turks, both in and outside their country, who would like to connect and reverse the state's history of denial. Turks abroad may be a very useful and underutilized ally in your quest for justice."

The doctor makes a good point. Because of the loud denial noises the Turkish government and Turkish Diaspora establishment organizations make outside Turkey to deny the Genocide, most Armenians perhaps assume the other side is a monolith, a lost cause. However, thousands of Turks in Germany have stated—more than once—that they recognize the Genocide. While organizations such as the National Congress of Western Armenians are doing good work within Turkey by networking with human rights and other justice-seeking NGOs, the Armenian Diaspora should make a concerted effort to "connect" with Diaspora Turks and "reverse the state's history of denial" as Dr. Altiner suggests. Let's explore the possibility that there is a silent Turkish Diaspora that would like to work with us to reverse Ankara's denial. Let's meet them; let's invite them to address our communities; let's open our media pages to them. What better advocates of the Armenian cause than righteous Turks?

There are an unknown number of righteous Turks in Turkey. After decades of being forced into silence, they are coming out and telling the truth about the Armenian/Turkish conflict. These righteous Turks can also use the support of their brothers and sisters in the Turkish Diaspora to pressure Ankara that it's high time it recognized the truth. Righteous Turks also see the Genocide as a stain on Turks and Turkey. They believe that to atone and to be considered a civilized nation Turkey should tell it as it is. No obfuscation. No half-hearted and politically motivated condolences. No "shared pain" diversions. No subterfuge and nonsense.

But first, let's build bridges with the enlightened faction of the Turkish Diaspora.