

# "UNCLENCH YOUR FIST AND WE WILL TALK"

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By Arpie Dadoyan, New Jersey, 21 January 2009

*Friends of Hrant: Voices in Dialogue* are a group of Armenians, Turks and Kurds with roots in Anatolia who have come together to share their deep love and respect for Hrant Dink and to carry on his legacy and dream. On January 17 in Ottawa, Canada, they put together an evening commemorating the second anniversary of Hrant Dink's senseless killing and invited the public to attend the event.

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For this occasion, I drove to Montréal from New Jersey taking the 87 Thruway on to Highway 15  in Canada and from there five of us Armenians drove to Ottawa on Autoroute 417, thus bypassing the ways of politics, governments, hate, ignorance, revenge and demands. The experience was liberating. Understanding open arms of non-Armenians greeted us upon arrival and welcomed us in peace and appreciation.

Despite the fact that non-Armenians outnumbered us 5 to 1, from then on and throughout the event, the evening brought us closer to each other via the tool called compassionate intelligence. We, the Armenians were the endangered species for them. They had worked so hard and slept so little to let one more Armenian know that they understood our plight. They knew. There were tears, hugs and laughter, smiles of understanding and discoveries, language and name comparisons, geographical locations of ancestors were noted. At one point I had to come to terms with the sense that the grandparents of the people I was talking to might have been the neighbors of my grandparents.

At times we forgot why we were there only to later realize that it is Hrant Dink who brought us together. His vision was being realized as we were honoring and remembering him. He was among us and we were all him.

 In Beirut, where I was born, the Kurds used to live in huts behind a whole circle of buildings in our neighborhood. They always wore their traditional costumes and before television they were our only source of entertainment and education in matters ethnic. The husbands sold vegetables on carriages in the mornings and were oh so kind to all the Armenian housewives who kept bartering for pennies. 

But I had never met a "Turk."

And here we were: "Turks", "Kurds" and "Armenians," in the moment, looking alike, crying alike and smiling alike.

There were over a hundred people seated in the little auditorium of the Canadian Library and Archives. There were two large screens with Hrant's picture on both. Underneath the picture, the year of his birth but no year of death. Instead, three dots symbolizing his place in the hearts of his friends.

After the welcoming remarks we were treated to the sounds of the Duduk; a recitation in Armenian of Shiraz' *Dantegan* (Dantean); an article written by Hrant Dink was read in English; and the keynote address was given by Phil Jenkins, Chair of Writers-In-Prison Committee, PEN-Canada. At one point, he juxtaposed Hrant's life with that of the great Chilean activist Victor Jara who had inspired a song that Mr. Jenkins sang a cappella inviting the audience to join in "...his hands were gentle, his hands were strong..."



We also watched three video clips of Hrant which I had never seen. In one of them, during his acceptance speech for the Henri Nannen Award, Hrant asks the German politicians seated in the audience and other European governments in general to take responsibility for what happened to the Armenians in 1915 and help us overcome the great divide. In another clip, Hrant expresses his wish that the people of Turkey be educated about what happened to the Armenians before we can establish dialogue with them.

I will paraphrase a line from Obama's inauguration address: "Unclench your fist and we will talk". Surely, that goes both ways.

The impeccable event organized by *Friends of Hrant: Voices in Dialogue* gave me the opportunity to unclench my fist.

Hrant Dink, "his hands were gentle, his hands were strong..."

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The guest speaker Phil Jenkins drew parallels between Hrant Dink and Victor Jara. The lyrics of "Victor Jara of Chile" are by Adrian Mitchell, music by Arlo Guthrie. [Brian Hibbard](#), the Welsh actor and singer performs the song in this YouTube capture.

## VICTOR JARA

Lyrics by Adrian Mitchell, music by Arlo Guthrie



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|--|--|
| Victor Jara of Chile                         | When the generals seized Chile               |
| Lived like a shooting star                   | They arrested Victor then                    |
| He fought for the people of Chile            | They caged him in a stadium                  |
| With his songs and his guitar                | With five-thousand frightened men            |
| His hands were gentle, his hands were strong | His hands were gentle, his hands were strong |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Victor Jara was a peasant                    | Victor stood in the stadium                  |
| He worked from a few years old               | His voice was brave and strong               |
| He sat upon his father's plow                | And he sang for his fellow prisoners         |
| And watched the earth unfold                 | Till the guards cut short his song           |
| His hands were gentle, his hands were strong | His hands were gentle, his hands were strong |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| When the neighbors had a wedding             | They broke the bones in both his hands       |
| Or one of their children died                | They beat him on the head                    |
| His mother sang all night for them           | They tore him with electric shocks           |
| With Victor at her side                      | And then they shot him dead                  |
| His hands were gentle, his hands were strong | His hands were gentle, his hands were strong |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| He sang about the copper miners              | Now the Generals they rule Chile             |
| And those who worked the land                | And the British have their thanks            |
| He sang about the factory workers            | For they rule with Hawker Hunters            |
| And they knew he was their man               | And they rule with Chieftain tanks           |
| His hands were gentle, his hands were strong | His hands were gentle, his hands were strong |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| He campaigned for Allende                    | Victor Jara of Chile                         |
| Working night and day                        | Lived like a shooting star                   |
| He sang "Take hold of your brothers hand     | He fought for the people of Chile            |
| You know the future begins today"            | With his songs and his guitar                |
| His hands were gentle, his hands were strong | His hands were gentle, his hands were strong |

