"UNCLENCH YOUR FIST AND WE WILL TALK"

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Category: Opinions

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 cappela 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…"

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

Victor Jara of Chile
Lived like a shooting star
He fought for the people of Chile
With his songs and his guitar
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

Victor Jara was a peasant
He worked from a few years old
He sat upon his father's plow
And watched the earth unfold
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

When the neighbors had a wedding
Or one of their children died
His mother sang all night for them
With Victor at her side
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

He sang about the copper miners
And those who worked the land
He sang about the factory workers
And they knew he was their man
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

He campaigned for Allende
Working night and day
He sang "Take hold of your brothers hand
You know the future begins today"
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

When the generals seized Chile
They arrested Victor then
They caged him in a stadium
With five-thousand frightened men
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

Victor stood in the stadium
His voice was brave and strong
And he sang for his fellow prisoners
Till the guards cut short his song
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

They broke the bones in both his hands
They beat him on the head
They tore him with electric shocks
And then they shot him dead
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

Now the Generals they rule Chile
And the British have their thanks
For they rule with Hawker Hunters
And they rule with Chieftain tanks
His hands were gentle, his hands were strong

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