

Impunity perpetrates injustice

This text is the summary of the message of His Holiness Aram I given to the International Conference on “Genocide, Impunity and Justice”, organized by the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 22-23 April, in Antelias, Lebanon.

This Conference on "Genocide, Impunity and Justice" organized by the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, will undoubtedly bring a particular contribution to the Armenian Church's engagement in the promotion of justice, peace and human rights.

The 20th century was an age of genocides. With the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the ratification of the Genocide convention in the same year, and with the establishment of the International Criminal Court in the Hague in 1998, the last few decades of the 20th century were marked by the growing commitment of the international community to the prevention of genocides. This was a significant and encouraging development, indeed, at the end of the most violent century of the human history.

As the United Nations, international organizations, states and NGO's are increasingly expressing their concern for the prevention of genocides, I believe that the preventive, punitive and retributive approaches must be taken seriously and always in their inter-connectedness. Let me explain it briefly:

- 1) In its attempt to prevent genocides, the international community must go beyond juridical commitments and processes. It must create early warning systems, build public awareness, and promote education and dialogue; whenever applicable, it should impose economic sanctions and in extreme situations engage in humanitarian intervention. These are the most efficient ways of preventing genocide. In Rwanda the international community failed to respond immediately and the repercussion of this delay were disastrous. While in Kosovo thousands of human beings were saved because of preventive action.
- 2) Punitive approach is an other efficient measure to prevent genocide; it is also an essential factor for the restoration of justice. In fact, real justice happens when the rights of the victim are fully recognized and addressed. Impunity perpetuates injustice, which, in turn, generates revenge and violence. Offenders must be held accountable to humanity. If the existing justice systems can bring single criminals to justice, why cannot the International Criminal Court will not be able to bring governments or nations to justice? This is a crucial question that must be wrestled with in the context of international law and existing juridical systems.
- 3) And finally, the punitive approach must be followed by retributive justice. In fact, the retributive justice is a victim-centered approach. It aims at recognition of truth, acceptance of responsibility as well as reparation, restitution and compensation for the victims. Retributive justice promotes dialogue by bringing together the offender and the victim.

Tonight and tomorrow the issues that I just referred to will be treated in different perspectives with particular references to the question of impunity which is the focus of this Conference.

Concern for human rights, justice, peace and dialogue has been a permanent trend in the life and mission of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia. This concern has been articulated in different ways and forms. As one of the concrete manifestations of this concern and engagement we have decided to establish in this Catholicosate an “International Center for Dialogue, Peace and Human Rights”. Indeed, at this crucial juncture of the history of humanity promoting dialogue, working for peace, and advocating human rights are great challenges. Through the reflection and action initiated through this Center, we will give a renewed impetus and vision to our engagement in the procession of dialogue, peace, justice and human rights.