

Recognition and Compensation The Way to Reconciliation

This is the summary of the message that His Holiness Catholicos Aram I delivered on Sunday, 24th April, 2005 in Deir Zor (Syria) on the occasion of the 90th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Once again, I have come as a pilgrim to Deir Zor, to this sacred place imbued with the blood and faith of the Armenian martyrs. For the Armenian people Deir Zor is not merely geographical place or just a reminder of a tragedy pertaining to history. Deir Zor has become synonymous to the martyrdom of the Armenian people, and a living testimony to their firm faith and to the strong determination which enabled them to conquer death by life.

With its strong message, Deir Zor must continue to occupy a unique place in the life, thought and work of all Armenians throughout the world. This church, which was built at the heart of the desert and which contains the relics of our martyrs, must be regarded by all Armenians as a place of pilgrimage, where Armenians from all corners of the earth should pay visit to renew and strengthen their lives with the spirit, faith and hope of the martyrs.

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With this faith in heart and thought in mind, I have come here as the Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia. I have come to Deir Zor to be with our martyrs and listen to their message. Surrounded by the sons and grandsons of martyrs, I address my first greeting to one and a half million martyrs, to those who have fallen in this desert for the perpetuation of the values and ideals which constitute the basis of their Christian faith and the essential identity of their nation. It is a plain fact that the Armenian Genocide, the first genocide of the 20th century was carefully planned and systematically executed by Ottoman Turkey. The relics that are displayed in this church and in the chapel not far away from this place, as well as hundreds thousands of relics that were found in the sands of this desert are indeed eloquent and tangible evidence of the massacres that were committed in this very place by the Ottoman army under the pretext of exodus and deportation.

Dear martyrs, you fell in this desert but you did not remain here. We took you with us and you remained with us wherever we went; your faith, your hope and your vision sustained our life. We always remembered you: we remembered you in our churches, in our schools, in our personal and community life. We remained faithful to your cause, becoming the ardent defender of your just rights.

As a pilgrim, in the name of our people, I renew my oath to remain faithful to our faith that you have defended with your blood, to our national heritage that you have preserved by your struggle and to your vision that you have shaped and conveyed to the generations to come. We will undergird our life with the strength of your faith and hope and will continue the struggle for the promotion of those values and aspirations which gave meaning and purpose to your life: freedom, justice and dignity.

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I address my second greeting to the Armenian people, who have survived the massacres and, in a Diaspora situation, undergone a process of spiritual renewal and national renaissance.

In fact, for 90 years, through prayer and requiem services, you have remembered the martyrs. For 90 years, through education and nation-building, you have remained faithful to the heritage of the martyrs. For 90 years you have knocked at the doors of nations and demanded justice.

Nations cannot forget their martyrs; and they cannot give up their human rights. Indeed, all attempts aimed at the denial of the Armenian Genocide have failed because of your tenacity and faithfulness. Listen carefully to what your martyrs say to you: one can not hide the truth; one cannot ignore the collective memory of a people; one cannot deny justice. Re-affirm your commitment to continue, with renewed impetus, the struggle for truth and dignity.

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I address my third greeting from this sacred place to the international community. While the Armenian Genocide was taking place, the world remained silent; only a few states and diplomats registered their eyewitness accounts and sorrow in diplomatic annals. In the last few decades, however, due to significant changes in international relations, many nations have formally recognized the Armenian Genocide. I am sure that this process will continue with growing dynamism.

Any attempt to exterminate a nation is a genocide; and genocide is a crime against humanity. Hence, the international community and particularly the United Nations must not remain silent about this crime. We must not forget that Hitler, encouraged by the silence of the world, planned and executed the Holocaust, stating that “after all today who remembers the Armenian Genocide”. We must not forget that the Armenian Genocide was followed by other genocides, in Africa, in Asia, in Europe, and in the Middle East with different names, forms and scope. We must not forget the genocide in Rwanda ten years ago and the genocide in Darfur (Sudan) a few months ago. Such crimes against humanity may continue if the international community fails to act immediately and call to accountability and justice the perpetrators of all genocides.

As the son of a people who went through the terrible experience of genocide, and as the spiritual leader engaged in the service of a people who survived a major genocide, I would like to express my great appreciation and warm thanks to the people of Syria and Lebanon and to the whole Arab world, for sharing their bread with the survivors of the Genocide, becoming an exemplar of love and solidarity. My deep appreciation and special thanks are also due to all nations, churches, religions and international organizations who, as a concrete manifestation of their commitment to justice and human rights have, recognized the Armenian Genocide. It is the firm expectation of the Armenian people that the whole world will soon express its strong solidarity with the Armenian by addressing seriously this unpunished Genocide and by doing justice to the martyrs and the survivors.

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And, finally, how can I greet Turkey which continues, through political and diplomatic means and by using all of its information power to deny the Genocide which was planned and perpetrated against the Armenian people by the Ottoman-Turkish government. In fact, it is not possible to falsify the history. Even if people try to interpret historical events in different ways, by different criteria and logic, it is not possible to deny the truth and obscure the realities. The existing eyewitness accounts, the well substantiated historical proof, the concrete evidence provided by diplomatic documents and hundred of thousands of serious studies clearly testify that the Armenian Genocide is a historical fact and not a fiction.

We don't consider Turkey as an enemy; nations must coexist on the basis of mutual respect and trust. But, how is it possible to achieve such a coexistence when justice is still denied for the Armenians, and their fundamental human rights are still violated. Do we not have the right and the obligation, as the sons of a people who were subjected to a genocide, to demand justice for our martyrs? Do we not have the right to constantly remind Turkey, its people, its government and particularly its youth that a genocide was perpetrated by their forefathers against our forefathers and that day, therefore, they have the obligation to duly recognize it? Justice has been done in the case of all genocides that have followed the Armenian Genocide. In order for Turkey, as a member of the United Nations and as an applicant for membership in the European Union, to demonstrate that it is fully committed to human rights and the values and principles upheld by the international community, it must formally recognize the Armenian Genocide and compensate the Armenian people. This is the way to justice and reconciliation.

Aram I
Catholicos of Cilicia

24th April, 2005
Deir Zor