

NEWS BULLETIN

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DEPUTY ARMENIAN PATRIARCH IN TURKEY REACTS AGAINST PARLIAMENTS

Head Bishop Aram Ateshian, The Deputy Armenian Patriarch in Turkey, complained that it was high time to stop using the Armenian Question as a trump card in international political card games.

The symposium titled “ Turkish-Armenian Relations in 19th and 20th Centuries ” which has been jointly organized by the Istanbul Municipality Department of Social and Cultural Affairs, Istanbul University Faculty of Literature, Istanbul Branch of Turkish Nationalists Society and the Istanbul University, Institute of the History of Atatürk Reforms and Principles, opened its doors at the Cemil Bilsel Conference Hall of the University of Istanbul. It is took on Jan. 5-7th, 2015.



The full text of Head Bishop Aram Ateshian is below:

Dear Participants and Guests,

I would like to thank the Dean's Office of the Istanbul University, Faculty of Literature and Letters, for their kind invitation to this international symposium titled “Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 19th - 20th Century, with the theme and emphasis on social melting and mixing, resentment, disappointments and search for new ways to reconcile.

Dear Guests; I believe that it should not go unnoticed that there are definite and clear differences of judicial understanding among the Turkish - Armenian Group in Turkey who are bound together with their citizenship of Republic of Turkey, the Armenian Diaspora and the Armenian Republic, whenever the Turkish - Armenian Relations are concerned. TurkishArmenian Patriarchy, as part of their daily routine, is the religious and spiritual center of the Turkish - Armenian Citizens in Turkey who are in daily contact and dialogue with the Turks. The Armenian Patriarchy assumes it its obligation and responsibility to approach the subject with goodwill and offers constructive criticism whenever the Turkish-Armenian Relations are concerned while not violating its fundamental responsibility of remaining outside the local and international politics and not acting contrary to its basic function which is religious and spiritual service.

The Turkish - Armenian Citizens in Turkey have three sacred values that are always upheld with the highest esteem; their national identity - being part and parcel of the Armenian Nation, believing in Christian religion and its spiritual values and their citizenship identity - as a citizen of Republic of Turkey. It is also well known fact that, everyone, particularly, the Armenian Patriarch Mesrop II feels highly strongly about this issue. I, now, would like to share with you my personal sentiments and thoughts within the confines of the above mentioned constraints.

The Land of Anatolia is the cradle of the Turkish Armenian Relations which have existed for centuries. The history of the these relations is the life story of two children who were born, grown up and lived together in this cradle and put their names and signatures on plenty of joint successful developments. Regrettably, several negative developments that took place during the first half of the 20th Century and as the First World War went on, have become the breaking

point in the lives of these two children, as testified by the history. But, those in Republic of Armenia and Armenian Diaspora who think that all the Turks are vicious and all the Armenians are victims and similarly those in Turkey who think all the Armenians are vicious and all the Turks are victims tend to ignore, or mildly put, forget one fact that is never spoken about. Neither the Armenians nor the Turks have started the First World War. Just like in the Ottoman Empire, Armenians were not responsible for its periods where its territorial expansion was stopped, regression had started and final collapse had taken place. But, there is one thing for sure; the Armenian Citizens of the Empire has suffered terribly due to weakening or even loss of Ottoman governmental authority. The failure to recognize the effects of foreign powers' non constructive and intentionally damaging efforts in the roots of the events that had taken place would not only result in difficulties in analyzing these events but would also make them impossible to solve.

It is important to realize and submit correctly the outside intervention of the foreign powers which resulted in the internal fighting among the various minority national groups of the Empire in order to correctly identify, analyze and conclude today the Armenian Relations with the Empire. It is obvious that talking today about only the negative aspects of the Turkish Armenian Relations during the Ottoman Empire would not be useful or beneficial for anyone. It is also quite clear that constructive efforts would result in constructive results while non-constructive efforts would result in more damaging results. Therefore, I believe and trust that superficial and futile arguments and discussions which do not benefit anyone must not be allowed to continue forever.

In this subject, the official statement made on April 24th 2014 by the then Prime Minister (now the President) Recep Tayyip Erdogan had become the statement which was really 'a reference point 'and an expression of respect shown to the memories of the Muslim and Non-Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire who experienced the pain of war in the middle of the Anatolia.

As stated in his message, living through and experiencing events that would result in such inhumane decisions like forced deportations should not prevent or stop now the creation of friendly ties and display of respective humane behavior between the Turks and the Armenians. This approach should not be underestimated or minimized and just the opposite, both sides should make positive strides to create proper background for better understanding and eventual peace.

We know that the current Patriarch Mesrob II had proposed and offered at different platforms in the world an erection of a joint memorial monument at the common border between Turkey and Armenia as a respect and in memory of those who lost their lives and display mutual feelings for those who have experienced grave pain and suffering. We also know that our late Patriarch Shnup had offered prayers for humanity not to experience such calamities in the future and memorized gracefully those who had fallen in wars.

We must remember that the sorrows and bitter memories experienced may not be easily forgotten but it is obvious that using those memories as a tool in taking revenge would not be useful and beneficial for no one. Even more importantly, it should never be forgotten that the lost lives would never come back. The two children of the cradle called Anatolia have been hurt today. It is necessary for those hurt children to receive treatment for their wounds and not only walk ahead hand in hand but actually run ahead together towards more healthy future. The doctors who would treat these wounds are those doctors who are sensitive, upholding their conscience and respectful to the basic human rights of the Turkish and Armenian peoples, having left behind their prejudices. It is actually quite open that those foreign doctors who claim to be ready to treat these wounds would in fact cause further pain.

Furthermore, it is impossible to understand those parliaments whose actual responsibility is to legislate for their own country, making promises to render decisions on the history which does not fall into their expertise and specialty, for events taken place in lands far from their own. Those parliaments would claim to be able to do the right thing, but, one should ask these parliaments; if you could do the right thing, why have you done nothing for the last hundred years, if you can not do the right thing, why do you attempt to do the wrong thing again ? It is high time to stop using the Armenian Question as a trump card in international political card games.

Keeping responsible and accusing only the other side for what had happened would result in no tangible benefits in the relations between two nations. It is obvious that singling out only one side as guilty party would not be any different from playing a soccer game in half the field with a single goal. Quality and judicious studies made by the academicians would have helped, at least partially, to remove the obstacles and difficulties in the relationship. It is a scientific fact that without knowing Armenian language to be able to read and comprehend what is printed today in that language on the

subject, favorably or unfavorably, would make the mutual understanding and advancing together towards peace almost impossible. The same reality is also true for those who do not understand Turkish and Ottoman languages. I happen to think and favor the translation of historical books and printing of these studies in both languages. I hope that printing of such works would enlighten the uninformed people and lifting the darkness from their minds would remove the fear and suspicion in understanding each other.

It is necessary in our age today for people with differing opinions on any subject to discuss an issue without hurting each others' feelings. Admittedly, today in Turkey such books and magazines about the Turkish - Armenian issues are freely printed and easily available for purchase. More importantly, books with differing conclusions on the same subject are also available in the same bookstore. It is our hope to find such freedom of speech and printing everywhere in the world. Let's not forget; "the informed person is not the same as the uninformed".

It is important for those researchers, who are in a position to study the history of the other side, to refrain from belittling the other side for superficial reasons and sentiments and think thoroughly before accusing the other side without foundation and reality. It should not be forgotten that both nations, at differing periods of the history, have made important strides in civilization and created works of fine arts in architecture, literature and music. Referring these works justly and proudly would cause the other side defeat its negative feelings at least, if not totally lose them. Meeting and visiting each other by the NGO's (Non - Governmental Organizations), press and business and fine arts representatives would at least result in getting to know the other side. Such introductions and meetings may cause to lose the prejudgments against each other and that may result in mutually enjoyable business transactions and cooperation in the future.

Some circles may consider and conceive all these only as dreams. Despite that, it should not be forgotten that the number of people who would in fact turn these dreams into realities are not to be underestimated. I would like to share with you the statements of a senior bishop of the Armenian Church as far as dialog is concerned. St. Nerses, as he is called Surp Nerses Sunorhali in the history of our Church, who was born in the cradle called Anatolia, in the City of Rummale, had in the early centuries, offered the Byzantine Empire to create "Common and Joint Church" together. St. Nerses who is also the head of the World Armenian Catholicos, is still holding light for our problems and issues today. According to him, both sides in negotiations should behave modestly, unlike a victorious commander going to war. Differences may not be overcome by force. Using a force to straighten out a curved tree branch may cause that branch to break, he once said. Looking at each other with belittling behavior due to difference in opinions is futile and harmful. Seeds not reflecting the truth may cause permanent separation. Both sides have equal influence and authority in their relationship with each other.

We hope that these words of wisdom which have reached us from 800 years back would find interested ears to hear. It would be a source of pride and hope for the people of this neighborhood if the Republics of Turkey and Armenia maintain constructive, positive and respectful relationship with each other and prepare to live side by side in peace.

I strongly believe that the pain suffered by both peoples will subside, wounds be treated and sealed one day and I personally would greet and welcome that day with respect. In order to attain this result, statements, thoughts and declarations promoting revenge, hate and enmity must be refrained, stopped and refused by those honest people with a strong determination and will power. Because, one's blood cannot be washed away by the blood of others! We will be celebrating the Christmas after tonight. We will pray for the peace on Earth but particularly in our own neighborhood. May God help those who are on the road to help bring peace, happiness and brotherhood in this process? Hoping that this symposium would be the first effective step towards peace, I greet all the attendees and participating speakers with respect. Thank you.

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