

FIDH Mission In Turkey - Summary Report «Turkey Must End The Impunity Of Political Violence»

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) undertook a mission in Istanbul, Turkey, from February 9 to 11, 2008, on the occasion of the third hearing of the Hrant Dink murder trial, the founder and editor-in-chief of the Turkish-Armenian weekly Agos newspaper, who was shot dead in front of his office on 19 January 2007. This mission was deployed in follow-up to FIDH's mobilisation alongside Hrant Dink's family and lawyers, and in support of their struggle for Justice.

Following the third hearing, FIDH welcomes the filming of the proceedings, as transparency is an essential element to guarantee the fairness of the procedure. Nevertheless, FIDH Secretary General Florence Bellivier calls the Turkish authorities « to ensure full access to the documents related to the case to the lawyers of Dink's family, in particular the results of the investigation into the behaviour of State security agents».

In parallel to this case, FIDH wishes to express its satisfaction following the arrest, on January 22nd, and the opening of a judicial investigation against a group of ultra-nationalist individuals who would belong to the illegal paramilitary group Ergenekon. Among them is Mr. Veli Küçük, a retired general of the Turkish army.

Without prejudice to the results of the investigation, FIDH welcomes the opening of proceedings against individuals whose names have appeared repeatedly in a number of cases of political violence, notably the murder of Hrant Dink, the massacre of a Christian pastor and two of his practitioners in Malatya on April 18th 2007, and the killing of a Catholic Priest on February 4th 2006 in Trabzon. « FIDH hopes that these investigations will enable the determination of higher levels of responsibility in the instigation of these crimes, and break the cycle of political violence » said Secretary General Florence Bellivier.

Beyond the trial, the mission was an opportunity to discuss several of the main human rights violations that Turkey is facing today. In this respect, FIDH wishes to highlight the following: The Kurdish Question.

FIDH and its member organisation the Human Rights Association (Insan Haklari Dernegi, IHD) express their deep preoccupation at the continuous human rights violations in the South-Eastern provinces. The organisations are particularly preoccupied by the bombing of civilian areas, in violation of fundamental prin-

ciples of international human rights and humanitarian law. The organisations repeat their call to the authorities for a political and pacific settlement of the Kurdish Question, and urge the government to open talks with Kurdish organisations and civil society in this respect.

Freedom of opinion and expression

FIDH repeats its call for the abolition of Article 301 of the Penal Code. Freedom of expression should not be criminalised and Turkey should conform with the recommendations addressed by all UN special rapporteurs and treaty bodies in this respect. Newspapers such as Free-Agenda (Özgür Gündem), documenting the situation of Kurdish or other minorities as well as the consequences of the conflict in the South East, should be able to publish their stories.

Situation of human rights defenders

FIDH is worried about the continuous harassment of human rights defenders, intellectuals and journalists who promote human rights. As documented by the Observatory for the protection of Human Rights defenders (FIDH-OMCT), Mr. Ethem Açikalin, the Chair of IHD's section in Adana, as well as the former chair and an Administrator of the Ankara section remain under arbitrary detention. FIDH calls for their immediate release. FIDH further remains preoccupied at the judicial harassment against the Vice-President of the IHD, Ms Reyhan Yalçindag, the pending court case to close down the Mersin section of IHD (in South Turkey, as well as with the prosecution of members of the National Commission on Human rights, professors Mr. Ibrahim Kaboglu and Mr. Baskin Oran, for having published a report on Minorities in Turkey. FIDH calls for the suspension of all charges in these trials.

Counter-terrorism and human Rights, use of torture

FIDH is finally worried about information reported by its member organisation the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, on the broad and vague definition of the acts defined under the Anti-terror Act, in violation of the principle of legality of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The organisations further deplore the continuous use of torture in impunity or the light sentences resulting from the few condemnations. They call upon the Turkish authorities to comply with the recommendations of the UN Independent Expert on counter-terrorism and human rights, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Florence Avakian Discusses Armenian Genocide On Al Jazeera Television

By Harry Koundakjian

UNITED NATIONS, NY - Florence Avakian, an accredited United Nations journalist, and free lance writer based in New York, recently was interviewed on Al Jazeera television which has a worldwide audience of over 70 million. The interview which took place at United Nations headquarters in New York, focused on the Armenian Genocide, and its prospects for recognition by the United States Congress.

She emphasized that the issue was one of moral and human rights, and should not be compromised because of political expediency. This first genocide of the 20th century was a catalyst in persuading Rafael Lemkin to call the mass slaughter of a people a "genocide", she said.

Ms. Avakian pointed out that early United States administrations had recognized the magnitude of the Armenian tragedy perpetrated by Ottoman Turkey, and that The New York Times during that period, had run front page articles about the horrific events. This accentuated the plight of the refugees, and resulted in American efforts to help the survivors. Even Hitler, she reiterated, had chillingly stated, "Who remembers the extermination of the Armenians", before he started his own plan.

When asked about Turkey's intention to close the American base in Turkey, as well as other such threats, she said the issue must not be one of "callous political expediency". As an influential world power, the United States should stand up as a beacon of justice. Even today, the world is seeing genocides and ethnic cleansing continue, with virtually no action taken to prevent them, a precursor to future genocides, she noted.

With huge military and industrial corporations joining the well-financed Turkish lobby and the Bush administration to stop the Genocide bill, several members of Congress caved in, causing the bill to be tabled indefinitely, she pointed out.

While a freshman student at Hunter College High School in New York, Ms. Avakian had represented her school on the NBC television



Journalist Florence Avakian

series "The New York Times Youth Forum" on the topic of genocide. At that time, she was privileged to meet Rafael Lemkin who was the moderator of the program.

Florence Avakian received a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Political Science on a Falk Fellowship at Michigan State University. She was also awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Fellowship in Journalism to Cornell University, and an English Union Speaking Fellowship to Oxford University in England.

At the United Nations, she has interviewed several world leaders including India's Indira Gandhi, Georgia's President Edward Schevardnadze, Turkey's President Bulent Ecevit, and Cypriot Presidents Archbishop Makarios, Glafkos Clerides, and Spyros Kyprianou, among others. She is a regular member of the United Nations Correspondents Association (UNCA).

In the last several years, Ms. Avakian has had her Op Ed articles on the Armenian Genocide and Armenian issues published in The New York Times, Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor, San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Examiner, Baltimore Sun, and the Hearst Feature Service Ms. Avakian is a frequent contributor to The Armenian Reporter, and to Ararat Magazine. She is also the news reporter in English every week on the Armenian Radio Hour of New Jersey.

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1060 N. ALLEN AVE. PASADENA
ՀԵՌԱԶԱՅՆԵԼ (626) 797-7680**

 **Merrill Lynch**
INVESTMENT BANKING
JACK KALANJIAN
Professional Financial Advisor
Corporate Center Pasadena
225 So. Lake Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101
(626) 396-2825 Direct
(626) 376-4665 Fax
jack_kalanjian@ml.com
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