



## HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION, ISTANBUL BRANCH PRESS RELEASE

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### **RESPECT SHOULD BE SHOWN TO THE GRIEF OF THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE**



Today is 24th of April. 90 years ago today, the ruling Union and Progress Committee of the Ottoman empire started widespread arrests in Istanbul. In the web sites of many government agencies ranging from the General Staff to various ministries it is said that those who were arrested were the members of the armed Armenian revolutionary committees, which is not true. Most of them were distinguished Armenian intellectuals: members of parliament, writers, poets, artists, musicians, physicians, lawyers. With the exception of few none of them returned alive from where they were taken. The arrests, followed by mass deportations, became the symbol of the ethnical cleansing that took place in 1915 and 16. At the beginning of the 20. century non-Moslems in the Asia Minor accounted for the 20% of

the total population whereas today they are only 0.2%.

After 90 years the frantic distortion campaign against the calls for the recognition of genocide cannot cover the naked truth, i.e. the fact that Armenians, once a cornerstone of the Asia Minor civilisation, has become a community of 30,000 mainly living in Istanbul within a population of 70 million and that even the traces of its rich history are wiped off the country.

After 90 years Turkey still refuses to face its history. Let alone facing its history, various forms of saying “they deserved it” or “under the same circumstances we wouldn’t hesitate to do the same thing” are being voiced. The aggressive campaign for promoting official theses provokes feelings of hostility and hatred towards Armenians, thus violating their personal rights and dignity and denies them the right to feel safe in their homeland.

This is evidenced by the fact that the Armenian Patriarchate felt the necessity to apply to the Governor of Istanbul for additional security measures today to protect their premises, i.e. the Patriarchate building, schools, churches and cemeteries against possible acts of violence.

The policy of banning any questioning of Turkey’s history is also a violation of the fundamental rights of everybody in this country. It is the denial of the right to gain access to information, to learn the history, free discussion and express one’s thoughts. The voluntary advocates of the official ideology and crowds they can easily mobilise put the state policies into action in the streets, the bloody examples of which have been experienced many times in the history of the Turkish Republic, and can launch lynch campaigns against anybody expressing undesired views about what happened 90 years ago. In the absence of freedom of access to information the state propaganda feels free to present what is untrue as the truth.

For example state propaganda always argues that the law on deportation was intended for the Armenian population living in the region along the Russian border on grounds of the Armenian collaboration with the enemy. The truth which they know very well is that, the deportation orders covered the entire Asia Minor with the exception of Istanbul and Izmir. Çorlu, İzmit, Bandırma, Adapazarı, Eskişehir, Bilecik, Bursa, Kütahya, Afyon, Konya, Ankara, Kastamonu, Çorum, Çankırı, Amasya, Kırşehir, Kayseri were among the cities where hundreds and thousands of people were forced to leave for their death. This and many more facts are being distorted without any feeling of embarrassment.

Distortion of the historical facts has recently been placed in a legal framework. In the Statement of Reasons for Article 305 of the new Turkish Penal Code passed by the AKP government, expressing any view in support of the allegations of Armenian genocide is cited as an example of actions against “the fundamental national interests” of Turkey.

In the meantime Turkey sends messages to the outside world, calling for the establishment of joint committees, free discussion and making researches in the state archives as if it is not the same Turkey where expressing independent thoughts is banned and widespread pressure is applied to silence all objections

On the other hand columnists convey the messages that the only option left to scientists and historians is to side with the official theses, by threatening them if they don’t actively support the official arguments and condemning even those who remain silent, let alone voice an objection.

We, the human rights defenders, demand that the ban on the word “genocide” by means of anti-democratic laws and through threats and intimidation should be lifted, and that the passage about the Armenian genocide which is an obstacle to any confrontation with the history should be removed from the Statement of Reasons for Article 305 of the Turkish

Penal Code.

Regardless of whether or not it technically fits into the definition of Genocide in the international law and regardless of how many people fell victim to massacres, as far as conscience is concerned, the experience the Armenian people went through in 1915 is a genocide in the eyes of humanity.

In the 90 anniversary of the 24th April 1915 we, as the human rights defenders in Turkey, deeply share the grief of both the Armenian citizens of Turkey and the children and grandchildren of those Armenians who were driven from their homeland and who witnessed the murder of their beloved ones. We say to them “your grief is ours. We too will not forget what has happened in order not to let it happen again”.

We denounce the aggressive campaign being carried out and call the media supporting the official thesis, the opinion makers and everybody to respect the grief of the Armenian people.