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THE HISTORICAL MESSAGE OF BERZAN BOTI

A small but expressive ceremony was held in Parliament of Sweden, in Stockholm, on May 13, 2009. After the official procedures in 8th notary, in Mersin, on October 6, 2008, opposing Kurdish intellectual, Berzan Boti, who has articles issued on an internet site called Nasname (Identity), assigned the house and the land in Çimencik, the village of Eruh county in Siirt, he had inherited from his family, to Sabri Atman on behalf of "Seyfo Center" whose main bureau is in Holland and has been working on the recognition of Assyrian-Syrian genocide. He knew that this house and land were seized from Syrian neighbours during the 1915 genocide. This modest ceremony in Parliament of Sweden witnessed not only a delivery operation but also a honorable standing against genocide denial.

What Boti has done, is a unique attempt as a reaction to those genocide crimes until now. Although people are denying the genocide and are very timid even while apologizing, Boti did not only apologize but also assigned willingly his properties which he knew they had been seized. Boti chose his name "Berzan Boti" as a reaction to Turkish identity registration and wanted to declare his identity like most Kurdish intellectuals. He mentioned about the reasons of his attitude in his official statement, in which he used his registered name, "Behzat Bilek". He stated the followings:

"World War I is a well known event by the international public. This event took place in the late Ottoman Empire in 1915; genocide was carried against all Christian minorities living there. My village Cimencik, of Eruh district, was another place where these unfortunate events occurred. I have personally researched this event from many different aspects. Today in Turkey this subject is still, not only denied and distorted for over 93 years, but to speak about it or mention it is considered taboo. I did not just rely on what historians wrote or documented; I have also witnessed the confessions of the live witnesses who not only witnessed this tragic genocide, but who took part in the killing role in these mass massacres; where these individuals can be described as the 'guilty party'. I have met these people face to face and listened to them just before their deaths. During the genocide years, the murdered Assyrians in my village had their lands confiscated and the little number of them who survived was Islamized. The grand children of those who were Islamized are still living in our village.

I found out that the land which was inherited by me and my brothers and sisters from my father actually was the land of the people (Assyrians) who were massacred in 1915. It does not belong to us. I now cannot find the right words that describe the shame, guilt, qualm and the pangs of conscience state I live in. Before taking my decision of transfer, for many years I have thought about it and have placed myself in the shoes of those people who became victims of the genocide. Despite me personally apologising to many Assyrian and Armenian individuals that I came across with and said 'sorry' to, I could not leave the moral pressure of conscience I inherited behind. Even though today I do not have a direct connection with the then genocide; I came to the conclusion that I have to do something beyond apology. That is why the estate I have inherited

from my forefathers, I am returning it to its actual owners, the Assyrians, to one of their organizations, the Seyfo Center which sacrifices altruism in recognition of the genocide.

This deed of mine is actioned into reality with my own free will and feelings. It has not been influenced upon me by any group or organization, nor is there any financial gain, family and personal intent or reason which lies behind it.

The 1915 genocide was directed towards non-Muslims living in the former Ottoman Empire territories during World War I. It is denied firmly in an insensitive manner by the Turkish Republic State for over 85 years. The victims of this genocide the Armenians, Assyrians and other Christian minorities are forced to live in anguish for many years to come. The lands they lived on for many millennia as well as their living and non-living possessions were confiscated. Many of them were forced into exile. All of their estates were seized; houses and churches were occupied and many of them were forcibly Islamized (against their own will). The shivering/horrifying sides of the genocide are detailed in many books and documented in historic documents. As a Kurdish person, I do not wish to enter the discussion of the genocide as someone has to make a decision to form one's judgement. Purely the responsibility for the genocide, due to its nature, being an organized political activity, undoubtedly lies upon the Ottoman state, being the then most authoritative political organization at the time. However, having said that primary responsibility lies upon the authoritative state, this does not leave out those who carried it out as irresponsible nor removes their guilt. Just like some Kurdish tribes who acted with the state in carrying it out won't remove their guilt and responsibility in the action. In this genocide the ones who carried it out are guilty of their actions as much as those who took the decision to implement it. Even though many decades have passed since, to remain silent about this genocide consciously, I feel as guilty as if I were openly denying it.

Against this historical guilt, as a human being or in the humanitarian sense I could not let the feelings of shame continue. I came to the conclusion that it is our conscience duty to not be delayed in apologising to the victims of the genocide and to return anything we have confiscated from them. Because, to live with historical guilt, even though you have no direct connection with it, while not taking a stand and remaining silent about it is like to continue in identifying with that guilt. The Turkish Republic State keeps denying the 1915 Genocide and states that: "we have no pebble to give in nor we owe any apology". However I, not only am apologizing for them, I'm returning to the Assyrians the estates that were confiscated from them.

With this deed of mine, I wanted to place a stop to a historical guilt that occurred many years ago and was kept denied. On behalf of my grandfathers, I apologize and ask forgiveness! My decision to apologise is to make a real peace with the people that were victims of the genocide. I am a human being! I do not want to loose my humanitarian values!"

This historical message of Berzan Boti is still a great value for its historical and especially, philosophic point of view although it has had no mediatic popularity. His pure humanistic, open-hearted, sincere attitude is a great proof that this big

taboo can be abolished, in spite of all the nightmares created by Turkish official ideology and history and also, in spite of this timid, catastrophic and coward mood of us. He did not let the ideologic prejudice, political affairs, ordinary worries to control our humanistic feelings and may be, he has taken the risk of being stoned like a devil, has broken that thick surface around our conscience and said: "Look, it does not hurt!" What Berzan Boti succeeded personally can be succeeded by our society too. Furthermore, it is a "must" to do this in order to construct a new future based on equality, respect and love, with the people and the society we live together.