



October 8, 2009

MESSAGE TO ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, SUPPORTERS, ACTIVISTS AND FRIENDS

President Serzh Sargsyan Discusses Importance of the Armenian Turkish Protocols at New York City Meeting with Representatives of the Armenian Diaspora

President Serzh Sargsyan clearly articulated that the Protocols initialed on August 31 by Armenia and Turkey include no preconditions and that they make no mention of the Nagorno Karabakh issue or the Armenian Genocide. While President Serzh Sargsyan acknowledged that there are risks and potential problems ahead in negotiations with Turkey, he indicated that the challenge and historic opportunity to establish diplomatic relations and open borders with Turkey must be realized.

Sargsyan addressed about 40 representatives of major Armenian organizations from the Eastern United States and Canada on Saturday, October 3, at the Palace Hotel in New York City. The meeting was the second stop of President Sargsyan's tour of the Armenian Diaspora.

Representatives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), and its affiliated groups were the only opponents of the protocols and objected to several of its provisions. These objections were led by Kenneth Hachikian, Chairman of the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), whose remarks were inappropriate and insulting to the President of Armenia. Hachikian called the president's action "naïve", "reckless" and "simply irresponsible." He also inferentially attacked the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) reciting past actions that he inappropriately characterized as consistently supporting the U.S. State Department. Furthermore, he accused President Sargsyan of acceding to Turkish blackmail and characterized those supporting the Armenian Government's efforts to establish relations with Turkey as a minority, "no longer having political relevance in our community." Other speakers representing groups affiliated with the ARF objected to the protocols as well, but without the rancor or being disrespectful to Armenia's president.

In their turn, representatives of the Assembly, Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Diocese of the Armenian Church, Knights of Vartan, Ramgavar Party, Tekeyan Cultural Association, Congress of Canadian Armenians, and Primate of the Armenian Church of Canada, presented comprehensive statements of support for the pending Armenia-Turkey negotiations. Each explained the necessity to proceed with the negotiating process.

Assembly Chairman Hirair Hovnanian challenged ANCA's assertion that the ARF represented the majority views of the Armenian Diaspora, adding that he protested the crude tone and discourtesy of Hachikian's remarks toward President Sargsyan and his hostile attack on the Assembly, AGBU, Eastern and Western Dioceses of the Armenian Church, and the Knights of Vartan, whose joint statement welcoming the Armenian President's initiative seems to have provoked Hachikian's extreme and angry assertions.

Assembly members Anthony Barsamian, Bryan Ardouny, Noubar Afeyan and Jirair Haratunian also addressed the meeting.

Barsamian challenged as false the assertion made that any one person or organization has the right to speak for victims of the Genocide. Barsamian also stated that we collectively share the responsibility for ensuring affirmation of the Armenian Genocide.

Bryan Ardouny spoke to the political dynamics in Washington to the Armenia-Turkish initiative and its effects on the Armenian Genocide resolution currently pending in the U.S. Congress and actively promoted by the Assembly.

Noubar Afeyan addressed the necessity of economic progress in Armenia and the prospects ahead with the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations with Turkey. Afeyan stated that many of the arguments presented against the protocols remind us of the cold war between the Diaspora and Armenia that existed for the previous 70 years. He encouraged those present to "not work against Armenia." Afeyan also urged the group to "trust but verify" in Armenia's dealing with Turkey and called on the Diaspora to help build a bright future for Armenia.

Jirair Haratunian congratulated the President on the success of his "football diplomacy," which brought Turkish President Abdullah Gul to Armenia. He reiterated that this move radically changed the political landscape in the South Caucasus, for the better, and made the current diplomatic initiative possible. Finally, Haratunian urged the process to proceed and if it fails it should not be because of any lack of effort by Armenia.