

TURKEY REFORMS FALL SHORT ON DINK ANNIVERSARY

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The political assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink last January stunned the world. A year later it is clear that it was not just the bullet that killed Hrant Dink or the seventeen year-old that pulled the trigger. There were also other forces at work. A fierce defender of the freedom of the press and an outspoken advocate for democratic reform and human rights in Turkey, Dink's murder outside his office in broad daylight exposed the depths of ultra-nationalist sentiment and the consequences of a decades-long campaign of denial. While some may argue that it is ultra-nationalism to blame, it was Hrant's commitment to build bridges and engage in dialogue that they saw as their worst fear. Indeed, while the international community roundly condemned this heinous crime, some hailed the killer as a hero.

While inexcusable, it is perhaps predictable that Turkey has yet to adopt standards and practices that would improve conditions for its ethnic and religious minorities. Having invested millions of dollars and countless resources to erase history, we could expect that Turkey's warped education system would fail to teach the facts of the Armenian Genocide and that its leaders would continue to repress and punish discussion of this "taboo" subject. Instead of coming to terms with its genocidal legacy, Turkey continues its pattern of obfuscation and obstruction – denial and distortion of the facts and calling for yet another commission to determine what the world already knows to be a genocide.

It is clear that Armenians and other minorities in Turkey are still at risk. Over the last year, Ankara has done precious little to overturn the climate of intolerance, prejudice and repression, which led to this unspeakable crime. Instead, Dink's son, Arat Dink, was recently convicted under Article 301 for allegedly "insulting Turkishness" by characterizing the killings of Armenians as genocide.

Rather than confront its past, Turkey employed its cadre of high-priced lobbyists and genocide deniers to thwart progress – through intimidation tactics and threats of retaliation – on a congressional resolution (H.Res. 106), which affirms the Armenian Genocide. The exportation of Article 301 of Turkey's penal code, which penalizes discussion of the Armenian Genocide, into the U.S. political system should be summarily rejected – period. For those who have capitulated to Turkish demands and oppose H.Res. 106, what message does it send about America's commitment to human rights and our cherished values and fundamental freedoms?

We should embrace these ideals, not stray from them. During the Armenian Assembly's 35th Anniversary Gala last year, Assembly President Carolyn Mugar presented Rakel Dink with its Distinguished Humanitarian Award. Upon accepting the honor on behalf of her late husband, Rakel stated: "We, as the new branches of the trees that were cut in 1915, have grown throughout the years with deep pain. However, with every pain we suffer, we try to reach the ultimate level of our humanity. With the support of Jesus Christ, we sail towards the future without forgetting our past, without letting it overshadow our future, while being more conscious and proud."

As Congress reconvenes this month, it too has the opportunity to sail into the future while remembering the past – by not only passing H.Res. 106 – but by also adopting S.Res. 65 and H.Res. 102, introduced by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joe Biden (D-DE) and Chief Deputy Whip, Representative Joe Crowley (D-NY) respectively. Both resolutions condemn Hrant Dink's murder, honor his legacy and call upon Turkey to repeal Article 301. By adopting these resolutions, Congress will pay lasting tribute to Hrant Dink's legacy of tolerance as well as squarely confronting the dangers and consequences of denial by unequivocally affirming the historical truth of the Armenian Genocide.