



Armenian National Committee of America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

September 4, 2008

Dear Representative:

In light of the announcement this week by Turkish President Abdullah Gul that he will accept Armenian President Serj Sarkisyan's invitation to watch the September 6th Armenia-Turkey World Cup qualifying match in Yerevan, we wanted to share with you the Armenian American community's perspective on this new and potentially significant development, and to reaffirm our community's fundamental commitment to universal recognition and a just resolution of the Armenian Genocide.

We are, as you can imagine, watching this matter with vigilance, mindful of the risks that Armenia is taking for peace, hopeful that Yerevan's diplomatic initiative will bear fruit, yet cautious regarding the realistic prospects for progress given Ankara's longstanding and deeply troubling track record of antagonism toward Armenia.

As you know, since Armenia's independence in 1991, successive Armenian governments and the worldwide Armenian Diaspora have - despite the unresolved legacy of the Armenian Genocide and Ankara's ongoing and deeply painful denial of this crime - consistently sought sincere and sustainable progress toward improved Armenia-Turkey relations. President Sarkisyan's invitation represents only the most recent such outreach on Armenia's part, although by no means the only one. Both of his predecessors visited Turkey in their official capacities as president, although, sadly, neither of their visits resulted in any moderation of Turkey's policies toward Armenia.

Armenia's invitation represents a pro-active gesture by Armenia - a small country populated in large part by the descendents of Armenian Genocide survivors - to reach out to a large and heavily armed neighbor that, as heir to the Ottoman Empire, denies this horrific crime, blockades Armenia, and pursues a broad array of anti-Armenian policies - both at home and abroad. President Gul has accepted the Armenian President's invitation even as his government has made it clear that they do not plan any changes in these policies, which, it is worthwhile noting, include:

* Turkey's continued denial of the Armenian Genocide, continued threats against other nations that consider recognizing this crime against humanity, and continued allocations of tens of millions of dollars annually for lobbyists, academic mercenaries, and outright fabricators to attempt to rewrite this profoundly important chapter in world history.

* Turkey's continued efforts to silence any recognition of the Armenian Genocide within its own borders through Article 301 and other provisions of its criminal code (e.g. Nobel Prize-winner Orhan Pamuk), continued intimidation and unofficial acts of violence (e.g. Hrant Dink), and the perpetuation of a deeply flawed educational system that indoctrinates successive new generations of Turkish students to believe that the Armenian Genocide is a lie and that all Armenians are inherently enemies of Turkey.

* Turkey's continued attempts to economically weaken and isolate Armenia through its illegal 14-year blockade; its attempts to exclude Armenia from regional and international initiatives that provide economic benefit to the Southern Caucasus; its continued attacks on Armenia within the United Nations, the OSCE, and other international venues; and, its ongoing military, economic, and political support for Azerbaijan over the Nagorno Karabagh conflict.

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* Turkey's continued mistreatment of its remaining Armenian population as second-class citizens, continued enforcement of unfair and burdensome restrictions on the Armenian Church, and the continuation of policies intended to drive out the remaining Christian minorities within its borders.

We are, given this record and Turkey's past efforts to manipulate public opinion, profoundly concerned that President Gul's visit will be used by Ankara to advance its short-term "public relations" interest in creating the image of movement, at the expense of the broader and far more meaningful interest of the United States and the international community in actual progress toward a durable improvement in Armenia-Turkey ties. For this initiative to succeed, Turkey's leaders need to view this as a true opportunity for enduring peace, not simply as a photo opportunity to help alleviate the growing international pressure it is under to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Recognizing that this visit cannot, by itself, substitute for real progress in improved Armenia-Turkey relations, we do, however, remain hopeful that Armenia's pro-active diplomacy, if matched with real movement by Turkey, can serve as a first, cautious step toward a true reconciliation based on truth and justice. At the same time, we remain deeply concerned that if, as may very well be the case, Turkey treats this visit as a superficial undertaking - yet still garners undeserved credit internationally for an essentially empty gesture - we may in fact witness a tragic setback to the worthwhile cause of a real and enduring peace between Armenia and Turkey.

In this spirit, we respectfully ask that you look beyond Ankara's rhetoric concerning this visit, and focus instead on the substance of the Turkish government's real-world policies toward Armenia. The best - and most immediate - test of President Gul's sincerity will be his willingness to walk the mile from Armenia's national soccer stadium to the "Dzidzernagapert" Armenian Genocide Memorial, a tradition long honored by foreign dignitaries visiting Yerevan. In the days and weeks following his departure, we urge you to track Turkey's movement toward:

* Lifting domestic restrictions on the study, discussion, and recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and abandoning opposition to international recognition and commemoration of this crime against humanity - including by the White House and the U.S. Congress.

* Lifting its blockade of Armenia, allowing free Armenian access to its traditional transportation routes, ending its opposition to the incorporation of Armenia in regional and international initiatives impacting the Southern Caucasus, and removing restrictions on Armenian stewardship of cultural and religious heritage sites within Turkey.

* Publicly and in practice adopting a truly neutral position as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group charged with mediating a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict, ending military support for Azerbaijan's armed forces, and openly calling on all parties to reject any non-peaceful resolution to this conflict.

* Lifting all restrictions on the collective rights of the Armenian community in Turkey.

* Accepting Armenia's offer to negotiate the establishment of normal diplomatic relations without any preconditions, and agreeing to resolve all outstanding bilateral issues in a peaceful, non-violent manner.

Progress in each of these vitally important areas - not the level of skill of Turkey's public relations firms in spinning this visit - will represent the true benchmarks of progress toward improved Armenia-Turkey relations.

Thank you for your consideration of the points we have raised in this letter. We would, of course, welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this matter in greater detail.

Sincerely,



Kenneth V. Hachikian
Chairman

