



Guest Editorial

Turkey Inches Toward Genocide Recognition Abdulmesih BarAbraham

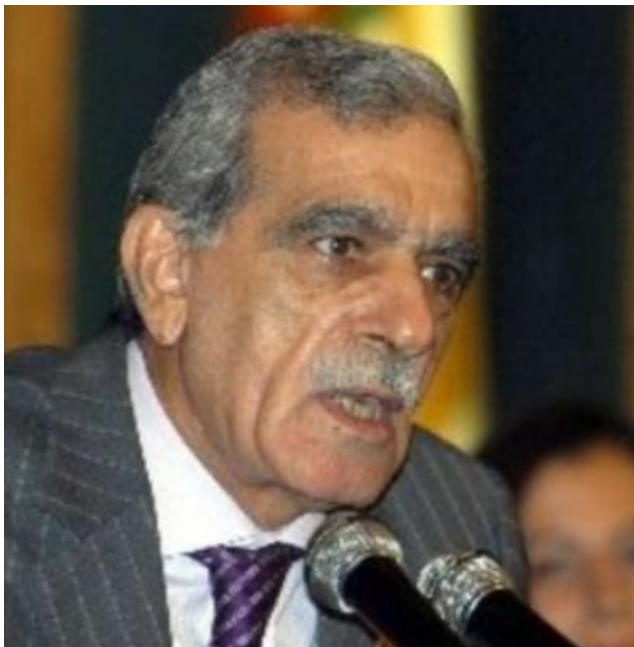
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Midyat, Turkey (AINA) --- The head of the pro-Kurdish DTP (Demokratik Toplum Partisi -- Democratic Society Party) in Turkey, Ahmet Türk, toured the south-east region early this week and visited the Assyrian Cultural Association in Midyat. He was accompanied by other DTP members of the Turkish parliament from Mardin, Diyarbakir and Sanliurfa, Emine Ayna, Aysel Tigluk, and Ibrahim Binici. At the Assyrian Club he met with the vice-chairman Yuhanna Aktas and other Assyrians.

According to various Turkish news sources (AINA [12-30-2008](#)), Türk apologized to the Assyrians in context of the events of 1915: "Sensing the pain of the events in our hearts, we feel that we need to apologize. In Turkey, apology is becoming quite a fashion recently. However, ours is something very different," he said.

Recently, a group of 200 Turkish intellectuals launched an Internet campaign to apologize for Ottoman war crimes committed at the hand of Turks against Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks during World War I (AINA [12-12-2008](#)). The language used does not refer to the term genocide, as favored by the victims, though it is certainly helping to erode the biggest taboo in Turkey, as the campaign initiator Baskin Oran puts it. The language speaks of "the great catastrophe" but Assyrians as victims -- 750,000 (75%) were killed in the genocide -- are not mentioned. Meanwhile at least 25,000 Turks have signed the petition, prompting calls of treason by Turkish nationalists and media. The Turkish Prime Minister Mr. Erdogan himself has called the petition a "mistake" (AINA [12-18-2008](#)).



Ahmet Türk

Mr. Türk continued his statements at the Assyrian association in Midyat with the following remarks: "We are ready to apologize for wrong doing. This is not to reduce the importance of the events. The events should be not brought up to the agenda by a simple apology. We are the people of this region and soil. Our struggle is aimed to allow people to live in brotherhood."

Closing his remarks, Mr. Türk said: "Without forgetting that Kurds have been abused in the past to act against others, it is important that we study the history and derive lessons. Probably we, as Kurds, have our stake in the killing of this (cultural) richness. Today, when we see Armenian and Assyrian brothers, and look at them, we feel shame."

Subsequently, the DTP delegation led by Türk visited the Assyrian monastery of St. Gabriel and met with Bishop Samuel Aktas. The monastery has recently came under attack by neighboring Kurdish village leaders, who are close to Erdogan's ruling party (AKP), aiming at grabbing monastery's land via fabricated lawsuits (AINA [12-24-2008](#)).

Clouded and Undifferentiated View

Mr. Türk's apology is definitely welcomed as a gesture of friendship by Assyrians. In fact, it is not the first time that a Kurdish leader has apologized for Kurdish crimes committed against Assyrians during World War I. Putting Mr. Türk's statement in context of the Apology Campaign of by Turkish intellectuals, it is a courageous step by a party leader of the Turkish parliament.

In his statements, Ahmet Türk does not use the term genocide, and, like many Kurdish nationalists, compares the "suffering" of the Kurds in Turkey to the suffering of the Armenians and Assyrians in the past and especially to that of World War I, saying, that "Kurds today live the same pain." This confirms still an undifferentiated historical view with regards to the great losses that Assyrians had during World War I; apparently his suggested studies of history and the lessons to be learned from that need to go further.

In an interview with BBC and CNN in November of 2008, Mr. Türk used the word genocide for what is happening to the Kurds in Turkey, later on emphasizing that he did not use the word to support any Armenian claims. Triggered by protests of [Collective VAN](#), a French-based Armenian initiative (Vigilance against the Holocaust Denial), a press controversy began in Turkey following the use of the term that is still taboo in Turkey.

According to Collective VAN, Ahmet Turk is best positioned to know what a genocide is, since he is the grand-son of one of the heads of

Hamidiye regiments (Hüseyin Kanco of Mardin), established by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II in 1894; they were responsible for perpetrating massacres against Armenians and Assyrians in the eastern provinces. These para-military regiments consisted of Kurdish chiefs who actively participated in the massacres against Christians in 1894/96 and again later in 1915 during the genocide unleashed by the Young Turkish government against the Christian population.

Despite being very well informed about the reality of the genocide, Collective VAN accuses Türk of manipulating the issue. In 2007 Ahmet Turk complained to Turkish television because DTP was not invited to the commemorations of Victory Day on 30/08/2007. He vehemently criticized the decision, stressing that the Turks had obtained the victory thanks to the Kurds -- because it is "understood that the Kurds had helped clean the Armenian people," according to Collective VAN -- and the Kurds were excluded from the festivities.

Abdulmesih BarAbraham was born in Midyat, Tur Abdin in the Turkish part of Mesopotamia and emigrated with his parents to Germany in the mid-1960s, wherehe completed his education and received his M.Sc. from the University of Erlangen/Nürnberg in the field of Computer Science. Early 1970s, he organized the first Assyrian conference in West Germany, which marked the beginning of organized public Assyrian activities in Europe. He has published numerous articles on Assyrian topics. He is currently President of the Trusty-Fund of the Yoken Bar Yoken Foundation.

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