100th Anniversary of 20 Armenian Martyrs Commemorated in Los Angeles
Congressman Schiff Awarded ACA’s “Stephan Sapah-Gulian Integrity Award”

More than 1400 attendees crowded the historic Alex Theater in Glendale California, on Sunday, June 14 to mark the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Nation’s 20 Hunchakian Martyrs. Mrs. Zovig Koroghlian, the evening’s Mistress of Ceremonies, presented a brief historical account of the 20 Martyrs, their dedication to democratic principles, and their understanding of the Young Turk policies and ideology that adopted a form of Turkish nationalism which was xenophobic and exclusionary in its thinking. These policies threatened to undo the tattered fabric of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, once again harming the Armenian populace. Mrs. Koroghlian stated “The Young Turks seized complete power in a coup d’etat in January 1913. On September 7th of that same year, the 7th General Convention of the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party adjourned with an aim to thwart this new dictatorship by any means necessary,

Over 160,000 March in Los Angeles to Commemorate Armenian Genocide Centennial

In an unprecedented show of support for the centennial commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, over 160 thousand community leaders, religious figures, elected officials and activists took to the streets of Little Armenia on April 24th to march for justice for the martyred souls who perished at the hands of the Ottoman government during World War I.

Thronged joined Friday’s six-mile walk from the Little Armenia neighborhood to the Turkish Consulate, carrying flags and signs voicing their common and persistent call for the Turkish government to recognize the deaths of more than 1.5 million Armenians as genocide. Many of the signs voiced forceful messages: “We Demand Justice” and “Turkey Must Pay.” The march is said to have been the largest in the history of protests in Los Angeles joined by politicians at the federal, state and local level.

The event began with an unveiling ceremony of the “Armenian Genocide Memorial Square” sign adorning the busy intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Western Avenue. The erection of the signs, spearheaded by Los Angeles City Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell with the participation of the Consul General of RA in Los Angeles Sergey Sargisov, drew thousands of onlookers while...
Federal, State and local political leaders hailed the sign as an important and significant step towards recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Councilmember O’Farrell stated that the marker will show that the city of Los Angeles recognizes the history of the Armenian Genocide, emphasizing the impact of the event on the Armenian community.

“One hundred years ago, the Ottoman Empire attempted to annihilate an entire race in the first genocide of the last century,” said Congressman Adam Schiff. “When it was over, 1.5 million Armenian men, women and children lay dead and many thousands of others barely survived. Despite a brutal campaign of massacres, forced death marches, lootings and rape, the Young Turks failed to destroy the Armenian people as evidenced by the vibrant diaspora and Armenian nation.”

Immediately following the unveiling ceremony was the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee’s March for Justice, which began with an invocation by H.E. Archbishop Hovnan Derderian of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, Moushegh Mardirossian of the Western Prelacy, H.E. Mgr. Michael Mouradian, Bishop of Armenian Catholics of North America, and Rev. Joe Matossian. The event featured speakers including LA Mayor Eric Garcetti, Consul General Sergey Sargisov, State Senator Kevin De Leon and Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell, whose Armenian language speech invigorated the audience made up of young and old Armenians and non-Armenians.

Elected officials at the Federal, State and local levels listened to the speeches as they gazed at the myriad of audience members holding signs in support of recognition, restitution and reparations for descendants and victims of the Armenian Genocide. Among those in attendance were Congressmembers Adam Schiff and Judy Chu, State Assembly members Mike Gatto, Scott Wilk, Mike Gipson and Adrin Nazarian, State Controller Betty Yee, LA County Mayor Michael Antonovich, LA County Assessor Jeffrey Prang, LA City Councilmembers Felipe Fuentes, Nury Martinez, Paul Koretz and Paul Krekorian, LA City Attorney Mike Feuer and many others.

The march proceeded towards the Turkish Consulate in Los Angeles where Los Angeles City Councilmember Krekorian addressed the 130 thousand strong and described the story of his grandmother and her brother, a professor in Turkey who was arrested, tortured, and killed by the Turkish government at the start of the Armenian Genocide. Krekorian condemned President Obama’s decision to once again refuse to utilize the word Genocide. “Presidents come and go,” he said. “Congressmen come and go. But the truth remains.”

Los Angeles City Councilmember Paul Koretz, addressed the crowd and expressed his heartfelt connection to the Armenian people’s struggle for justice for the genocide of their people. “As a Jew, I know of many loved ones who were lost to the Holocaust, which may have happened because the Armenian Genocide was ignored,” he said. Representative Adam Schiff, who earlier this week read out

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the names of one thousand Genocide victims on the House floor, called on Turkey to recognize the crimes of its predecessors and “help heal the wounds.” Rep. Schiff also condemned President Obama for his failure to recognize the Genocide. Schiff said: “To be honest, it would have been better if the President said nothing at all.”

Also speaking at the rally were co-chairs of the AGCC, AGBU chairwoman Talin Yacoubian and former chairman of the Armenian Bar Association Garo Ghazarian, who asked all representatives of the 19 organizations which comprise the AGCC to join them and renowned Armenian singer Harout Pamboukjian on stage as they sang Armenia’s national anthem.

Representatives of the following organizations and institutions serve on the Armenian Genocide Centennial Committee – Western USA: Armenia Fund – Western Region USA; Armenian Assembly of America; Armenian Bar Association; Armenian Catholic Church; Armenian Council of America; Armenian Cultural Foundation; Armenian Evangelical Union of North America; Armenian General Benevolent Union – Western District; Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region; Armenian Relief Society – Western USA; Armenian Rights Council; Armenian Youth Federation; Ignatius Foundation; Nor Or Charitable Foundation; Nor Serount Cultural Association; Organization of Istanbul Armenians; Unified Young Armenians; Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America; Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

GYO and ACA Host “1915” Screening

The Gaidz Youth Organization and the Armenian Council of America hosted a special screening of the new film “1915” at the Laemmle Playhouse Theater in Pasadena on Sunday April 19.

The film depicts the effects of genocide and denial on this generation in a new and thought provoking way.

“1915” is a psychological thriller film co-written and directed by Garin Hovannisian and Alec Mouhibian, and is produced by Hovannisian and Mouhibian with Terry Leonard, and stars Simon Abkarian, Angela Sarafyan, Samuel Page, and Nikolai Kinski. 1915 follows a mysterious theater director in present day Los Angeles as he tries to bring the ghosts of a forgotten genocide back to life.

Alec Mouhibian and actor Sam Page, were in attendance and discussed the film with the audience in a question and answer session after the movie. The audience enthusiastically listened to Mouhibian and Page as they discussed the thought process behind the film, the development and production challenges that they faced during the making of the film, and plans for the film to become available to a wider audience.

The audience also praised Mouhibian on the message of the film, which does not necessarily depict the Genocide as expected. Rather, it shows the dichotomy of personal tragedy and collective grief, and most importantly the difference between dismissing memories and closure.
As we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, we also remember the martyrdom of 20 Hunchakian intellectuals who were hanged on June 15, 1915 in the Sultan Bayazit square of Istanbul. Their sacrifice remains very much alive in the collective memory of the Armenian nation today.

Why have progressive Turks, Kurds, Armenians, and others in present day Turkey made it a point to honor these individuals? What is the reason that we are here commemorating the martyrdom of these individuals who were technically sentenced to death 3 weeks after that fateful night on April 24, 1915?

Because these individuals wanted an independent Armenia, yet chose practical, and peaceful steps of Constitutional rule of law, that the 1908 Ottoman revolution purported to bring about.

As was stated in the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party 1910 program, these individuals believed in and demanded that any governing body provide the following principles not just to the Armenian population, but to all its inhabitants:

- A general Assembly, having full powers, elected by direct and general popular suffrage.
- Provincial, and Communal autonomy.
- Equality of the law for all citizens, without distinction of nationality, religion or gender.
- Complete freedom of press, conscience, and assembly.
- The institution of Habeas Corpus as a safeguard of liberty.
- The separation of church and State.
- The establishment of a secular and mandatory system of public education.
- And the abolition of the existing unjust tax system.

As you can see these, and other progressive principles were not Armenian oriented. Rather they were for the safeguard of all democracy loving people. Yet, through the Coup of 1913, and the continued consolidation and centralization of power into the hands of the triumvirate of Enver, Talaat, and Jemal, who for all intents and purposes established a military junta in the Ottoman Empire, the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party foresaw the dangers inherent in the Young Turks fascistic ideology.

At their 7th General Convention, SDHP leadership stressed their concern of the Young Turk government’s blatant disregard of Armenian lives, implementing a policy based on forced assimilation and the utilization of pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic ideas to rile Turkish peasantry against other ethnicities and ideologies as it suited their purposes.

Thus the SDHP 7th General Convention adjourned with two main objectives:

- First - The party was to move from authorized to illicit activities, thus becoming once again a covert organization to safeguard its structure and objectives.
- Second – The Central Committee was authorized to organize and implement the elimination of the Young Turks leaders, specifically Talaat, the chief architect of what would be the Armenian Genocide.

Nonetheless, the SDHP Central Committee was determined to pursue the search for peaceful solutions, if and when possible, especially with the Turkish and Kurdish populace of the Ottoman Empire.

Unfortunately, these objectives were leaked to the Young Turks by an Armenian agent spying for the Turkish government. Hundreds of party members were arrested and tortured for many months. When the mock trial began, however, the number of those accused was 23 including 2 who were tried in absentia.

On the morning of June 15, 1915 before dusk, all twenty men were hanged in Sultan Bayazid Square; the central square of Constantinople. But yet again we ask, why does the tragic story of these 20 men remain very much alive in the collective memory of Armenians today?

Had these individuals not been arrested, had they been able to implement any portion of their plan, the outcomes of 1915 might have been very different. The destiny of the Twenty Martyrs was intertwined with the destiny of their nation. They knew what was coming and sounded the alarm but they were betrayed by a fellow Armenian. They believed that an independent Armenia will be born from the ashes. And history proved them right.

Over the past decades, the Twenty Martyrs have been a source of inspiration for thousands of Armenians and non-Armenians who believe in the welfare of all people. The Armenian Council of America is a prime example of that inspiration and champions the causes and concerns of the Armenian-American community within local, state, and federal governments. This past year, through ACA’s undertaking, the Armenian American community was able to gain a historic win with the recognition of Artsakh by the State of California.

Today the Armenian Republic is a living example of what the Twenty Martyrs and thousands of other Hunchakian intellectuals fought and died for. But the struggle must and will continue. ACA will strengthen its relationship with Turkish intellectuals who recognize the fact of the Armenian Genocide and desire peaceful coexistence, seeking to establish new areas of cooperation and chipping away at the Turkish government’s policy of denial. The struggle must go on, until the Turkish government joins those within Turkey, who have confronted their nation’s historical past, to look inward and recognize the terrible deeds of their predecessors.

Turkey must come to terms with its dark past, for the sake of its collective conscience in order to foster a better future - A future that these Twenty Martyrs wanted for both Armenia, and Turkey. Thus, that is why we commemorate the martyrdom of these twenty intellectuals!

And that is why we are here and why we continue their fight - the fight for justice!
100th Anniversary of 20 Armenian Martyrs Commemorated In Los Angeles

The Young Turk dictatorship, learned of this aim through the betrayal of a fellow Armenian. “Unfortunately, one may argue the betrayal did not only result in the arrest of hundreds of Hunchakian leaders and intellectuals and the execution of these twenty courageous men, but also facilitated the weakening of the leadership of the Armenians at the cusp of the Armenian Genocide.” continued Mrs. Koroghlian.

“Today, we commemorate the Martyrdom of these twenty brave souls. And As Matteos Paramaz Sarkissian, stated at the point of his hanging, “You are only able to kill the body, but never our ideology.” The survival of the Armenian people is living proof of his last words, we live by the principles which these individuals adhered to, and continue the struggle for democracy, equality and justice. This was evident on April 24, at the March for Justice where over 160 thousand made their voices heard. This was evident throughout the world where Armenians and non-Armenians continue the fight for justice. Lastly, this is evident in the establishment and survival of the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh.” concluded Mrs. Koroghlian.

Mr. Vahan Khodanian, delivered the Armenian Council of America’s message, paying homage to the 20 heroic Martyrs who fought for democracy, liberty and equality for all mankind. ACA Chairman Mr. Sevak Khatchadian, introduced the descendants of the 20 Martyrs, along with local elected officials who took part in the event. A short video montage of Rep. Adam Schiff (D- Burbank) reading the names of the Genocide victims on the House floor, including those of the 20 Armenian Martyrs was displayed. Immediately following the video, Mr. Khatchadian presented Congressman Schiff with the “Stephan Sapah-Gulian Integrity Award” for his continued leadership towards championing causes important to the Armenian American Community.

The following is the acceptance speech delivered by Congressman Adam Schiff for the “Stephan Sapah-Gulian Integrity Award” awarded for his continued leadership towards championing causes important to the Armenian American Community, at the 100th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Nation’s 20 Martyrs in Glendale California.

Thank you so much for this beautiful acknowledgement. I’m so fortunate to represent such a magnificent community and very proud to receive this honor tonight. The twenty Hunchak martyrs who died a century ago, we might think that little could they have realized the impact that they would have or that they would be remembered around the world a century later, but they understood the importance of what they were fighting for. They had the courage to take on a corrupt and murderous dictatorship and their idles would go on, and they did, helping to birth a great nation and a great political party. We remember them not only because of the seminal role they played in the founding of Armenia and the struggle for Artsakh, but because the values that they represented, the right to self determination, and sadly those ideals are still under assault in many parts of the world. Indeed one of the most tragic ironies of the present day, survivors and ancestors of the genocide still struggle for those very rights and their very survival in places like Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. The ideals they espoused a hundred years ago are equally contemporary today and of enormous significance. By remembering them, what they lived for and what they died for, we express the convictions that those ideals live on; they are worth fighting for, they are worth dying for. They are part and parcel of who we are as a people, part and parcel of who we are as human beings. We honor their memory and I am very proud to do so, and I am very greatful for your recognition. Thank you so much.
On the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a motion by Mayor Michael D. Antonovich and Supervisor Hilda L. Solis to send a letter, signed by all five supervisors, to President Obama requesting that he recognize the atrocities against the Armenian people in 1915 as a genocide and petition the Turkish government to come to terms with their predecessors recognize the 1915 Armenian genocide.

Moving to “honor the 1.5 million victims,” and proclaiming April 24 as the “Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923” Antonovich told his colleagues, “23 nations have officially recognized what Pope Francis has called ‘the first genocide of the 20th century. Yet, the President of the United States refuses to refer to the mass killings of Armenians as genocide. It is necessary, and indeed a duty to remember that this was genocide, it’s time that we also proclaim it a genocide.”

Supervisor Hilda Solis told her colleagues that “any assault on humanity is an assault on all of us.” The Board also approved a genocide memorial plaque to be placed in Grand Park where a month-long interactive public art display to commemorate the centennial of the Armenian Genocide through public art was unveiled on Saturday, April 25, 2015.

Conceived by artists Ara Oshagan, Levon Parian and architect Vahagn Thomasian, “iwitness” incorporates photography and architecture to educate and inform a new generation about the Genocide. The display consists of massive portraits of eyewitness survivors telling the story from the frontlines — people who were there — most of whom are Southern California residents who migrated here to reestablish their lives.

“This remarkable memorial honors the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide and tells the personal stories of survivors — first-hand eyewitnesses to one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century,” said LA County Mayor Antonovich. “In Los Angeles County, home to the largest population of Armenians in the nation, we must ensure that those who died are never forgotten by consistently remembering — and openly condemning — the atrocities committed against the Armenians. This plaque in Grand Park will serve as a reminder and a memorial for the 1.5 million Armenians who died, along with the survivors and their families.”
Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich commemorated the centennial of the Armenian Genocide by hosting a month-long interactive art installation at Los Angeles’ Grand Park. Titled “iWitness,” the installation consisted of an inter-connected network of towering asymmetrical photographic sculptures wrapped with massive portraits of eyewitness survivors of the Genocide. The sculptures have no right angles and their irregular angular shapes spoke to an unbalanced world, continually at risk of war, ethnic cleansing and genocide. They ranged in height from eight to fifteen feet.

Conceived and constructed by artists Ara Oshagan and Levon Parian and architect Vahagn Thoma-sian, iWitness was the first ever public art installation at Grand Park.

“This remarkable memorial honors the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide and tells the personal stories of survivors — first-hand eyewitnesses to one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century,” said Antonovich.

“iWitness is a temporary monument to the men and women who rebuilt their disrupted lives and communities in the aftermath of genocide,” said artist Ara Oshagan. “The proximity and clustering of the sculptures alludes to, and reflects, the new communities they created after being dispersed across the globe.”

The installation offered a continually shifting perspective during the day, as shadows cast by sunlight created a dynamic interplay between the asymmetrical lines, shapes and forms of the sculptures. At night, a different atmosphere and environment is created as each sculpture in the network is illuminated from the inside.

To educate and promote discourse, audiences at iWitness walked amid these larger-than-life sculptures to reflect on its message and the Turkish government’s continued denial of the Armenian Genocide.
Although the United States Presidential elections are 15 months away, the contest to win the respective political primaries for both the Democrat and Republican parties is well underway. The Armenian Council of America would like to take this opportunity to briefly examine the leading candidates towards issues important to the Armenian American community.

When Hillary Rodham Clinton was running for president in 2008, her views on the Armenian Genocide were clear. In fact, she issued a statement bragging that “alone among the presidential candidates, I have been a long-standing supporter of the Armenian Genocide Resolution…. I believe the horrible events perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire against Armenians constitute a clear case of genocide.” But, as Secretary of State, Clinton refrained from using the word Genocide. In July 2010, during an official five-day trip to Armenia, Secretary Clinton paid a visit to the Armenian Genocide memorial complex. For us Armenians, it was a symbolic moment.

Yet soon after the visit to the memorial, the U.S. Embassy in Armenia released a statement that called it “a private visit…as a sign of respect for the 1.5 million Armenians who lost their lives in 1915.” Not using the word Genocide and dubbing it a private visit, despite the fact that Clinton was in Armenia in her official role as Secretary of State, struck many Armenians then and now as ducking the issue, and only displaying interest in promoting the ill-advised and destined to fail Armenian-Turkish Protocols. In 2011, diplomatic cables disclosed by Wikileaks and investigated by ACA, point out, while having information on important documents related to the Armenian Genocide being destroyed in the Turkish archives, Clinton encouraged the Republics of Armenia and Turkey to engage in the Armenian-Turkish Protocols which included a provision “implementing a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim to restore historical confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations.” The State Department and Hillary Clinton were completely aware that Turkish archives containing important documents related to the Armenian Genocide had been purged by Turkish officials, yet they continued the façade that the Protocols as a right step towards bilateral relations. As the diplomatic cables show, rather than being an impartial and an honest broker and engage the government of Turkey in persuading them to stop denying the Armenian Genocide and to take responsible steps and acknowledge their historical past, Hillary Clinton, as Secretary of State, distorted the Armenian Genocide in favor of international, political and economic gain. Now, as the lead candidate for the Democratic Party nomination for U.S. President, Clinton would like Armenian Americans to believe she will be a President who has always stood by her convictions and will acknowledge the truth and use the word Genocide.

On the Republican side, surprisingly, Donald Trump has so far maintained his lead over the large field of Republican candidates for U.S. President. While there is not much to examine in terms of issues exclusively important for Armenian Americans, considering foreign policy, that in itself is alarming. The next president of the United States should at the very least have some familiarity with the complexity of the world’s history and politics. This is key for Armenian Americans who want to see, a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on people’s right of self-determination, a peaceful resolution to the Syrian conflict where their Armenian brethren are continuously being put in harm’s way, and a President who acknowledges the Armenian Genocide and is an impartial and an honest broker to foster harmony and good-will between Armenia and Turkey.

While a newcomer to politics, and lacking experience in foreign policy, Donald Trump has been a relatively good businessman. Examining the methods utilized in amassing his wealth, one comes to a startling observation. Mr. Trump has not shied away in partnering with questionable business partners in an oppressive regime, particularly, as media outlets have reported, partnering in the venture with Anar Mammadov, a 34-year-old billionaire playboy whose father serves as Azerbaijan’s transportation minister. Azerbaijan is considered one of the world’s most corrupt regimes and Mammadov’s wealth has resulted in part from his father’s political connections. While the Azeri Dictator Aliyev, continues to escalate his rhetoric and violence on the borders of Armenia/Artsakh and Azerbaijan, Mammadov has mounted a campaign to rehabilitate Azerbaijan’s kleptocratic image in the West by courting some of Washington’s most powerful politicians.

Trump does not own the future Trump International Hotel & Tower Baku, but rather, the building was constructed and is owned by a company controlled by Mammadov. Yet Trump has earned lucrative management fees for lending his name and expertise to the project. According to the recent financial disclosure, he is required to file in conjunction with his presidential bid, he received at least $2.5 million last year for his work on the Baku hotel, which will be operated as part of Trump’s chain of luxury hotels. More significantly for Armenians, Mother Jones reports that Mammadov “heads the Azerbaijan American Alliance, a group that at one point was registered with the US Department of Justice as a foreign lobbyist. Last year, the Alliance spent more than $2.8 million lobbying Congress and State Department to improve US-Azerbaijan relations.” An Alliance, according to OpenSecrets.org, which has spent $11.5 million in the last four years on lobbying US lawmakers and officials.

Thus, as contender for the President of the United States, Trump’s relationship and partnership with Mammadov is disturbing to what may come if he were to win. While these issues should not be the sole leading indicators of support or lack thereof towards these two presidential hopefuls by Armenian Americans, the Armenian Council of America believes that it is important to understand and recognize the past deeds of politicians who may otherwise attempt to distort their own record on issues important to Armenian Americans for their own benefit.