



ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICA

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ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICA STATEMENT REGARDING THE NOMINATION OF AMBASSADOR RICHARD HOAGLAND

It is vitally important that the United States send an ambassador to Armenia. The close bilateral relations of the two countries depend on the maintenance of contact and consultation at the highest diplomatic levels. Armenia and the United States share important security, economic, and political objectives in the region. These relations need to grow and improve. That cannot happen without the presence of an U.S. ambassador in Armenia. Democracy in Armenia is still a work in progress. With elections scheduled this year, the U.S. Ambassador can play an important role in strengthening Armenia's democratic process and ensuring free and fair elections.

While no U.S. Ambassador has affirmed the Armenian Genocide during Senate confirmation hearings, the Armenian-American community rightly expects that any U.S. ambassadorial nominee to Armenia, or anyone in the U.S. diplomatic service, properly understands and refers to the Armenian Genocide. The Armenian Assembly of America salutes former Ambassador John Evans for speaking the truth and for his efforts in working to strengthen Armenia's democratic institutions. The withdrawal by the American Foreign Service Association of the Christian A. Herter Award for "Constructive Dissent" with which it initially honored Ambassador Evans was a cowardly act that was not consistent with respect for human rights and good governance.

The proper recognition and international affirmation of the Armenian Genocide is a matter of high priority for the Armenian people worldwide. Senator Robert Menendez who strongly supports U.S. affirmation of the Armenian Genocide has sent a clear message to the Administration about his position. However, U.S.-Armenia relations do not hinge on this issue alone. The Armenian government has given its consent with respect to President Bush's choice of Richard Hoagland to serve as Ambassador to Armenia, and in a recent Wall Street Journal article, a senior Armenian government official indicated that Armenia should set aside the issue of recognition as a precondition in order to encourage an opening in diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey. The President of Armenia and its Foreign Minister have made the same point.

Unlike Turkey, Administration officials have made it clear that the United States does not deny the Armenian Genocide. The Armenian Assembly does not believe that Richard Hoagland is a genocide denier. However, it is also evident that the Bush Administration, while relying on the dictionary definition of the Armenian Genocide in its annual commemorative statements, remains unwilling to properly label the crimes as genocide.

Because of this fundamental policy disagreement with the Administration, the Armenian Assembly believes that forceful and consistent advocacy by the Armenian-American community toward shaping a U.S. policy that properly recognizes and characterizes the Armenian Genocide is the only right strategy in the long run. That is what the Assembly has been doing all along, and that is what the Assembly will continue doing when later this month the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues reintroduces legislation which calls upon the President to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide.

The Armenian Assembly understands that the Armenian-American community is not of one mind on this matter, but some of the opposition is based on inappropriate grounds. The Assembly believes that there should be an American ambassador in Yerevan, and there should be clear and positive U.S. affirmation of the Armenian Genocide. Until then ambassadors will articulate the policies of the President since they serve at his pleasure. The historical fact that it was genocide will remain; however, U.S. Foreign Service professionals bound to the policies of their government will only be able to express it as such once U.S. policy affirms this truth. The Armenian Assembly calls upon Congress and the President to stand up for the historical truth, as Ambassador Evans did, and boldly recognize the crimes committed in 1915 as genocide.

The Armenian Assembly of America is the largest Washington-based nationwide organization promoting public understanding and awareness of Armenian issues. It is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization.

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