

A Challenge to the Armenian Diaspora: Help Lead the Armenian Homeland in a New Direction

The time has arrived for organizations, communities, and individuals of the Armenian Diaspora to urgently act to address the troubling events unfolding in the Republic of Armenia in the wake of the February 2013 election.

Public criticism of the Armenian government is growing from all corners.

[Recent analysis](#) conducted by Policy Forum Armenia and other independent experts using official election data provides statistical evidence of massive election fraud and indicates that in several hundred polling stations not affected by falsifications the main opposition candidate was ahead of the incumbent.

The [interim report](#) issued by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on March 2, 2013 notes that its analysis of official results “raises concerns regarding the confidence over the integrity of the electoral process.”

Despite the current administration’s attempts to hide this pervasive election fraud, as observed by independent observers and the media alike, Diaspora communities are weighting in on the matter. In recent days, activists throughout the Diaspora are coming forward to show their support for free and fair elections in Armenia. Criticism has come from prominent Diasporans, grassroots members, and organizations united behind one principle: it is the people’s collective will—and not the self-interest of the authorities—which is paramount and needs to be secured.

We all are stakeholders in the future of Armenia.

Without justice and respect for the constitutional rights of people, what kind of a country will future generations inherit? Will the core values of decency, dignity, and honesty be allowed to take root in our homeland or just be deflected? Will corruption and cynicism at all levels continue to undermine Armenia’s economic and demographic viability? Aren’t we undermining our demands for justice for the Genocide that happened *nearly a century ago*, if we allow protesters on the streets of Yerevan to be shot and killed *today*? Denial of rights and liberties at any level originated in, and perpetuated by, any nation’s government requires civil response of intolerance.

Achieving free and fair elections is not an end in itself. Better elections will lead to better governance and stronger social cohesion. These in turn are the primary drivers of economic development and progress in developing countries.

What has “looking the other way” for two decades actually achieved?

We have one homeland to cherish and to serve, a homeland which emerged from a decades-long history of institutional resistance to the people’s freedoms of speech,

expression, and assembly. That history has been hard to shake in the first two decades of Armenia's independence, with a continuing tradition of judicial system depending on executive order and an economy monopolized by the very few, who covet their seats in parliament and the prosecutorial immunity that those seats provide. All of the good that the country has experienced with your generous help tilt ever-so-slightly against the Armenian government's poor governance and neglect of fundamental human rights.

The mass migration of population out of Armenia is a serious national security threat, commensurate with that posed by Armenia's foreign enemies, today and almost 100 years ago. Any administration whose policies—willingly or unwillingly—lead the country down the path to an Armenia without Armenians cannot be supported by the Diaspora.

It's not about taking sides. It's about making a stand for what's right.

There are many crisis points in the life of a nation. Here, in the 21st century, we have reached ours. Citizens of Armenia are organizing to challenge what has been widely perceived as flawed presidential election and to refute the illusory reports of the State regarding the results. They need all the help and solidarity they can get from us. Our assistance and solidarity do not come at a price for us since it is the Armenian citizenry, not us, who run the risk of reactionary repercussions for trying to express their inalienable right. We enjoy those rights without fear and consequence.

Some foreign governments were quick to congratulate the incumbent. We do not deny them the right to pursue their own interest in our region. We do not need to buy into them though. Interestingly, those interests have been linked with leaderships in Armenia that have denied their people the freedom to choose their own future.

This begs the question as to the role of Diaspora institutions in this quest for truth and justice. The Armenian Church has remained on the sidelines on issues that speak to the core Christian tenets. Speaking truth to power follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ himself. But today, our church leaders refuse to speak against the effort to deprive Armenian voters of the fundamental right to choose their own future. It should be incumbent on the Church to encourage people to be more confident, more courageous, and more conscious of their social responsibilities and rights.

As for Diaspora organizations involved in economic development in Armenia, it is in their best interests to operate in an environment free of corruption and shadow economics. Yet, they often looked the other way and have accepted top members of Armenia's corrupt regime as members of their governing bodies. Standing up for principles is not the same as being political.

Cultural and educational organizations also have a part to play. Instead, they have so far said little on behalf of truth and freedom. As put by Holocaust scholar Elie Wiesel, “Neutrality always helps the oppressor, never the oppressed.”

The lobbying groups, too, have been eerily silent when it comes to promoting the fundamental rights of Armenians in Armenia. While exercising the rights given to them by the constitutions of the countries in which they live and pursuing historical justice, they would be doing injustice were they not to hold the Armenian government to safeguarding the rights of our brothers and sisters in Armenia

Ironically, many of these same entities have been quite vocal in calling for the people to refrain from their struggle for true freedom and better governance. Siding with the regime publicly, sometimes even verging on demagoguery, and remaining silent when the people need backing is not the hallmark of a proud and prosperous Diaspora.

Patience is only a virtue when accompanied by thoughtful action.

We believe that no self-respecting Diaspora institution or community group, except those involved in health, medicine, and emergency humanitarian relief, can afford to sit on the sidelines or claim that making public statements about internal politics is “not within the scope of their mission” or “Armenia needs time to work things out” or blame outside forces for all the country’s ills.

As stakeholders in the homeland and as leaders in their respective communities, Diaspora organizations have a responsibility to help lead the way in bringing about meaningful and positive change.

Ultimately, however, it still comes down to the people there in Armenia. Here in the Diaspora, it is the responsibility of every Armenian to challenge his or her community leaders to do the right thing, at the right time, and for the right reasons.

The world has changed. The people can no longer be made to believe that black is white. Nor they can be forced to live that way. The youth is on the rise—the real hope of a small nation beset by massive emigration. The Citizens of Armenia have decided in large measure that they will no longer passively accept what the ruling regime imposes on them. They have shown that they will take individual responsibility for the destiny of the nation to ensure that sovereignty rests with the people.

The people of Armenia have been asking for our support for years. Our voices and open acknowledgement that things must change for the better can’t come fast enough. We, the Diasporans, have the responsibility before history and our own collective conscience.

To start, we, the undersigned, strongly encourage you to take the following actions:

- 1) If your organization's mission is to promote Armenia's development, issue a public announcement denouncing the unacceptable tactics of ballot stuffing, multiple voting, and vote count fraud used massively during the presidential elections to keep Serge Sargsyan in office.
- 2) Openly support a system-wide ballot recount or the annulment of the election outcome.
- 3) Spread the word in your social circles and online using information provided by independent media sources in Armenia. We can only provide a balance to misinformation from the official Armenian and international media sources if we become the carriers and couriers of truth.

The clock has stopped at now or never. Let the challenge begin.