

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Richard Hovannisian Lectures for International Institute for Genocide and  
Human Right Studies on Turkish and Armenian Rescuers during Holocaust  
Education Week**



Jodi Porepa of the  
UJA Federation

Toronto, Canada—“Education is the key to preventing the cycle of violence and hatred that marred the 20<sup>th</sup> century from repeating itself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” These words of Elie Wiesel explain the participation of the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies in the 28<sup>th</sup> annual Holocaust Education Week in Toronto, known as the world’s largest commemoration of the Shoah, with some 160 events and 30,000 participants. The events include exhibitions, films, musical performances, book readings, survivor testimonies, panel discussions and public lectures. This year the IIGHRS invited Richard Hovannisian, Professor of Armenian and Near Eastern History and Holder of the Armenian Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Armenian History at the University of California, Los Angeles to speak on “Righteous Turks and Armenian Righteous Among Nations: Rescuers in the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust.”

Prof. Hovannisian conducted a wide-ranging discussion of one of the most human and personal issues in genocide, that is, what motivates individuals to risk their lives and often those of their families to save others who have been targeted by the state for annihilation. There are cases of Armenians who saved Jews during WWII, both anecdotal and documented by Yad Vashem and entered in the official rolls of the



Righteous Among the Nations. Did the genocidal experience of the Armenian people during WWI make those individuals more sensitive to the plight of others?

A detailed presentation was made on the Turks and other Muslims who saved Armenians during the Genocide, as Prof. Hovannisian has done extensive research on this subject, based on the oral history testimonies of Armenian survivors. The motivations of these rescuers were varied and complex, ranging from financial gain, to free labor, to concubinage, to religious belief, to altruism. Even though the Armenian survivors have a hatred against the Turkish state for what it had done to them, still on a personal level, they had affection for the Turkish families that took them in and took care of them. “We are just beginning to try to understand all of this. What I find is that the denial of the Armenian Genocide has prevented it,” Prof. Hovannisian remarked. Unlike the Jews, who have the solace of knowing who their rescuers were, the Armenians, generally, have been deprived from knowing who the Turks, Kurds and other Muslims were who helped save them.

Prof. Hovannisian quoted the famous statesman, Edmund Burke: “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” As genocide shows no signs of abating, this leads one to ask, “What would I do in such a situation?” Thus, this subject is not only of great interest historically and politically, but also has deep meaning spiritually.

He also quoted the Czech writer, Milan Kundera, who said, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” Prof. Hovannisian concluded by saying, “Your presence here today tells us that we are here to remember and to recommit, and so long as you remember, the struggle continues, and all is not lost, but there is hope to be gained.”

Professor Hovannisian has authored, edited or contributed to 24 volumes on Armenian history, the Armenian Genocide, as well as other subjects. He has received many honors for his scholarship, civic activities, and advancement of academic studies. A Guggenheim Fellow, he is the first recipient of the “iWitness Award,” conferred by Jewish World Watch in 2007 for his contribution to genocide studies.

The lecture, held at the Sephardic Kehila Centre one evening and the Armenian Community Centre a second evening, was organized by the IIGHRS, with the participation of the Armenian Community Centre the Armenian General Benevolent Union of Toronto, and the Canadian Jewish Congress-Ontario Region.

The International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (A Division of the Zoryan Institute) is dedicated to the study and dissemination of knowledge regarding the phenomenon of genocide in all of its aspects. This is achieved through the annual Genocide and Human Rights University Program, public lectures, seminars and publication of *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* in partnership with the International Association of Genocide Scholars and the University of Toronto Press.