

Kate Nahapetian  
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Community Impact Statement  
Sentencing Hearing  
United States v. Sinan Narin  
United States v. Eyup Yildirim  
Superior Court of the District of Columbia  
April 5, 2018

The case against Sinan Narin and Eyup Yildirim is not just about a violent assault, which on its own should merit severe punishment, but it is a case closely associated with a coordinated assault by foreign government security forces on the bodies of our citizens and on our foundational principles of free assembly and speech. Narin and Yildirim are on camera in broad daylight joining the security force assault, crossing a busy DC road to reach their victims, who are in prone positions on the ground, and then brutally kicking them in the most vulnerable part of their body. The Turkish government has treated them as heroes with the Foreign Minister even visiting them in jail in September and proudly tweeting photos of the visit while extending “our nation’s love and greetings.”

Upon their release, the Turkish government could reward them for the attack, so the sentencing today may be the last chance to see any semblance of justice done. In addition, the U.S. Attorney has dropped charges against almost all the Turkish government security guards implicated in the attack, dropping seven of them a day before former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and four of them on the eve of Turkey’s Prime Minister Binali Yildirim’s visit to DC last November.

We know what happens to people who dare to fight for minority rights or criticize President Erdogan in Turkey. They get beaten, arrested, prosecuted and even killed like Hrant Dink, a celebrated editor of one of the last Armenian language newspapers in Turkey who was assassinated in 2007. In the case of Dink, the police even posed for pictures with the assassin after he was caught on video shooting Dink in broad daylight.

The answer before the court today, is what happens to American citizens who exercise their sacred First Amendment rights in our nation's capital and are then brutally assaulted in broad daylight and on video footage that is broadcast around the world? The answer must be they are protected, and their attackers will be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

The world is watching. But more importantly, the people of America are watching, the police who had to risk their lives protecting women and children from Narin and Yildirim and unhinged armed foreign security personnel are watching, the protesters who were severely bloodied, beaten and suffered lasting physical injuries and emotional trauma are watching, and Armenian Americans who will be protesting Turkey's state-sponsored denial of the Armenian Genocide in just a few weeks on April 24, are watching to see, if they will be safe in DC. April 24 is the anniversary of the state sponsored mass murder of over 1,500,000 Armenian women, children and men committed by the Ottoman Turkish government. A government, which Erdogan glorifies today despite its commission of a genocide that would later inspire Hitler.

Armenian Americans are especially concerned since they have been fighting against Turkey's "double killing" of them. Their family members were murdered or enslaved in the genocide and today they fight against the cover up and denial of this crime, what Elie Wiesel has called a "double killing." The denial makes future violence and genocide more likely, which is why it is imperative to confront and speak against it. If Turkey's dictator and his supporters get light sentences after kicking the heads in of anyone who dares to speak against them, however, people will not feel safe to challenge Turkey's human rights abuses.

When Armenian Americans have been at such protests in the past, they have faced physical assault and fear this brazen assault will encourage more violence, especially since Turkish government officials including the President and Foreign Minister have vocally defended and justified the assault and used their power to prevent any accountability for the attack.

The Turkish government routinely threatens America with retaliation if Congressmembers speak on the Armenian Genocide by passing a resolution to commemorate it.

We are now fearful that they will use thugs in the United States to silence people with new methods as we saw on Sheridan Circle. In the past, anti-Armenian protesters have coordinated closely with the Turkish Embassy. New reports just this month have emerged from one of Germany's most influential magazines Der Spiegel revealing wiretaps of Erdogan himself coordinating anti-Armenian protests in Berlin.

The threat is real and a light sentence today will make future violence against peaceful protesters in DC more likely.

The assault was not only on the bodies of peaceful protesters, but also on our country's most sacred right to free speech.

We hold this right so sacred that we tell Holocaust survivors that they must endure neo-Nazis, who track them down and organize a march through their neighborhoods.

We hold this right so sacred that we tell Armenian Americans, African Americans, Latinos, LGBT citizens and any minority that they must endure marches by groups, which justify violence against them and teach that they are subhuman.

We hold this right so sacred that we tell Gold Star Families that they must endure protesters celebrating the death of their sons and daughters, who come to taunt them at their funerals.

So, when a foreign tin pot dictator and his supporters face condemnation for Turkey's violent policies that kill and suppress minorities, Erdogan, his goons and supporters must respect this sacred right that makes our country exceptional. They cannot kick people's heads in and when they do, they must face severe punishment, so that we're safe and our fundamental constitutional rights are protected.