



Groupe parlementaire Suisse-Arménie  
Parlamentarische Gruppe Schweiz-Armenien  
Gruppo parlamentare Svizzera-Armenia

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## Genocide: an Armenian, Swiss or Universal issue?

**The film “Screamers” directed by Carla Garapedian was the issue of an extraordinary screening for Swiss parliamentarians held in Bern this week.**

The Switzerland-Armenia Parliamentary Group organized on Wednesday September 19, 2007 an extraordinary screening of the feature documentary, “Screamers”, the story of prominent heavy-metal rock group, System of a Down, as they strive to gain recognition of the Armenian genocide, putting the crime in a universal context of a violation of human rights.

The screening, at the Kino im Kunstmuseum of Bern, was held one month before Switzerland's federal elections to elect a new Parliament, where Switzerland's current anti-racist law, which makes Genocide denial illegal, is being attacked by the SVP (Swiss People's Party). The screening was attended by prominent representatives from the Swiss Parliament, representing the entire spectrum of Swiss politics, including Chiara Simoneschi-Cortesi, deputy speaker of the National Council, Andrea Hämmerle, Vice President of the Socialist Party along with both co-chair of the Switzerland-Armenia Parliamentary Group Dominique de Buman, Vice President of the Christian Democratic Party, and Ueli Leuenberger, Vice President of the Ecological Party (Green Party) and officials from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Leuenberger introduced the event, underlining the importance for civil society to have an anti-racist law. “One must be clear: whoever tries to trivialize atrocities committed 90 years ago is practicing denial. The positions of the Swiss National Council as well as the Vaud and Geneva Cantonal Parliaments are there to remind us of the historical truth. (...) We will try to oppose, with all the legal methods we have at our disposal, every attempt to weaken the anti-racism norm. Along with accurate information, it is crucial that this issue be discussed between politicians, specialists and the population. The collective memory should be kept alive and we all have to fight so that expressions like *Never again* become a reality,” Leuenberger said in his opening speech.

Twenty MP's viewed the film and contributed to the panel discussion afterwards with director, Carla Garapedian, along with members of the Swiss media and Armenian community. Oskar Freysinger (Swiss People's Party) asked Garapedian whether it is right to compromise the concept of freedom of speech with an anti-racist law. “You have to choose which principle has the greatest public good,” answered Garapedian. “Freedom of speech must and should be at the top of our list of values we cherish in our democratic society. The only value which should be put above it is the prevention of genocide.”

Garapedian reminded the audience of the views of one of the film's contributors, Prof. Thom Tsvann, from Amsterdam's Institute of Genocide and Holocaust Studies, who has studied the cycle of genocide in the last century. “We know from history that words matter in the run-up to genocide. The minority group is targeted with racist words, and a political climate is created which sets the scene for genocide. In this context, we must understand that words have a consequence. And we must take responsibility for that, especially in the knowledge that we have failed to stop genocide in the last century. Miserably failed.” Garapedian also quoted Elie Wiesel, who famously said denial is the last stage of genocide. “If we understand this, we would see stopping genocide denial as an imperative act – not an elective act. We would do everything in our power to stop it.”

The Parliamentary Group Switzerland-Armenia is co-chaired by the National Councillors Dominique de Buman ([dominique.debuman@parl.ch](mailto:dominique.debuman@parl.ch)) and Ueli Leuenberger ([ueli.leuenberger@parl.ch](mailto:ueli.leuenberger@parl.ch))

Switzerland is the first country which successfully applied the anti-racist law condemning Dogu Perincek, President of the Turkish Worker's Party, for his denialist statements about the Armenian genocide, made on various occasions in Switzerland in 2005. Two charges against Perincek were upheld by the Swiss courts in 2007, including the appeal court. The conclusion of a federal court appeal on the Perincek case is expected by the end of 2007.

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