

January 20, 2007

Hrant Dink was murdered yesterday outside the offices of Agos, the newspaper where he'd served as editor-in-chief for over 10 years. From those offices he had spoken of the importance of communication, of dialogue between Turkey and Armenia, and their people. He had written articles about the importance of free speech, civic rights, and peace. He mentored journalists and created a space for empathy and for dissent. In short he did his work - work that earned him the international recognition of his peers and a conviction from the Turkish government under article 301 of the Turkish penal code.

Article 301 that prohibits insulting Turkish identity is one of many criminal defamation laws that PEN and other human rights organizations are working to overturn around the world. It states that writers like Hrant Dink, who foster open discussion about history and politics are criminals.

Hrant Dink's trial was marred by violence, inside and outside the courtroom, and death threats affected his daily life. He knew full well the cost of work such as his. But, as all great writers do, he stood firm in his conviction that communication could lead to a better understanding between people of differing opinion. And so, despite the risk to himself, yesterday morning, Hrant Dink went to the offices of Agos – to do his work.

His contribution to the ideals of free expression and cross-cultural communication can not be overstated. In his memory we must continue to work that writers in Turkey as well as the rest of the world can work free from violence, persecution and intimidation. The literary community joins in mourning the death of Hrant Dink and calls for the Turkish government to do all in its power to bring to justice those responsible for this tragedy.

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