
Press Release

AGBU Hye Geen Hosts Lecture with Sarah Leah Whitson of Human Rights Watch

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For immediate release

Whitson discusses contemporary human rights in the Middle East

On May 19, 2015, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Hye Geen held a lecture at the AGBU Vatche and Tamar Manoukian High School in Pasadena, California, with Sarah Leah Whitson. Whitson is the executive director of the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organization committed to human rights advocacy and research.

The lecture focused on an overview of human rights issues in the Middle East. Whitson, an attorney, has worked in her role since 2004 and has written extensively on conflict zones and violations of international humanitarian law.

In her presentation, Whitson explained that resistance, rather than repression, is the reason for the struggle in the Middle East. While opposition against ruling regimes was the impetus for the conflict in countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Syria, the situation has escalated since then to the proportions seen today. She expressed her regret in the government's lack of accountability and the atrocities that both the government and rebel forces have carried out as a result.

Whitson looked specifically at the example of Syria where people had been repressed by the current regime for decades and various opposition groups have emerged. She detailed how resistance groups have not only failed to succeed in political liberation, but have also destroyed cities, towns and cultural monuments.

Whitson also explained the failure of the United States State Department, responsible for foreign policy, in creating a clear policy to address the worsening conditions in the region, particularly an immigration policy pertaining to refugees. The conflict has resulted in millions of refugees who now live in refugee camps in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan.

“As the Armenian nation has been commemorating the centennial year of the genocide all over the world, Armenians, along with other ethnic minorities, are still being killed in such countries as Iraq, Syria and Egypt, where they had found shelter for over a century,” said Sona Yacoubian, founder of AGBU Hye Geen.

AGBU Hye Geen is a non-governmental organization committed to preserving and honoring the achievements of Armenian women and promoting their role in family and society through research, education and advocacy. All proceeds from the event went to benefit the AGBU Pregnant Women's Centers in Armenia.

Established in 1906, AGBU (www.agbu.org) is the world's largest non-profit Armenian organization. Headquartered in New York City, AGBU preserves and promotes the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs, annually touching the lives of some 500,000 Armenians around the world.

For more information about AGBU and its worldwide programs, please visit www.agbu.org

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