

15 September 2025

Սիրելի բարեկամներ, հարգելի հիւրեր, բարի եկանք:

Dear friends, esteemed guests— a very warm welcome to you all.

Haval u hogırno em hami kher hatın.

Today marks the 71st birthday of my beloved Chutag, whom I long for more than life itself.

We are all welcome here, at the International Hrant Dink Award Ceremony, where we celebrate his life, his struggle, and all kindred struggles, in his name.

Dear friends,

This year too our world has kept turning in the spiral of wars, femicides, and the killing of children. They have not ended wars. Evil and death are roaming with full force. Death no longer comes only with illness or old age; even newborn babies are sacrificed for profit.

Whether the killers are states, adults, or children, they recount their deeds with pride — even with joy. It defies reason.

And alongside the pain comes impunity, which wounds our souls further. This year we had to reckon with the climate that bred the young men who brutally murdered Mattia Ahmet Minguzzi at the marketplace.

Today, our children face different kinds of suffering: on one side, children who are killed; on another, children who kill; and elsewhere, children unjustly separated from their parents by so-called justice.

Last year, among those in this hall applauding the struggle for rights, was the elected mayor of this very district, Şişli — Resul Emrah Şahan. Today, he is behind bars. His five-year-old daughter waits for her father's return. The daughters of Demirtaş have been waiting for years for their father to come home. By now, they are almost grown ups...

Isn't it a sin that such young children have to grow up without their fathers? Isn't it cruel to their small hearts? Isn't it a violation of the rightful share of others? Isn't it merciless? To which conscience, to which notion of justice does this belong?

What kind of future are we building?

On one side, impunity. On the other, the violation of the presumption of innocence...To imprison without evidence, to release despite evidence.

A justice system that releases murderers while jailing our beloved Çiğdem, Osman Kavala, and elected mayors. A system that deems it appropriate to punish Osman Kavala regardless of the European Court of Human Rights judgment establishing that there is no evidence.

No one—not even the elected—has immunity from committing crimes, nor should they. But if you imprison so many journalists, students, elected officials without due process, using detention measures as punishment, you lose both credibility and trust. To imprison the elected mayor of one of the world's greatest cities without presenting any convincing justification to the public—indeed, without even attempting to convince them. This constitutes a violation of human rights.

We do not need to belong to this party or that party. The rule of law is a necessity for us all. Where law is absent, insecurity reigns. Unrest, chaos, anxiety, dismay — these take hold. Violence and bullying, anger, resentment, and hatred grow. No one knows whose hand is in whose pocket.

It is true: we all need justice—as much as we need water and air. If the strong are not just, then the weak suffer the most. Scripture tells us: *“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”* And who is to fulfil this if not prosecutors, judges, lawyers, and those in power?

They speak of peace processes — but isn't the very foundation of peace justice itself? And what is justice? Justice is truth.

But when it is the state, the government itself, that is the oppressor — who then can call it to account? No one! Only if it repents, admits its guilt, renounces its tyranny, turns denial into confession, and pledges never to repeat...It can begin by judging itself. Here I recall the words of Jesus: *“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”* Not ritualised justice, not token gestures — but true repentance of the heart, true mercy. Transparency and honesty must be placed at the very heart of justice. Think of Saturday Mothers, who were the laureate of the International Hrant Dink Award in 2013...The whereabouts of their loved ones — the forcibly disappeared, the oppression and bans they endured, still remain in darkness. We have only just bid farewell to Mother Emine Ocak. The true perpetrators must now feel shame. Or will they? Let us ask. Or is this merely a game? Will they ever be put on trial?

All these government-appointed trustees...What kind of justice can they deliver? What solution can they possibly offer, to which process, to which problem? Shall the candle of justice be snuffed out entirely, or shall the fire of justice blaze brighter — scattering all darkness? Let light prevail. Let relief, peace, and security come to our land. Let joy come with prosperity. Let truth arrive, honesty prevail, love and forgiveness grow.

Our yearning for justice was also at the heart of dearest Hrant's endeavour for peace between Turkey and Armenia. With his words, with his writings, he sought to *become a path* — for the building of relations, for the opening of borders. And as the Hrant Dink Foundation, we do our utmost to carry forward that mission, striving to strengthen ties between peoples. Now that a deal has been signed in the United States for a peace route, bringing a new impetus to the sealed border, we do have a wish: may Turkey give true meaning to its constructive and positive steps it has taken towards Armenia. For, as Hrant said: "*A new opening must carry with it a new and empathetic language.*" (Agos, 15 July 2005). And tonight, I thank our friends from Yerevan, who join us with music, adding yet another brick to this bridge.

We thank each of you for sharing this evening with us — and for sharing hope.