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## Seeking restorative justice for a century-old crime

The concept of restorative justice has helped many people and many societies come to grips with crimes and tragedies in recent years. But why not also use restorative justice for a crime committed decades ago — one for which there has been no confession or adjudication, and which continues to hurt the descendants of the principal victims?

I propose a form of restorative justice for the Armenian Genocide, especially for my family's hometown of Sis, the capital of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in the Ottoman Empire — now called Kozan in the Republic of Turkey.

The official beginning of the Armenian Genocide was April 24, 1915. But for my father and his family, the genocide began with the deportations from Sis in the summer of 1915. They were taken, often on foot, to the outskirts of Aleppo in present-day Syria, where most died. Those who survived were marched down the Euphrates River. On that trip the remainder of the family died except for my father and his older brother.

For our family, nothing can compensate for the loss of life, property, and the joy of being in one's ancestral home.

I have visited Sis and seen the ruins of the medieval castle on the rock and the stones that are all that is left of the monastery that was the see of the Armenian Catholicos. I have seen the old

Armenian quarter that is now home to poor Kurdish villagers. Next to the old city of Sis is the new part of the city of Kozan, apparently built upon agricultural fields and probably upon the Armenian cemetery that held the graves of our ancestors.

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I suggest to the residents of Kozan that if they opened their records, they would find where the Armenians lived. I want to know where the family home was. I do not want the house. I don't need it.

Besides, taking back that house would mean evicting a poor Kurdish family. A little Kurdish boy might look up at his mother and ask, "Why are we leaving our home? Where are we going?" just

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as a little Armenian boy asked his mother those questions in the summer of 1915. That would not be justice; it would be revenge on innocent people.

But I want to stand there and look at the house, just to imagine what life in that house was like a



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century ago.

Then I'd like to help raise the funds from all of us in the diaspora of Sis (we call ourselves "Sisetzis" even today) for several

I'd like to help build a youth center, which Kozan apparently did not have when I visited in September 2008. It's a city of almost 80,000 residents now, perhaps 10 times more people than a century ago. But it's not that modern and it doesn't have many civic amenities. Together, the descendants of the people who once lived there, Turkish Muslim and Armenian Christian alike, could make it a better place.

But we would have to do it together. It is sad that the mayor of Kozan apparently refuses to honor the historical memory of the Armenian community. In early 2015, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia filed suit to regain possession of the monastery that was the see of his predecessors for centuries.

According to reports, the mayor of Kozan responded, "Prove they were yours."

Why? The stones are uninhabitable. They are of no use to anyone in Kozan except as a tourist attraction to bring Armenian tourists there. Sisetzis come for a few hours, climb around the stones and remember with tears what was once there. Why not cede those few acres to the church that was forced to abandon them in September 1915?

These steps would be a beginning. Then we could talk, just as our ancestors talked with each other. We could do something together for this ancient city of Sis-Kozan. We could begin to have some justice and peace and reconciliation.