

# THE ARMENIAN Mirror-Spectator

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## Ban Ki-moon Appoints Movses Abelian Assistant Secretary-General

NEW YORK – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon this week announced the appointment of Movses Abelian, born in Armenia and a national of Georgia, as Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management. He will succeed

Affairs Division since April 2011, Abelian served as the Secretary of the Security Council and provided substantive advice to the President and members of the Council and its subsidiary bodies on matters related to the Council's work, practices and procedures. Abelian also has several years'

Service in 1992, Abelian worked in academia as associate professor at Yerevan State University from 1989.

He was educated in Armenia, the Russian Federation and the United States. He is married and has two children.



Ambassador Movses Abelian, right, with US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power

Catherine Pollard of Guyana, whom the Secretary-General has appointed as the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management.

Abelian brings with him more than 25 years of experience in peace and security issues and conflict resolution as well as extensive expertise leading, supporting and managing complex portfolios and intergovernmental processes, including the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Executive Boards of United Nations Funds and Programmes.

As Director of the Security Council

experience in management, including program planning and budget, having previously worked as Secretary of the Administrative and Budgetary Committee of the General Assembly (Fifth Committee) and the Committee on Programme and Coordination at the United Nations.

Prior to joining the UN, Abelian was the ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United Nations (1998-2003) and deputy permanent representative from 1996 to 1998. During his diplomatic career, Abelian served in various capacities including as the chairman of the Fifth Committee (1998); Vice-Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission and Special Negotiator for the United Nations Peacekeeping Scale Financing Reform (2000); President of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and Facilitator for United Nations Reform during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly (2002)

Prior to joining Armenia's Foreign

## Hollande Working on New Bill Criminalizing Denial of Armenian Genocide

PARIS (Armenpress) – The annual dinner of the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations in France was held on January 28 in Paris's l'Hôtel du Collectionneur. The event was attended by



President François Hollande with Paris train attack hero Mark Moogalian

French President Francois Hollande, the Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo, singer Charles Aznavour, as well as French-Armenian public and political figures.

In his speech, Hollande said that France resumed discussions on the preparation of a law criminalizing denial of the Armenian see HOLLANDE, page 3

## Philanthropist Vardanyan Believes Armenia Can Become New 'Hong Kong' for Iran

YEREVAN (Mediamax) – Businessman and philanthropist Ruben Vardanyan believes that Armenia can become a new "Hong Kong" for Iran.

Vardanyan is the co-founder of IDEA Charitable Foundation that implements large-scale projects in Armenia. In an interview with Mediamax, he remarked that lifting of sanctions against Iran would undoubtedly open new opportunities for Armenia.

"I've said time and again that Armenia should become a regional hub take into account its geographical position and centuries-old entrepreneurship traditions at the crossroads of different cultures and civilizations. Iran will be gradually "opening" to the world, and that situation justifies Armenia becoming such hub even further," said the businessman.

Vardanyan praised the membership of Armenian in the Eurasian Economic Union and advanced trade relations with European Union as additional competing advantages for the country.

see VARDANYAN, page 16



Ruben Vardanyan



## Nazar and Artemis Nazarian Donate \$10,000 to Mirror-Spectator

In appreciation of its professional content, news coverage and its support of vital Armenian institutions, Nazar and Artemis Nazarian of New Jersey have donated \$10,000 to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator.

We acknowledge the donation with gratitude, especially since it is not the first one of its kind from this generous family.

–ADL Press Committee

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### New Ambassador to US Presents Credentials to President Obama

WASHINGTON – Career diplomat Grigor Hovhannisyan, Armenia's newly appointed ambassador to the United States, presented his credentials to President Barack Obama on Thursday, January 28.

Prior to his Washington appointment, Hovhannisyan had served as Armenia's ambassador to Mexico, Costa Rica and as the country's consul general in Los Angeles.

Hovhannisyan was born in Yerevan in 1971. After completing his studies at the Yerevan State University, Department of Oriental Studies specializing in Arab Studies in 1992, he moved on to study Middle East Politics at the Haigazian University in Lebanon in 1992-1993 and received his MA from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Boston, MA in 2001.

He officially assumed his post on February 1.

### Assembly Opposes US Bailout of Azerbaijan After Bonds Downgrade

WASHINGTON – In a letter sent this week to Secretary of State John Kerry and Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, the Armenian Assembly of America urged the US to oppose any bailout for Azerbaijan, especially with US taxpayer dollars. According to recent media reports, the US-backed International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are contemplating a \$4-billion bailout for Azerbaijan, while at the same time Standard and Poor's downgraded Azerbaijan's bond rating sending a warning to investors that they are considered speculative junk.

"Rather than reward one of the most corrupt dictatorships in the world, whose president, Ilham Aliyev, received the first ever Organized Crime and Corruption Person of the Year award, bestowed by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Azerbaijan should be urged to make much needed reforms and use its oil resources for the betterment of its people and not at the expense of Christian Armenians," the Assembly letter stated. Further, the letter highlighted that "Azerbaijan's president continues his policy of trying to resolve the dispute over Nagorno Karabagh by threatening to wipe Armenia off of the map."

"The notion of bailing out a corrupt, foreign regime that continues to blockade and attack its Christian neighbor is out of step with America's values," stated Assembly Board Co-Chairmen Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian. "We urge the United States to use its considerable influence as a leading member of the IMF and World Bank to oppose any such bailout," they continued.

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## ARMENIA

## News From Armenia

## Armenian Foreign Minister Meets with OSCE Ambassadors

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) – On February 1, Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian had a meeting with the ambassadors of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) member states accredited in Armenia and Andrey Sorokin, head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, on the latter's initiative.

At the meetings the results of the OSCE Ministerial Council held in Belgrade in December 2014, issues concerning the German chairmanship of the OSCE in 2016, as well as a number of other issues on the OSCE agenda were discussed.

Nalbandian presented the process of peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict and outlined the importance of the active role of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries. The sides touched upon the results of the meeting between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan held in Bern, Switzerland, at the end of last year.

Nalbandian praised the activity of the OSCE office in Yerevan and thanked Sorokin for his productive work.

## 26,000 Have Visited Komitas Institute within One Year

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – On January 29 Komitas Museum-Institute director Nikolay Kostandyan said at a press conference that during the past year, the museum's first, the museum was visited by 26,000 people.

"During one year we received different visitors, diplomats, public figures, students and pupils. World famous Charles Aznavour, Krzysztof Penderecki and other prominent people visited the museum," Kostandyan said.

On the international "Night of Museums" in 2015, 3,000 visitors alone visited that day.

By a 2014 decision of the government of Armenia, the Komitas Museum-Institute was founded as a non-commercial institution. It was built in the Komitas Park, replacing the old house of culture.

The museum officially opened on January 29. The museum consists of a large concert hall, permanent and temporary exhibition halls and sections, research center, music studio, library and publishing house. Komitas Vardapet's personal belongings are grouped in the museum.

The life and work of Komitas, activities related to his musical and religious careers along with his rich heritage of researches in Armenian folkloric music, are permanently exhibited in eight sections of the museum.

## Armenia to Be Guest of Honor at Minsk Book Festival

MINSK, Belarus (Betta) – Armenia will be the guest of honor of the Minsk International Book Fair to be held in the Belarusian capital on 10 to 14 February, BelTA learned from the Belarusian Information Ministry.

In other years, the honorary title was given to Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Kazakhstan, France, Germany, Venezuela, and China.

This year's edition of the forum is expected to bring together book publishers from Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other countries.

The Information Ministry said that the book fair will showcase best products of the national and foreign book publishing industries. The program of the forum features many cultural and business events.

The Year of Culture in Belarus will be one of the key themes of the upcoming event along with the preparations for the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing. Other themes include the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death, and other anniversaries.

# Levon Aronian: How the 'David Beckham of Chess' Became an Armenian National Hero

YEREVAN (CNN) – When Levon Aronian walks down the street in his native Armenia he's met by cheering crowds; restaurants insist he eats for free; new parents name their babies after him.

Aronian isn't an actor, activist, or astronaut. He's a chess player – the fourth best in the world, to be precise. And in this tiny, ex-Soviet, chess-obsessed country, that means he's also a national hero.

"The first time my fiancé arrived in Armenia we stopped at one petrol station and they said, 'OK, we're not going to charge you,'" says the 33-year-old dubbed "The David Beckham of Armenia" by the foreign press.

"So for her this is pretty shocking – but that happens all the time," he adds, referring to his Australian girlfriend Arianne Caoili, an international chess champion in her own right whose good looks have spurred the nickname "The Anna Kournikova of Chess."

The red carpet treatment of players isn't so far-fetched in a country where chess is compulsory in all schools. Here, even the nation's President Serge Sargsian is also President of the Armenia Chess Federation.

For a nation of just three million, Armenia has one of the highest numbers of grandmasters per capita in the world. Of the past five Chess Olympiads, the national team has won three times – led by none other than idol Aronian.

"I won't be humble about that," he adds with a cheeky laugh. And while Aronian may not have the swagger of a footballer like Beckham, his playful and sincere charm has only endeared him to a country of chess-fanatics.

Home-schooled by his scientist parents in what was then the Soviet Union, Aronian was taught to play chess by his sister as a 9-year-old – and turned pro the same year.

These days the chess prodigy spends around four hours a day training. He usually travels seven months a year – playing at international tournaments offering anywhere between a few thousand and over a million dollars in prize money.

Armenian grandmasters are also paid around \$120 per month from the government – a symbolic sum which nonetheless sets it apart from the rest of the world.

But to really understand the country's love of chess, you must head to the streets.

"You see people playing chess in cafes, in parks, at family gatherings, among young and old alike," says Professor Aram Hajian, Dean at the College of Science and Engineering at the American University of Armenia, and co-founder of the Chess Academy of Armenia.

"It's generational – most of the people I have met who play chess, when asked, mention a parent or grandfather who introduced them to the game."

Even for a small and chess-loving nation like Armenia, rolling out the sport to every single school in 2011 was no easy task.

"The single biggest challenge has been the training of chess teachers,"

explained Hajian.

"There's also integration into the national school curriculum, and overcoming logistical challenges of equipment and materials."

For the Armenian government, the benefits of nurturing a nation of chess players far outweighed the logistical nightmare.

And it's an approach being watched



Grandmaster Levon Aronian

closely by educators around the world.

"Children playing chess are exposed to such topics as strategy, planning, sacrifice, creativity, logic, and learning how to be a gracious winner and loser," says Hajian.

"Kids love games, and if you can identify a way to teach all these topics in the context of a game, I think you have struck upon a scholastic goldmine."

Armenia's modern-day love affair with chess owes a lot to one man – 1960s world champion Tigran Petrosian.

The moment Petrosian beat Soviet Mikhail Botvinnik to become 1963 World Chess Champion (a title he held

until 1969), has been likened JFK's assassination in America – everyone in Armenia remembers where they were at the time.

"The collective euphoria that the nation experienced was a real watershed moment for the Armenian people," explained Hajian of the games which were projected onto giant screens and watched by thousands in the capital Yerevan's Opera Square.

"At the time, Armenia was one of the smallest constituent republics of the Soviet Union. While national expression was discouraged by the Soviet authorities, the rise of Tigran Petrosian galvanized the spirit of the Armenian nation."

For a country with such a tumultuous history – including one of the most horrific massacres of the 20th century – chess has now also become an important source of Armenian national pride.

"We're not just a nation of people who struggle and fight. We're also a nation of people who can come back to the days of our glory when we were a big country, a country who set new rules," explained Aronian.

"When you travel to Armenia you see all those monasteries, all those universities that are 1,500 years old and you always feel 'this is what we are.' We have been a nation that had a lot of intellectual capability."

"So I think what drove people to chess, is to bring back the feeling that we were once a scientific nation."

And if Aronian is any indication – it's a winning move.

## Armenia, Georgia Sign Defense Cooperation Pact

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) – A Georgian delegation led by Defense Minister Tinatin Khidasheli arrived in Armenia for an official visit on February 1. Following an official welcome ceremony, the Defense Ministers of the two countries signed the 2016 Military Cooperation Plan.

"Although Armenia and Georgia have chosen different security systems, it will not hamper the cooperation on a common bilateral agenda aimed at the reinforcement of security and stability in the region," Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan told reporters following the meeting.

"I think we can see the best example in Afghanistan, where Armenian and Georgian peacekeepers are serving together for the sake of common peace

and stability. I'm here to speak about issues that unite us. Peace in the Caucasus is the first thing that unites us, and we cooperate in that direction," the Georgian Defense Minister said.

Referring to issues of Armenian-Georgian cooperation in the context of Georgian-Turkish and Georgian-Azerbaijani relations, Khidasheli said "the question is about strategic partnership. Georgia has a NATO-member neighboring country in the face of Turkey, which is of great importance to us."

The Georgian defense minister refrained from commenting on the vote of the Georgian delegation on the two anti-Armenian reports at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, but advised to look at the issue from the perspective of security.



Defense Minister Tinatin Khidasheli, right, and Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan





## INTERNATIONAL

# Russia Asks for Inclusion of Kurds In Syria Peace Negotiations

By Vladimir Isachenkov

MOSCOW (AP) – Russia last week argued strongly against Turkey's demand to keep a leading Kurdish group out of Syrian peace talks, and said it expects the UN envoy to resist "blackmail" by Turkey and others, reflecting sharp differences that remain ahead of the talks.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also denied allegations that Moscow had urged Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down and could offer him political asylum.

He specifically shrugged off reports last week claiming that Russia's military intelligence chief had traveled to Damascus to try to persuade Assad to go. Lavrov said there was no point in such a trip as Assad visited Moscow in the fall and had extensive talks with President Vladimir Putin.

"No one has asked for or offered any political asylum," he said, adding that Assad had promised Putin he would sit down for peace talks with opposition, including armed groups, and engage the "patriotic" opposition in the fight against the Islamic State group alongside the Syrian army.

Lavrov emphasized that the Kurdish group, the Democratic Union Party, or PYD, plays an important role in fighting the Islamic State group and is an essential part of political settlement in Syria.

Turkey sees the PYD and its YPG militia group as branches of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a Kurdish resistance group it has long fought and considers a terrorist group.

Lavrov warned that it would be a



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

"grave mistake" not to invite the PYD. "How can you talk about political reforms in Syria if you ignore a leading Kurdish party?" he said, adding that the Kurds account for 15 percent of the population.

Lavrov also warned against Saudi Arabia's proposal to invite only opposition groups that it hosted at a meeting last month, saying the Syrian peace process should also include other opposition representatives, like those that met for talks in Moscow last year.

The current opposition negotiating team announced in Saudi Arabia last week includes Saudi-backed Islamic rebel factions like Jaish al-Islam, or the Army of Islam, which Russia considers terrorists.

The nearly five-year Syrian conflict that began in 2011 with protests against Assad's rule, has morphed into an all-out war that has killed a quarter-million and displaced millions.

Lavrov's statement at a news conference reflects the tough posturing ahead of Syria peace talks set to start Friday. UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura will be sending invitations amid intense jockeying between coun-

tries like Russia and Turkey about who should be invited.

Russia, a key ally of Assad, has called for the inclusion of Kurdish representatives, and the US and others have supported the Kurds in the fight against IS. Russia's relations with Turkey are at a freezing point after a Turkish fighter jet downed a Russian warplane at the border with Syria in November.

In Ankara, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Tuesday reiterated Turkey's opposition to including Syrian Kurdish forces at the Geneva talks.

"A table without the Kurds would be incomplete. We do not oppose the Kurds but we oppose the PYD and YPG who oppress the Kurds," Davutoglu said in his weekly address to his party's legislators. "It is not acceptable for us for a terror organization to be included within the opposition."

Foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, in an interview with NTV television, said Turkey would boycott the talks if the PYD were invited.

Lavrov has dismissed the demand by some opposition groups that the Syrian military must lift the siege of some areas before the talks begin, saying that unblocking the besieged areas and delivering humanitarian aid should be an important part of the negotiations.

"There must be no preconditions for starting the talks, and the humanitarian issues must be among the central issues on their agenda," he said, adding that while the plight of the city of Madaya blockaded by Syrian government forces has been widely publicized, a similar situation in government-controlled Deir el-Zor has been largely out of the public eye.

## Agos Armenian Editor Laments Needs of Turkish-Armenian Community

ISTANBUL (Armenpress) – The main problem for the Armenian community in Turkey in 2016 remains the election of a patriarch and the departments of the community institutions, said the editor of the Armenian section of *Agos* Armenian periodical this week.

Bagrat Estukian, in an interview with Armenpress, said there is no statute regulating elections; therefore in the last few years, we were not able to hold elections. There are some obstacles connected with the election of a patriarch either. "We have to select a new patriarch, but the orders are not profitable. These are the main issues," Estukian said.

"Armenians of Istanbul were very organized 10 years ago. The uncertainties of the past few years hinder the community system and lead to despair

and disappointment among the members. This can lead to bad consequences," Estukian said.

Along with the issues concerning the elections, there are serious economic problems for the Armenian community in Turkey. According to Estukian, there are financial difficulties in schools, as the costs have been increased.

"It is impossible to balance the money that comes in and goes out of the funds. Usually every year at this time we have to face financial problems, but we try to balance the entrances and exits with the help of charity funds and donations. There are some difficulties this year. We hope to improve the situations by the means of Armenian community," Estukian added.

He added that security was not a concern for the Armenian population in Istanbul.

## Hollande Working on New Bill Criminalizing Denial of Armenian Genocide

HOLLANDE, from page 1  
Genocide mentioning that he entrusted its preparation to the former president of the European Court of Human Rights Jean-Paul Costa.

"I have called on Jean-Paul Costa, who is one of our best lawyers, to make our legislation to find any substantial way which undoubtedly will defend the memory of Armenian Genocide," Hollande announced followed by applause, the official website of Élysée Palace reported.

Hollande stressed the unconditional

constitutionality of the new law as if it is appealed in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), "It will be a terrible defeat for France and disclaimer for Hay Dat."

The French President also assured that the bill criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide has nothing to do with elections.

"The problem is to reconcile. Armenia and Turkey should always know that France will always be there to help them find a dialogue," said the president.

(See related editorial, page 14)

## Oldest Armenian Resident of Diyarbakir Dies

ISTANBUL (*Hurriyet Daily News*) – Sarkis Eken, an 86-year-old known as one of the oldest Armenians born and residing in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir, passed away at Dicle University's hospital, where he was receiving treatment, the *Hurriyet Daily News* reports.

Eken was born in 1930 in the Babuk village of Diyarbakir's Silvan district and was living in the Meryem Ana Assyrian Church in its central Sur district for 55 years.

He lived out his final years alone after losing his wife of 65 years, Baydzar Eken, in 2014, only two months after their official civil marriage.

His funeral was initially planned in Surp Giragos Armenian Church in Sur's Fatihpasa neighborhood, but the venue was changed due to the curfew in Fatihpasa.

The one-hour ceremony, which was orchestrated by priest Yusuf Akbulut of Meryem Ana Assyrian Church, was attended by Diyarbakir Church spiritual leader Ahmet Güvener, Sur deputy mayor Azize Deger Kutlu from the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), local authorities, artists and Eken's relatives and friends.

Eken was laid to rest in the Christian church in Diyarbakir's Urfakapi district.

## International News

### Al-Nusra Destroys Churches, Desecrates Cemeteries in Latakia

LATAKIA, Syria (PanArmenian.net) – Al-Nusra Front has destroyed the churches of Syrian village of Ghnemye in Latakia's north, according to a local resident cited in the website *Arevelk.com*. Upon returning to the town, the resident found his home demolished.

"The Armenian and Evangelical churches of the village have been completely destroyed, with cemeteries desecrated," *Arevelk* reported.

### Yerevan Among Top 10 Affordable Destinations For Russians

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (Panorama.am) – Russian online hotel booking service provider and travel agency *Okto.ru* has released a list of the most affordable travel destinations in 2015. The list is based on data of hotel bookings from February 1 to December 31, 2015. Yerevan was among the top ten most affordable foreign cities selected by Russian tourists in 2015. Visitors spent an average of 3.5 days in Yerevan, the press service of the Yerevan municipality reported, citing *Okto.ru*.

"In 2015 Yerevan was in the top ten most popular tourists destinations where visitors traveled on holidays," director of *Okto.ru*, Yakob Sadchikov, said.

### CoE Urges Armenia to Boost Battle against Money Laundering

STRASBOURG, France (PanArmenian.net) – Council of Europe experts have identified significant weaknesses in the investigation and prosecution of money laundering in Armenia and have urged the authorities to take immediate action to ensure that law enforcement efforts are fully commensurate with the money laundering risks faced by the country.

Overall, however, Armenia has made adequate progress in establishing a sound legal framework, and the financial sector was found to be effective in the application of preventive measures. The mechanisms for detecting and preventing financing of terrorism and proliferation are to a large extent effective.

Fraud, tax evasion, contraband and embezzlement pose the highest threats in terms of money laundering. Within the Armenian economy, the banking and real estate sectors are the most vulnerable to money laundering. Financial intelligence is gathered very effectively, but law enforcement does not often make effective use of it to develop evidence, trace, seize and confiscate criminal proceeds from money laundering.

Armenia is to report back to MONEYVAL in April 2018 on the follow-up measures.

### Azerbaijan Revises State Budget

BAKU (Armenpress) – The Azerbaijani government has corrected the state budget for the current year based on a basic oil price of \$25 per barrel, the Azeri Turan news agency reported.

According to the report, Finance Minister Samir Sharifov said the revenues will amount to 16.5 billion manat.

"The expected size of the deficit is 1.7 billion manats. To cover it the treasury balance for January 1, 2016 will be allocated, an amount of 1.4 billion manat," he said.

The privatization of state assets is expected to gain 100 million manats. These funds will be used to repay the state budget deficit.

It is predicted that this year the Ministry of Taxes will drop revenues by 200 million manat.

Azerbaijan lost more than \$10 billion in 2015 due to drop of oil prices. Since August 2014, Azerbaijan spent \$10,176 billion (67 percent) of the currency reserves to keep the manat stable.



# Community News

## SARF Telethon Helping Syrian Refugees

PARAMUS, N.J. – Nerses is a Syrian-Armenian professional. A graduate of Syrian universities, Nerses had a prosperous dental practice in Aleppo before the Syrian crisis erupted in 2011. Set in the devastated and hard-hit Armenian neighborhood of Nor Kiugh, his practice has been severely curtailed. Nerses is also an activist. An avid member of the community dedicated to the service of his people, he is faithful to his identity and roots and loyal to our national aspiration of truth and justice.

Nerses is set to perpetuate the heroic and historic presence of the Armenian community in Syria, contribute to its rich and resourceful legacy and live in peace and harmony with the indigenous Syrian Arab neighbors whose fathers graciously embraced the survivors of the Genocide; instilled hope to live, opportunity to prosper and freedom to worship.

Nerses and the Syrian Armenian Community continue to suffer as the Syrian conflict continues to spill blood, sow destruction, harvest lives and destroy communities.

Hagop too is a professional dentist and a graduate of Syrian universities. At the outset of the Syrian bloody conflict, he took refuge in a place Diaspora Armenians have always aspired and dreamt to move to and settle in; the homeland of Armenia. Hagop and his young family are eager to anchor in the homeland, settle there and extend roots in the land of their forefathers. Hagop practices his profession in a medical facility owned funded and operated by the Armenian Missionary Association of America - AMAA, that serves the hygienic



Syrian refugees

needs of the impoverished and fellow Syrian Armenian refugees in the homeland.

Hagop is set to anchor in Armenia, despite its economic woes and scarcity of opportunities. He is industrious, creative, spirited and productive. Hagop needs and deserves all the help possible to own a bird's nest that he can call home in the homeland.

In the absence of a national strategy to invest the immense potential of the Syrian Armenian refugees in the homeland, we are joyfully burdened to take charge and do our very best to sustain Nerses and Hagop in Syria proper and/or Armenia and diminish the national bleeding caused by the dismemberment of the suffering Syrian masses in the melting pots of the West or the dark and unknown wilderness of the world.

The mission of the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund (SARF) is to provide financial assistance to Syrian Armenians who are victims of the ravaging Syrian civil war. The Armenian Missionary Association of America is one of the founding member organizations of SARF on the West Coast.

This February 21, the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund - SARF, is set to have a fund raising Telethon to "Save a Life". Visit [www.amaa.org](http://www.amaa.org), or thru the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund - SARF's February 21st Telethon (Tel. 866.888.SARF - website [www.SARFtelethon.org](http://www.SARFtelethon.org) to help.



Performing a slit-lamp eye examination

## Seeing and Restoring Sight in Armenia

YEREVAN and LOS ANGELES – This is something I have always believed: discovering the beauty and vulnerabilities of different cultures gifts us with connection, humility, and an open heart.

Through my work receiving a master's in global medicine, I first discovered internal fulfillment from getting involved in global health – learning about the strengths and challenges of different care settings, and responding to community health needs in culturally sensitive ways. As a medical student, this creative impulse for new perspectives was still alive and pulsing, deep within me.

My birthplace was California, but I never forgot that my heart belonged in the Armenian highlands. And so, with the support of Dr. Roger Ohanesian and Dr. Nune Yeghiazaryan, I came to Yerevan this December as part of the Armenian EyeCare Project Observership Program to participate as a medical observer.

Founded by Ohanesian in 1992, the EyeCare Project focuses on direct patient care, medical education and capacity building of Armenia's ophthalmologic infrastructure. My hope was that through the program, I could bear witness to the miraculous alchemy of sight being restored and hope being reborn at the Malayan Eye Center – the largest eye institute in the country.

My journey to Armenia was in pursuit of myriad goals: to study, to learn and to reconnect with the marrow of my heritage, which had long been lost to time, geography and translation. I thought my observations would serve to highlight the differences in patient experiences between the American and Armenian healthcare systems. And yet, despite variations in cultural paradigms, what impressed me most was the commonality in the longings and fears of the patients. Across oceans, from many colorful traditions, their songs resonated of pain, wonder, and an extraordinary hope for renewal – paralleling my experiences with patients at the Los Angeles County Hospital. My journey helped me realize that longings for strength and regeneration of that precious light which saturates our lives are universal; discovering this thread of commonality was the keystone to my global health experience.

Along the way, I had the privilege of sharing my observations with astonishing doctors and nurses who work diligently to provide light for those suffering in darkness. Some of my favorite memories were with Dr. Anna Hovakimyan. I remember watching her during surgery a few days after my arrival; for a few eternal moments, it seemed as though time stood still. I watched her fluid fingers moving swiftly, neatly, and with the grace of an artist in the breathtaking act of creation. In her uveitis clinic, I stood beside her each day to learn from her prose and motions as she inspired countless patients. Though with the passing of time, I may forget the details of Bechet's disease, sarcoidosis, and the many disorders she taught me about, I won't forget how she made me feel hopeful about the power to heal the spirit, not just the body.

see EYE CARE, page 5

## Heroes Commemorated On 95th Anniversary of Defense of Marash

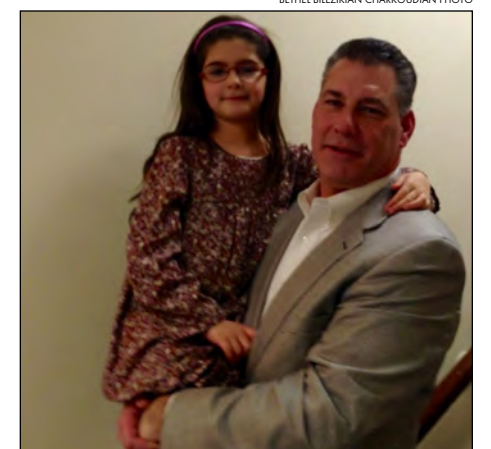
WATERTOWN – On Sunday, January 31, after attending a memorial service at St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown, commemorating the victims of the Armenian Genocide from Marash (1915 to 1920), the Boston Marashtsi community held its annual reception in the St. Stephen's Armenian Church Hall, once again remembering their ancestors who heroically defended Marash. This was a defense that ended with the departure of the French in the middle of the night, their horses' hooves covered with burlap to deaden the sound of their departure, the departure assuring the demise of most of the Armenians in Marash.

(This information is from eyewitness Stephen Baliozian. His oral history was conducted by Bethel Bilezikian Charkoudian. The tape is now on file at the Armenian Library and Museum of America in Watertown. Stephen Baliozian was 8 at the time of his departure from Marash during a fierce snowstorm).

This year's commemorative event began with the serving of the traditional Marash "Keshkek Ghabakli," a hulled wheat based pilaf with a squash "sulu" (squash cooked with onions) and chi kufte (a traditional dish of raw lamb meat kneaded with bulghour), and Armenian salata (fresh tomatoes with onions and parsley); the meal was blessed by Rev. Antranig Baljian, who later addressed the audience on the Beatification of the Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide including Marashtsi Martyrs, a beatification that occurred on the 100th anniversary of the Genocide, April 15, 2015. Rev. Baljian drew attention to the fact that for centuries, concerned with survival, the Armenian Apostolic Church had beatified no saints but for the past decade has undertaken the task of research and re-discovery of the process of beatification, keeping those lost in the genocide in mind.

Baljian emphasized that Armenian Martyrs were proclaimed saints for the sacrifices they made for God throughout their life and daily work. He added that the church recognizes that fact through the process of beatification, not for us to pray for them as we did over the past century, but rather for them to pray for us as intercessors with God.

Peter Koutoujian Jr., Sheriff of Middlesex



Sheriff Peter Koutoujian with his daughter at this year's commemoration of the Defense of Marash

County, followed. He recounted his Marashtsi heritage by briefly reflecting on the memory of his elders. Following Koutoujian's remarks, Harout Sajounian accompanied by Helena Hagopian performed a rendition of *Kedashen* and *Adana Voghp*, two patriotic songs in remembrance of the Armenian Martyrs.

Ani Chekjian recited poetry reflecting on the sufferings of Armenians then, a century ago, and now in the present day in Syria. Sevan Soukiassian and Shant Der Torossian followed with two short piano pieces, culminating in Sajounian and Hagopian once again in the performance of *Gilgila*, a hallmark song performed at the closing of many observation ceremonies at Saint Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church.

– Ara Demirjian





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# AGBU Young Professionals Northern California to Hold 16th Annual Winter Gala

SAN FRANCISCO — AGBU Young Professionals of Northern California (AGBU-YPNC) will host the 16th AGBU San Francisco Winter Gala, the Key to the City, on February 12-14. YPNC will donate a portion of the weekend's proceeds to the AGBU Humanitarian Emergency Relief Fund for Syrian Armenians.

"We are proud to continue the tradition of Winter Galas in our hometown, bringing together hundreds of young professionals from around the globe," said Steven Cherezian, YPNC gala co-chair. "Additionally, we realize the need to support our brothers and sisters in Syria is ever present and our goal remains to provide as much aid as possible to benefit the AGBU Humanitarian Emergency Relief Fund for the Syrian Armenian community. We hope to raise as much as possible for the charity."

Gala 2016 weekend kicks off Friday, February 12, with a welcome reception at the host hotel, the Sir Francis Drake in Union Square. Following the reception, guests will head to Hue nightclub where DJ Mikey Tan will be playing some of the finest tunes that will be sure to fill up the dance floor at this a hip new venue in SF's North Beach district.

Saturday, February 13 brings the return of another Gala weekend favorite: the SF city walking tour. The tour will include stops at many different landmarks around the city. Saturday night features the weekend's signature event: the Key to the City Gala dinner/dance in the newly renovated Green Room at the San Francisco War Memorial Performing Arts Center in downtown. Complete with breathtaking views of city hall,



YPs dancing the night away at the 15th anniversary AGBU San Francisco Winter Gala Dinner/Dance.

the evening will feature a four-course dinner, premium open bar, and dancing to Armenian and other international music, courtesy of DJ Raffy.

Sunday, February 14, starts off with the

Wine Trip. This year's trip features an all-inclusive experience at the famed Coppola Winery in Sonoma Valley wine country. The trip will include tours, tastings, bocce ball, appetizers and a stroll through the favorite attraction at the winery: the Movie Gallery. This stunning gallery displays a vast collection of authentic movie memorabilia from Francis Ford Coppola's filmmaking career spanning five decades. Sunday night features the return of last year's instant weekend classic: the Kef Night. Complete with Armenian food, music, and hands-on culinary lessons in making a traditional Armenian dessert, Kef Night offers a fun and relaxing opportunity to wrap up the weekend. Back by popular demand, this final event will feature local craft beer and wine tasting for all attendees.

"We are thrilled to welcome the entire young professional network to San Francisco for an unforgettable weekend getaway. As always, lots of planning has gone into the Winter Gala weekend, with this year featuring an even more exclusive experience for the wine trip, a new FridayClub Night venue, and the return of some weekend favorites," expressed Albert Arustamov, AGBU-YPNC gala co-chair. "The weekend will be one to remember."

For event information, tickets, weekend package specials and to donate, visit [www.agbusfwintergala.org](http://www.agbusfwintergala.org).

## Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State to Hold 28th Annual Banquet

FRESNO — The Armenian Studies Program of California State University, Fresno, will hold its 28th Annual Banquet on Sunday, March 6, at the Fort Washington Golf and Country Club.

This year's banquet will feature Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, the newly appointed dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, and Dr. Honora Chapman, newly-appointed associate dean of the college. The Armenian Studies Program is academically based within the College of Arts & Humanities.

More than 45 student recipients of Armenian Studies scholarships and grants for 2015-2016

will be recognized at the banquet. Students who are graduating with a minor in Armenian Studies will also be recognized.

The Armenian Studies Banquet brings together Fresno State students, faculty, administrators, and the community, to celebrate the achievements of the Program and its students.

The reception will begin at 5 p.m. followed by the banquet at 6 p.m.

Tickets are available at \$50 per person, with a special price of \$25 for Fresno State students and Fresno State faculty.

For more information about the banquet, visit [fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies](http://fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies).

## Seeing and Restoring Sight in Armenia

EYE CARE, from page 4

I remember spending time in the clinics learning the foundations of ophthalmology from Dr. Tatev Hakobyan. With her guidance, I learned about refraction, astigmatism, measuring visual acuity and other clinical pearls of general practice. There was honesty and elegance in her daily patient interactions, and I loved participating in her clinic. I also learned about retinal diseases with Dr. Armen Vardanyan, where I felt continuously challenged to learn and relearn different conditions of the retina and vitreous body, as well as techniques to evaluate them.

I feel deeply grateful for many others, including all of the wonderful nurses whose warmth and hospitality define the heart of the hospital. I especially feel grateful for Dr. Aleksandr Malayan, a great man whose acute intelligence, generosity of spirit and profoundly gentle manners made me feel more at home. I know their collective influences have shaped me in real and enduring ways.

Standing at the edge of the city on my last day in Yerevan, I tasted the ancient air and felt a sudden deep kinship to this place of mountains and rivers, of rooted trees and snowy vineyards, of churches and cobblestone streets. In the stillness of the night, I felt something meaningful had passed as a result of the program that had awakened a small part of my potential. The kind support of my mentors in the institution and the quiet connections I had made with the patients made me feel gentle and raw and eager to continue towards a life of service.

My experiences at the Malayan Eye Center are a testament to the healing grace of doctors,

and the unearthing and shaping of the spirit that is the miracle of providing the gift of sight. I have been fascinated and grateful for it all. Most of all, the observership has helped me to know my own heart, and has now become a part of my emerging visual story.

(Anna Ter-Zakarian is a medical student at the Keck School of Medicine at the University

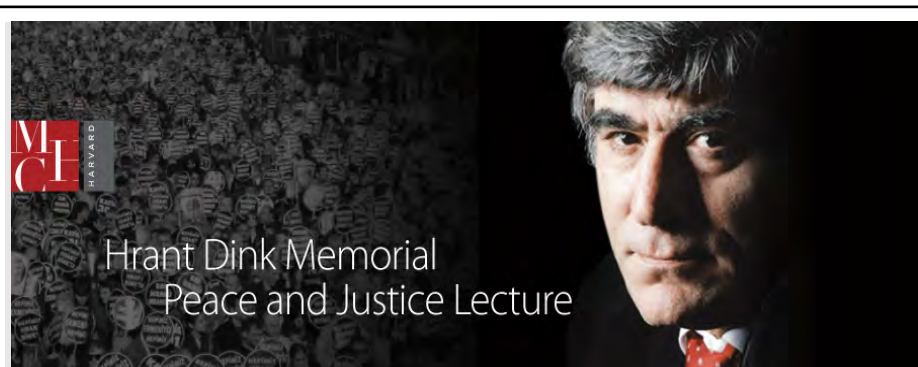


From left, Dr. Anna Hovakimyan, Dr. Aleksandr Malayan (director of the Malayan Ophthalmologic Center) and Anna Ter-Zakarian

of Southern California. She went to Armenia this year during her winter break as a volunteer with the Armenian EyeCare Project at the Malayan Eye Center in Yerevan.)



Armenian EyeCare Project headquarters in Yerevan



### EVENT INFORMATION

Thursday, February 18, 2016 - 6:00pm

Knafel Center, formerly Radcliffe Gym, 10 Garden Street

### Hrant Dink Memorial Peace and Justice Lecture

Complex Truths in Trials of Conflicts

#### Introductions:

#### Rakel Dink

Hrant Dink Foundation - Istanbul

#### Cemal Kafadar

Vehbi Koç Professor of Turkish Studies, Harvard University

#### Speaker

### Sir Geoffrey Nice

Gresham College Professor of Law

#### Biography

Sir Geoffrey Nice worked at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia between 1998 and 2006 and led the prosecution of Slobodan Milošević, former President of Serbia. Much of his work since has been connected to cases before the permanent International Criminal Court – Sudan, Kenya, Libya – or pro bono for victims groups – Iran, Burma, North Korea – whose cases cannot get to any international court.

This event will be **live streamed**. Free and open to the public. Seating is limited.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

## Berj and Annie Chekijian Host AMAA Reception

BELMONT, Mass. – On Saturday, January 16, the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) held a reception at the home of Berj and Annie Chekijian of Belmont. More than 50 guests gathered in fellowship and good spirits to view a video presentation and hear updates on the happenings and operations of the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School



Dr. Robert Mirak and Edward Avedisian

in Yerevan, Armenia. AMAA Executive Director/CEO Zaven Khanjian began his presentation by placing the success of the School in context with the AMAA's long history of moving education forward as one of its primary missions throughout the world.

The school's benefactor Edward Avedisian and Armenia Tree Project (ATP) Executive

Director Jeanmarie Papelian highlighted numerous ways the school benefits Armenia beyond offering a fine education. The school serves as a major extracurricular, social and community center for the impoverished Malatia-Sepastia district of Yerevan, in addition to working with numerous partner organizations such as the ATP.

The original Avedisian School was founded in 1999 as a tuition-free kindergarten. In September 2014, the doors of the new Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School and Community Center complex opened, in the presence of Republic of Armenia President Serge Sargsian and various leaders of the AMAA. It is the first LEED-certified school building in Armenia and the Caucasus. The complex includes: a primary school in the Krikor and Beatrice Bilezikian Building; kindergarten, middle and high schools; athletic facilities including a soccer field; and a community center.

The AMAA held this reception to highlight the importance of upholding the passionate spirit which resonates throughout the administration, faculty and students of this fine institution. The AMAA thanks the Chekijians for graciously opening their home and their hearts to host this reception in support of the Avedisian School.

For more information about the school, visit [www.amaa.org](http://www.amaa.org).



Berj Chekijian welcomes the guests.

## Bay Area Friends of Armenia Leaving Legacy at AUA Establishing a Scholarship Endowment Fund

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Friends of Armenia (BAFA), a San Francisco-based non-profit, presented AUA with a generous gift of \$65,000 to establish an endowed scholarship fund. The Bay Area Friends of Armenia (BAFA) Scholarship endowment will support students at AUA in financial need.

BAFA was founded as a humanitarian response to the aftermath of Armenia's earthquake and the liberation struggle in Artsakh. BAFA took a hands-on approach in helping mitigate the blockade of the third Armenian Republic by developing and implementing health, education and welfare initiatives primarily to benefit the rural regions of Armenia. Since then, BAFA, for more than 22 years, has addressed various and evolving needs of the country through the support of its many donors.

Execution of high-impact programs in health education and welfare has been the hallmark of BAFA's work. The organization has provided vital sustenance to the most vulnerable in Armenia through its Soup Kitchens. It has spearheaded various medical endeavors such as surgical training and surgical procedures performed by its board members, and shipment of medical equipment and supplies. BAFA has also contributed to a myriad of educational projects such as financial aid to teachers; supply of computers and books; breakfast for school children; a school nurse's station; renovation and construction of schools in partnership with other entities; and much more.

Most recently, BAFA has delivered a visionary public health initiative to promote oral health literacy among children and their parents within schools and communities. The dental health

symposium, which was carried out in collaboration with the School of Public Health at AUA in November 2015 and featured internationally known experts in the field, was a phenomenal success. The 160 attendees, health professionals from various fields and organizations, earned continuing professional development credit provided by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia.

"On behalf of its hundreds of supporters, The Bay Area Friends of Armenia is proud to have established this scholarship endowment to benefit new generations of students who represent the future of Armenia. We are gratified in doing our part, especially during a time when the country has been so welcoming of Armenian refugees from such countries as Syria and Iraq striving to rebuild their lives," said BAFA President Sylvia Melikian.

Scholarship support is one of the most important ways to give to AUA. Since its establishment, the University has remained committed to its need-blind admissions policy, meaning that every student who has earned admission is able to attend, regardless of financial limitations. This approach opens AUA to an economically diverse group of students. It emphasizes our core belief that education is not for the elite; whoever is qualified and wishes to learn can do so at AUA. Nearly half of our students receive some sort of financial assistance, and thanks to the generosity of donors like BAFA, we will be able to continue offering this support. For information about scholarships and other giving opportunities, please visit: <http://aua.am/giving/>.

## Tehlirian on Trial in Minnesota

ST. PAUL, Minn. – This past August, students from 26 high schools and colleges attended World Without Genocide's Summer Institute held at William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Institute focused on the topic of Religions and Genocide, highlighting the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, and the violence being perpetrated today in the Middle East by ISIS.

Students participated in a mock trial of the prosecution of Soghomon Tehlirian for the murder of Talaat Pasha. Tehlirian's trial tested the students' perception of justice and culminated in a jury verdict of 'not guilty.' Students filled the roles of judge, jury, prosecutor, defense attorneys, the defendant, witnesses, and the press. Following the jury's verdict, students and community members who attended the mock trial learned – many for the first time – about Operation Nemesis and enjoyed a robust discussion about the case and Tehlirian's actions.

The mock trial was prepared and coached by University of Minnesota law student Ceena Idicula and William Mitchell School of Law graduate Elizabeth Meske. At the conclusion of the mock trial, students received a copy of *Special Mission Nemesis*, translated by Dr. Lou Ann Matossian, who both assisted with and attended the mock trial. The books were a generous gift from Leroy Erickson, President of the Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota.



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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# What to Expect from Russian Foreign Policy?

## Four Scenarios and Implications for Armenia

WATERTOWN – The Armenian National Committee (ANC) of Eastern Massachusetts will present a lecture by Arthur Martirosyan at the Watertown Savings Bank Meeting Room, Watertown Free Public Library, 123 Main St., on Thursday, February 18, at 7 p.m.

The lecture series, named after, Michael Varantian, one of the luminaries and intellectuals of the Armenian independence and renaissance movement of the late 19th century, will feature informative talks and panel discussions to help inform, discuss, and articulate current geopolitical events in Armenia and its neighboring region. In light of the ever-changing developments in the political landscape of the region, and cognizant of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the rebirth of the Republic of Armenia, better understanding of the dynamics of the dominant powers and shifting alignments of the interested parties will shed light onto and

help formulate the participatory strategies of the Armenian nation, and its greatest resource, the Diaspora.

Martirosyan is a senior consultant with CMPartners, a Cambridge-based consulting company, founded by Prof. Roger Fisher and his students. In 1994 he joined the Harvard Negotiation Project (HNP) and has since worked with Fisher on several ethno-political and corporate negotiation projects. From 2001 through 2008, he was the director of the Momentum Program: Negotiation Culture Change in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). In his 22-year career as a negotiation specialist, Martirosyan has been involved in the design and implementation of a series of successful strategic assistance projects in the complex ethno-political conflicts of Chechnya, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Israel-Palestine, Iraq and Kosovo. Martirosyan designed innovative approaches to studying the impact of stereotyping on negotiations and the role of media in transforming cognitive and attitudinal aspects of

public opinion. From 2003 to 2008, Martirosyan managed the Israeli Palestinian Negotiation Partners program engaging senior technical advisors to the top decision-makers of the sides in a joint negotiation skills development process. For ten years now he has been involved with efforts at building a network of professional negotiators in Iraq.

By providing a platform of experts in the fields of political science, economics and international law and diplomacy to share their knowledge and experience, the ANC strives to provide the community with a deeper understanding of the current state of affairs and their overt and covert driving forces. It hopes that well informed citizens will engage more effectively in political discourse and will affect positive change towards a better future for their adopted as well as ancestral homelands. This, we believe, is at the core of the democratic principles of the free society we live in, and which we collectively pledge to reinforce, nurture and sustain in our 25-year-young republic.

Recent prominent events involving Russia

such as the Ukrainian and Syrian crises, the launch of the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Russian-Turkish geopolitical standoff clearly illustrate that Russia is repositioning itself in the international arena by forcefully demonstrating the post-Soviet space as a focus of its foreign policy. This post-Soviet resurgence has already had a significant impact on developments in the region and on Armenia and Artsakh in particular. Most International Relations and former Soviet studies scholars of the Russian foreign policy under Putin's rule have been drawing linear predictions of his next moves with rare success stories. To get post-Soviet Russia right requires thinking in scenarios, i.e. Putin's preferred method. In order to explain Russian foreign policy choices and decisions, Martirosyan will explore four core possible scenarios and their current probabilities. It is imperative that Armenian policy-makers be prepared to exploit to the full extent every opportunity, neutralize threats and meet challenges contained in these scenarios.

## Panel at Northeastern to Consider Nagorno-Karabagh's Past, Present and Future

BOSTON – Dr. Anna Ohanyan, Richard B. Finnegan Distinguished Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Stonehill College, will moderate a panel discussion titled “Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh): Past, Present, and Future,” on Friday, February 12, at 7 p.m., at Northeastern University, McLeod Suites, Curry Student Center (4rd floor), 346 Huntington Ave.

Dr. Simon Payaslian, Charles K. and Elisabeth M. Kenosian Chair in Modern Armenian History and Literature at Boston University, will provide an historical introduction to the discussion.

The program is organized by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and is co-sponsored by the Northeastern Armenian Students Association.

The challenges faced by Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh) have their roots in the historical

maneuverings of regional powers and in actions taken at both the birth and the death of the Soviet Union. Today, more than two decades after the war with Azerbaijan that resulted in Karabagh's precarious state of autonomy, its future remains uncertain.

How should Nagorno-Karabagh deal with Azeri border aggression? Should it attempt to trade territories for peace and recognition from Azerbaijan? What are the most important ways for diasporan Armenians to support Karabagh? What does Karabagh's long-term future look like? Our panelists will explore these and other timely issues at this forum.

The program is free and open to the public. There will be a reception and refreshments immediately following the program and question-and-answer session. Parking is available at Gainsborough Garage and other campus parking facilities.



Prof. Anna Ohanyan



Prof. Simon Payaslian

## Ümit Kurt to Speak on Turkish Genocide Denial

FRESNO – Clark University doctoral candidate Ümit Kurt will attempt to answer the question “Why Does Turkey Deny the Armenian Genocide?” in a talk at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 10, in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium, Room 191, on the Fresno State campus.

The lecture is the third in the Armenian Studies Program Spring 2016 Lecture Series, with the support of the Leon S. Peters Foundation.

One of the most important – and possibly the most sensitive – landmarks of modern Turkish history and the formation of Turkey's political and socio-cultural climate is the Armenian Genocide. By the same token, this issue is a taboo in Turkish political history. The question widely asked is “Why does Turkey deny the Armenian Genocide?” This question should be examined at two levels: state and society. It is correct to say that there has been strong state denial of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. Yet, one should also bear in mind that this strong state denialism has also been supported and reinforced by different sections of society. In this lecture, Kurt will analyze the societal dimensions of Turkish denial of Armenian Genocide and also explore the reasons behind Turkey's inability to come to terms with its past.

Kurt is a PhD candidate at Holocaust and Genocide Studies Program in the History Department of Clark University and completing his dissertation. He has written extensively on confiscation of Armenian properties, Armenian Genocide, early modern Turkish nationalism and Aintab Armenians. He is the author of the *Great, Hopeless Turkish Race: Fundamentals of Turkish Nationalism in the Turkish Homeland 1911-1916* (Istanbul: İletisim Publishing House, 2012) and editor of the *Revolt and Destruction: Construction of the State from Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic and Collective Violence* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Publishing House, 2015). He teaches history at Sabanci University in Istanbul and is the author, with Taner Akçam, of *The Spirit of the Laws: The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015). The lecture is free and open to the public.



Ümit Kurt

## St. Nersess Summer Conferences

ARMONK, N.Y. – St. Nersess Armenian Seminary will continue its long history of hosting summer conferences for high school and post-high school students. For the first time, each conference will be held on the new St. Nersess campus in Armonk. Applications are now being accepted for all four sessions:

Deacons' Training Program in Jerusalem: June 25–July 3, directed by V. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan

High School Summer Conference A: July 15 – 24, directed by Rev. Ghevond Ajamian

High School Summer Conference B: July 29 – August 7, directed by Rev. Fr. Shnork Souin

Post High School Summer Conference: August 9 – 13, directed by Rev. Fr. Samuel Rith-Najarian

This summer, St. Nersess will unveil a new curriculum for the Summer Conferences which will include topics such as Armenian Church History and Doctrine, Sacraments, Armenian Religious Art, Contemporary Issues, Modern and Classical Armenian, the Life of Christ, The Creed, Saints & Martyrs, and more.

Since its inception in 1963, the summer conferences have offered young people Bible study sessions, daily worship, lectures from clergy and lay leaders, Armenian language instruction, as well as sports and outings. Last summer, St. Nersess welcomed over 75 high school and college aged students to learn more about their Christian faith and heritage. Each day, a new topic of instruction is offered including classical Armenian, in-depth historical teachings of the Armenian Church, teachings from the Gospel, Bible meditations, explanations of the Divine Liturgy, and how the Armenian Church com-

pires in its teachings to other denominations. Students are enriched and fulfilled with a deeper understanding of their faith.

For the Deacons' Training Program, young men gain a deeper understanding of the church's worship services through practical workshops and interactive classes. Students are placed in classes according to experience. In Level I, students are introduced to the duties of an acolyte. In Levels II and III, students are introduced to liturgical practicum. All students take Armenian classes and voice lessons. Upon completion of the program, students return to their home parishes with polished liturgical skills and a stronger faith.

In addition to the timely topics presented to the participants during their conference, the attendees also experience a special trip to the local assisted living Armenian homes. These outings allow participants the opportunity to visit, learn from, and pray with our wise and valued elder community members.

And for the past 10 years, two students from the Sts. Tarkmanchatz School of Jerusalem's Armenian Patriarchate have attended a high school session. Thanks to the coordinated efforts between the Very Rev. Fr. Norayr Kazarian, principal of the school, and Fr. Mardiros Chevian, dean of St. Nersess, as well as generous benefactors and supporters who financially support their visit, these high school students from Jerusalem are provided a special opportunity to interact with their American counterparts and enhance their spiritual life and knowledge.

Registration for the St. Nersess Summer Conferences is available online and by mail. A maximum of 25 participants will be accepted to each session. To download a brochure and register, go to [www.stnersess.edu](http://www.stnersess.edu).





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# California State Coastal Commission Approves New Church Campus

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – In a vote of 11-0, the California State Coastal Commission approved St. John Garabed Armenian Church's application to build a new church campus near Del Mar. The vote was taken on Thursday, January 14, in the San Diego County Board of Supervisors Chambers. The new campus, which will be built in stages over a period of several years, will include a sanctuary, social hall, education center, library, gymnasium, youth center, Armenian heritage park, picnic and meditation space, and abundant parking.

For more than one year, the church's application has been under review by Coastal Commission staff. The church made numerous revisions and adjustments to be in compliance with coastal regulations. In fall 2015, Coastal staff sent a report to the commissioners stating that the church had met all necessary requirements with the exception of two staff-recommended conditions. Condition 1A proposed that the height of the church be lowered from 85 feet to 50 feet. Condition 1B proposed that the location of the church be moved to the back of the property (on the south side) so it would be less visible, essentially screening it from view.

In his remarks to the Coastal commissioners, Harry Krikorian, chairman of the church's Trust Fund Committee, stated, "Our proposed plans are for a place of worship, a place to socialize, a place for remembrance, and a place to preserve our culture, traditions and heritage. We are not a commercial enterprise but a non-profit Christian Church with a rich and proud history."

"Therefore, we disagree with staff that building a 50 foot church without the dome as they suggest is equally good and as functional as our design. We respect Coastal staff who reviewed and analyzed our project, however we find that conditions 1A & 1B do not meet the needs of our church nor satisfy our religious requirements."

Marcela Escobar-Eck, principal at the Atlantis Group and professional consultant for the project, stated, "This plan preserves the sensitive

habitat and promotes the biological and scenic corridors of its coastal location. The property lies 1.8 miles from the ocean and encompasses a total of 13.4 acres. This project will be developing 4.23 acres of land while preserving 9.18 acres. I understand the issue about precedent in approving the church's 85 ft. dome, but this area is zoned for agricultural use that includes

center for all to gather. The church facilities will be open to the general public for events, recreation, and open space. It will be a destination for the Armenian diaspora, international historians, tourists and many others."

San Diego native Lisa Kirazian Kradjian stated, "We ask that you please do your utmost to approve the original proposal, with its beautiful

the Western Diocese, stated, "This is a historic day for us as we present this proposal, and it comes in the context of a very important time in our church history. Just recently we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, and very soon we will be celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Western Diocese. This church campus will not only be a symbol of our Christian faith, but also a stronghold to unite communities around the world. On behalf of the Diocesan clergy, the Diocesan Council, and all Armenians, I respectfully ask you to accept the proposal as it has been presented."

Joe Kellejian, former long-time mayor of Solana Beach, concluded the church's presentation by reminding the commissioners that the grandstand at the Del Mar racetrack is over 85 ft. tall and over a block long, and west of the I-5 freeway, well within the jurisdiction of the Coastal Commission.

Commissioner Greg Cox stated, "This property is barely in the coastal zone. It preserves the wildlife corridors and the integrity of the environmental area. This is a beautiful structure that will enhance our community. In my opinion, I think it would be iconic. I also think that staff has overreached on these two conditions."

Cox made a motion to approve the application, with an amending motion to delete Conditions 1A and 1B; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Mark Vargas. The Coastal Commission approved both the amendment and main motion with a unanimous vote.

The history of this project dates back to 2008 when the Trust Fund Committee of St. John Garabed Armenian Church purchased close to 14 acres of premium property near Del Mar, California. On October 30, 2014, the project received unanimous approval by the City Planning Commission. The new property is located at 13860 El Camino Real in the City of San Diego between Del Mar Heights Rd. and Via de la Valle.



The supporters of the new Armenian church outside San Diego

the development of a church."

Maria Mehranian, an urban planner and managing partner at the Cordoba Corporation, said, "Since its inception, \$1.2 million has been raised in support of the project. These funds have been raised because of the potential the church holds for being more than just a building, but rather a symbol of the community and

design, careful environmental stewardship and honestly the most seamlessly integrated layout that is safest for our youth and families. Armenians have been contributing to the prosperity and innovation of California for well over one hundred years. Allow us to keep thriving, to keep serving our state and our people."

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of



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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# AGBU Awarded Scholarships to Students in Nearly 30 Countries, Including Many Women in STEM Fields

NEW YORK – In the 2015-2016 academic year, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) awarded nearly \$1 million in scholarships to 435 students in nearly 30 countries. For almost a century, the AGBU Scholarship Program has helped further the educational pursuits of tens of thousands of promising young Armenian university students enrolled at some of the world's top-ranked universities.

Each year, AGBU accepts applications for five categories of scholarships: Heritage Scholar Grants for high-achieving high school seniors at the three AGBU high schools in the United States; US Graduate Fellowships for students in professional, master's and doctoral programs in the United States; International Scholarships for students studying outside the United States with special funds for the United Kingdom, France and Syria; Performing Arts Fellowships for undergraduate and graduate students in music, drama and film; and Religious Studies Fellowships for graduate students pursuing theology and youth ministry.

This year, the AGBU Scholarship Committee was particularly proud to support young women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The STEM fields are one of the fastest growing employment sectors and considering its historically large gender imbalance, the committee was honored to help prepare Armenian women for successful careers in these areas.

Susie Sargsyan, a doctoral candidate in applied mathematics at the University of Washington, began her academic interest in math at Yerevan State University: "Education in Armenia still carries the remnants of the Soviet Union methodology and pays too much attention to theory and less to practice. This fact made me want to continue my studies abroad." But Susie is not planning on staying in the United States after she graduates. She intends to return to Armenia and develop the field of applied mathematics in her native country with a focus on real world application. "It was great to finally see how mathematics can be applied for modeling and better understanding diseases, the behavior of neurons, predicting weather, analyzing data and more. All these facets keep me amazed and excited about the future and what



Susie Sargsyan is a doctoral candidate in applied mathematics at the University of Washington.



Armig Kabrelian is an undergraduate in biological chemistry at Johannes Kepler University in Linz, Austria.

I can do using mathematics." During the school year, Susie works as a research and teaching assistant, but during the summers her budget is tight: "It's very stressful to think about saving money when I'm not working. The AGBU scholarship helped me feel less pressure, so that I could concentrate on my research and for that I am grateful!"

The AGBU Fellowship has also helped medical students like Claire Alexanian, a first-year student at the Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington DC. For Claire, medi-

cine runs in her family: "My mother, a practicing pediatrician, was a tremendous influence on me growing up. From a young age, she would teach me about science and medicine, which really piqued my interest in the field. My love of science and inclination to help others made medicine a natural fit for me." At Georgetown, Claire has encountered a supportive learning environment with stellar classmates and patients who often share their personal stories with her. But she is not just acquainted with patients in the American healthcare system. Claire spent July 2015 in Armenia with the Armenian American Health Professional Organization (AAHPO) to provide medical treatment for villages, where there is a lack of access and affordability. "As my first exposure to healthcare in Armenia, I became better acquainted with their healthcare system and have a clear understanding of their medical needs." She hopes to come back in the future and continue to improve the health in the villages of Armenia, but in the meantime, she will continue to study on an AGBU scholarship, which has helped her with her medical school essentials: books, tuition and her very first stethoscope.

Outside the United States, the AGBU Scholarship Program has also helped young women to excel in the STEM fields. In Istanbul, Turkey, Sila Temizel is not only a master's stu-

dent in environmental engineering at Bogaziçi University, but also a researcher at the Bogaziçi University Sustainable Development and Cleaner Production Center, which focuses on eco-efficiency, sustainable consumption and green entrepreneurship in Turkey. "Environmental issues together with chemistry captured my interest as an undergraduate. I felt I should gain some practical experience working in a research environment to gain first-hand knowledge of what the life of a research scientist entails. I have enjoyed every moment of my work: especially the opportunity to participate in important projects and discuss ideas with senior engineers and chemists." After Sila graduates, she hopes to pursue engineering as a doctoral student in the United States. "The AGBU scholarship has enabled me to buy important books related to engineering and even the laptop I needed to present at conferences in Italy and Spain as well as prepare my PhD applications."

In Linz, Austria, Armig Kabrelian is pursuing her bachelor's degree in biological chemistry at Johannes Kepler University. Armig, born and raised in Aleppo, fled to Austria with her family when the conflict began in Syria. "As a non-European Union student, tuition fees are very expensive at my university. I want to thank AGBU for awarding me this scholarship and easing the financial burden on me and my family." As a child, Armig was raised on stories of Armenians with great talents, including scientists, and she was determined to become one of these great talents herself. "My motivation to continue my education in the sciences was to strengthen Armenian society and keep the Armenian voice strong in this challenging world. Every time I hear about achievements of fellow Armenians, I feel a great sense of pride."

Also in Europe, Arpine Martirosyan studies civil

engineering at the Dresden University of Technology in Germany. Arpine grew up in the up-and-coming Armenian town of Dilijan, home to the prestigious United World College Dilijan. "During my childhood, I saw many important schools and factories in my hometown built by my grandparents and parents. It is an indescribable feeling when one can see that the results of his work help people over so many years." This feeling led Arpine to study bridge and tunnel design to help her country develop with modern technologies and creative designs. In Germany, she has seen herself grow as a professional and gain international experience, including language skills which Arpine has used her AGBU scholarship to improve: "Thanks to my scholarship, I could afford German language courses, which will be a great help for increasing my career opportunities in Germany."

The AGBU Scholarship Program is now accepting applications for its 2016-2017 season. Visit <http://www.agbu-scholarship.org/> to apply.



Claire Alexanian, a medical student at the Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington D.C., with her mother pediatrician Dr. Herminee Alexanian.

## Southern Connecticut State University President Papazian to Lead San Jose State University

SAN JOSE, Calif. – Mark Ojakian, president of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system, has announced that Mary A. Papazian will resign as president of Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) effective July 1, 2016, and will become the 29th president of San José State University.

In announcing her resignation, Ojakian noted that while Papazian has only served as SCSU president since 2011, she has nevertheless produced a distinguished record of student success and accomplishment. "From major construction projects that have changed the face of SCSU, to urban initiatives and the growth of STEM programs to meet workforce development needs, President Papazian has served the SCSU community with exceptional vision and integrity," said Ojakian. "We are indeed fortunate to have had the benefit of her extraordinary leadership."

"The Board of Regents greatly appreciates President Papazian's service and commitment to Southern Connecticut State University and its students," said Board of Regents Chairman Nicholas Donofrio. "We wish her well in her future endeavors and we thank her for her service to the state, CSCU community and Southern Connecticut State University."

Since 2011, Papazian – the 11th president of SCSU – led a period of institutional advancement. During her tenure, she established a Student Success Taskforce that enhanced student services and support, and the first Presidents Commission on Campus Climate and Inclusion. Major construction projects included the new School of Business, renovation of Buley Library, and the Academic Laboratory Science Building and changed the face of the SCSU campus.

While president, she also established the Office for STEM innovation and Leadership, where SCSU's new science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs were created in alignment with the needs of a 21st century economy. In spring 2015, Papazian and New Haven Mayor Toni Harp announced a new bioscience partnership linking SCSU and the City of New Haven. In addition, the university is now developing an initiative with the city of Bridgeport, focusing on education, business and environmental science.

During her time at SCSU, Papazian also led the university through the final phase of a successful academic accreditation process, expanded SCSU's community engagement by cultivating stronger ties to SCSU's feeder K-12 school districts, and began the planning phase in partnership with New Haven Public Schools to place a K-4 magnet school on campus. Her efforts enabled SCSU to earn a place on the coveted President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

Before joining SCSU, Papazian was provost and senior vice president for Academic Affairs at Lehman College at the City University of New York. She also served as dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Montclair State University in New Jersey, and associate dean of the College of Arts and Science at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. At Oakland University where she also was an assistant, associate and tenured professor of English. She holds a bachelor's, master's and PhD in English literature from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Papazian is active in many community organizations, and is chair of the Connecticut Campus Compact governance sub-committee, president of the Greater New Haven Heart Walk and director of New Haven Promise, a scholarship and support program to promote college education for New Haven Public school students. In 2014, she received the Athena Leadership Award from the Greater New Haven and Quinnipiac Chambers of Commerce, and a state delegation member for Complete College America.



Dr. Mary Papazian



# Arts & Living

## NAASR Los Angeles Event to Feature Chris Bohjalian, Eric Nazarian

LOS ANGELES – The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will hold a special event featuring best-selling author Chris Bohjalian and acclaimed filmmaker Eric Nazarian on Saturday, February 27, at 6 p.m. at the UCLA Faculty Center, California Room, 480 Charles Young Drive East.

The event, which is an expression of thanks to the members of NAASR's Leadership Circle, will include a dinner reception followed by Bohjalian and Nazarian in a dialogue on the screen adaptation of Bohjalian's novel *The Sandcastle Girls*, as well as the introduction of newly appointed NAASR Executive Director Sarah B. Ignatius to give an update on NAASR initiatives.

In addition to members of NAASR's Board of Directors and Leadership Circle and invited guests, the event is also open to the public at a cost of \$100 per person, which includes dinner and one year of membership in NAASR. To make a reservation, email NAASR Board Member Dr. Gregory Ketabgian at gketabgian@yahoo.com.



Chris Bohjalian



Eric Nazarian

Bohjalian is the author of 18 books, including his new novel, *The Guest Room*. His work has been translated into more than 30 languages and been adapted for three movies. His books have been chosen as Best Books of the Year by the *Washington Post*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Hartford Courant*, the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Bookpage* and

*Salon*. His awards include the ANCA Freedom Award for his work educating Americans about the Armenian Genocide; the ANCA Arts and Letters Award for *The Sandcastle Girls*, as well as the Saint Mesrob Mashdots Medal; the New England Society Book Award for *The Night Strangers*; the New England Book Award; Russia's Soglasie (Concord) Award for *The Sandcastle Girls*; a Boston Public Library Literary Light; a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award for *Trans-Sister Radio* and the Anahid Literary Award. His novel, *Midwives*, was a number one *New York Times* bestseller, a selection of Oprah's Book Club, and a New England Booksellers Association Discovery pick.

Nazarian is an acclaimed screenwriter, director and producer. Born in Armenia and raised in Los Angeles, he holds a Bachelor of Arts in Film Production from the USC School of Cinematic Arts. "The Blue Hour," his first feature film, premiered at the 55th San Sebastian International Film Festival, receiving several awards on the international film festival circuit. In 2008 Nazarian received the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting for his screenplay, "Giants." In 2010 Nazarian made "Bolis," a short film about a descendant of a Genocide survivor in Istanbul, as part of the European Union's Capital of Culture program. Nazarian is currently working on the film adaptation of *The Sandcastle Girls*. He has lectured on the origins of cinema and on the Armenian Genocide on campuses across the US and Europe. He is a member of the Writer's Guild of America West and a Fellow of the USC Institute of Armenian Studies.

see NAASR, page 13



"Young Man," Conté crayon by Simon Samsonian, 1936

## Painter Samsonian's Family Promotes His Artistic Legacy

NEW YORK – Cubist-Impressionist Simon Samsonian (1912-2003) painted for six decades in Egypt and in the United States. Orphaned as a toddler by the murder of his parents and separated from his sister for decades, he was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide whose work became well known in Egypt. After moving to the United States, he continued painting, but, over the years, fell out of the spotlight. Now, his family, primarily his daughter Hilda Semerdjian and her son Alan, is trying to restore his place in the pantheon of significant internationally known painters.

**By Aram Arkun**  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

Alan Semerdjian is a writer, artist, musician and teacher. His first full-length book of poems reflects growing up in Samsonian's presence. In a recent interview he spoke about how the family is attempting to promote interest in Samsonian's legacy.

Samsonian was moved from orphanage to orphanage in the Ottoman Empire and Greece, and eventually transferred to Egypt. He did not even learn of his true surname (Klujian) until relatively late in life in 1960, when he was reunited with his sister in Alexandria, Egypt. He attended the Kalousdian Armenian School of Cairo, and then won a scholarship to go to the Leonardo da Vinci Art School in the same city. He later returned to the Kalousdian school to become its art teacher, and began to exhibit his paintings widely. In the 1950s, he visited the great art museums of Europe.

In 1961, he had a solo exhibition at le Salon de Caire, and an Egyptian Minister of Culture for the first time ever personally inaugurated the exhibit of an Armenian's works. During the 1960s, President of the Egyptian National Assembly Anwar Sadat, later to become Egypt's president, acquired one of Samsonian's paintings and wrote him a letter of praise. Several of Samsonian's pieces are held by the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art in Cairo.

He painted in a very cosmopolitan environment, and he had other active Armenian peers, such as Puzant Godjamamian, Ashot Zorayan and Hagop Hagopian. He was influenced by them and non-Armenian Egyptian painters such as Mahmoud Said and the symbolic work of Ahmed Morsi and Effat Nagy, according to Semerdjian, who categorizes him as "at heart, a Cubist-Impressionist with leanings towards Abstract Expressionism."

Samsonian was working in styles that had already been pioneered in Europe and elsewhere. "Samsonian's originality," according to Semerdjian, "is in the manner in which he brings together mid-20th-century aesthetics to create a narrative kind of abstraction that was not duplicated by any other artist in the Armenian Diaspora, to my knowledge, with the exception of [Arshile] Gorky...and most of the world understands Gorky through his nonfigurative work, so that might make

see LEGACY, page 12

## Ayline Amirayan Sings *Forget Me Not*

By Kay Mouradian

PASADENA, Calif. – I first heard about Ayline Amirayan's talent from her voice coach Charles Gevoian, whose tenor voice is well known here in Southern California. When Gevoian told me Ayline would perform her first original song *Forget Me Not* for the 100th commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at Montebello's Armenian Genocide Memorial last April, I made a special effort to be there. When Gevoian opened the program with the finest rendition I have ever heard of the *Star-Spangled Banner*, I knew the entire program would be filled with quality. I was not disappointed.

The Montebello Genocide Memorial opened in April 1968 and is the oldest memorial in the United States dedicated to Armenian Genocide victims. A yearly outdoor memorial service held every April attracts members of the Armenian community from all over the California southland and a capacity crowd of more than 500 attended the 1915 Centennial event on April 23.

Two well-known Armenian bands, the Element Band and the Greg Hosharian Band, along with solo vocalist Amirayan,



Singer Ayline Amirayan

helped elevate the somber energy. As I listened to Amirayan, accompanied by pianist Greg Hosharian, violinist Garik Terzian and percussionist George Bilezikjian, I wondered why I previously had not heard of her. She opened with three Armenian songs, and her obvious love for Armenian music resonated throughout the audience and affected me deeply.

Afterwards, when I interviewed Amirayan, she told me why she chose these three specific songs. The first one, *Kani Vur Djan* by Sayat Nova, was meant to remind the audience that Sayat Nova's music lives on and still influences the poetic artistry of the Armenian people.

Her second song, *Yeraz Im Yergir Hayrenik*, written by Yerevan songwriter and musician Robert Amirkhanyan is about love for Armenia. Through the work of the talented musicians of the present, such as Amirkhanyan, Amirayan understands how the preservation of the authenticity and beauty of Sayat Nova affects Armenian music over two hundred years after the latter's death.

Her next song was *Hye Herosneri Yerke*. "I wanted to thank the heroes of

see AMIRYAN, page 13





## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## 'Artist at War' Website Gives Voice to Artists From War-Torn Regions

KITTERY, Maine – Artists at War – offering testimonies of creative minds affected by brutalities of our times – today announced a new multi-media platform dedicated to bringing first-hand interviews with artists living in war zones, or displaced due to political conflicts, waging their own wars with their art. To learn more about Artists at War visit: <http://www.artistsatwar.net/> join the conversation on Facebook or contact the site's founder and creator, Jackie Abramian [Jackie@artistsatwar.net](mailto:Jackie@artistsatwar.net).

The site currently offers interviews with four artists: Berj Kailian (Painter, Armenian

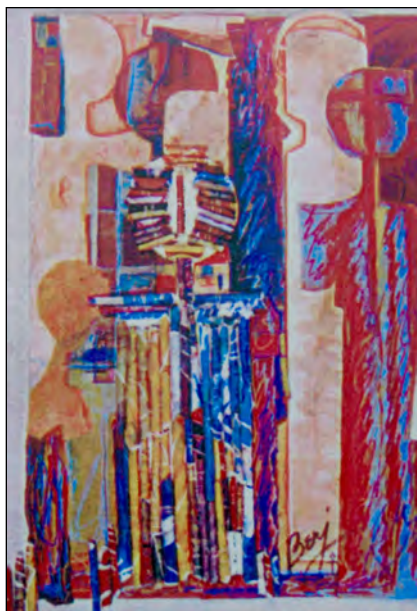
allow visitors to connect and engage directly with the artists. Additional interviews will be posted on ongoing basis.

The project is inspired by two major events that took place in 2015: The worldwide commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide – last century's first ethnic cleansing when 1.5 Armenians were annihilated and hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees were forced to flee to neighboring countries; The onset of the worst migration crisis since WWII, with the exodus of 60 million refugees and displaced individuals worldwide.

In its "It all Started Here" page, Abramian pays tribute to artists Kailian and Bak, survivors of the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust respectively. Abramian considers Kailian and Bak as pioneers of Artists at War, as their art focus on giving voice to the unspeakable crimes of humanity.

"The stark, painful dichotomy in today's war-torn regions of the world brings to light the obvious unlearned lessons of our history," Abramian said. "As a descendent of the Armenian Genocide survivors, I've heard too many times the "never again" slogans uttered by world leaders, only to witness orders of new wars signed into action. Artists at War makes audible the unheard voices of artists living in war zones – and at war armed with their art. It offers stark details of altered lives of millions of ordinary citizens who never participated in declaring wars but inadvertently became front line victims."

Artists at War is a multi-media site of interviews with and views of artists living in war zones, or as war refugees from conflict zones, exiled into adopted countries, waging global art wars to make audible the fears, horrors, and plights of oppression, ethnic cleansing and tyranny. The site is cre-



A work by Berj Kailian

Genocide survivor), Sam Bak (Painter, Jewish Holocaust survivor), Rania Kinge (Social Entrepreneur, jewelry designer - Damascus, Syria) and Nada Abu Taleb (Painter - Sana'a, Yemen). Each artist's page includes links to social media sites that



A work by Nada Abu Taleb

ated by author Jackie Abramian, whose previously published books include interviews with contemporary Armenian artists, and exiled artists living in the US. For more

information visit: <http://www.artistsatwar.net/home.html>

Contact Jackie Abramian at [Jackie@artistsatwar.net](mailto:Jackie@artistsatwar.net)

## AIWA-SF and Hearts of Armenia Launch First Book Signing in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO – Armenian International Women's Association-San Francisco (AIWA-SF) members mixed and mingled with friends and family of Meghedi Melody Nazarian at a private residence in the Bay Area in December for the official launch of *Hearts of Armenia*, a picture book filled with 87 hearts captured by Meghedi during her stay in Armenia from April through October 2015. The book also includes inspirational quotes within its 48 pages. Half the proceeds are donated to AIWA-SF to support the Women's Support Center of Yerevan dedicated to helping women and families follow their heart.

It was not only an event to debut the book; it was also a celebration of love and friendship. "The *Hearts of Armenia* launch party was just

as heartfelt and beautiful as the book itself. It was a gathering of Armenian women who wanted to support both the author and the Women's Support Center in Armenia. It was lovely to hear from Meghedi about her emo-



Signing copies of *Hearts of Armenia*



Guests at the signing

tional journey and how the book came to life in our Motherland. It made my heart smile," said one guest, Lori Aintablian.

Meleeneh DerHartunian shared her thoughts, too: "The highlight of the *Hearts of Armenia* launch event was when Meghedi read the foreword from her book aloud to the entire group. Meghedi's emotional, spiritual and physical journey in Armenia are not only manifested in those words, but also in the unique images she has captured in her book, allowing readers to travel side-by-side with her with the turn of each page."

AIWA-SF President Christine Soussa also spoke, telling the crowd about her first trip to Armenia over the summer and how the meeting

with Nazarian and the partnership with Hearts of Armenia came about. "Meghedi was telling me about her vision, and whether it was serendipity, everything happened quickly and naturally. I'm really happy you're seeing your vision through and that of all the organizations you can partner with, you picked AIWA-SF," she said.

Before heading home with a copy of the book, guests enjoyed appetizers, including Yeragooyin heart-shaped cookies made by Nanor Darakjian, and sipped on wine, donated by Soussa. More book signings are in the works for Los Angeles, Yerevan, Boston and New York, but can also be purchased online at [heartsofarmenia.com](http://heartsofarmenia.com).



# Painter Samsonian's Family Promotes His Artistic Legacy

LEGACY, from page 10

Samsonian even more unique." There is at present one monographic work on *Samsonian: M. Haigentz's Simon Samsonian: His World Through Paintings*. (New York: Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1978.

Moving to New York had a direct impact on Samsonian's art. Semerdjian said, "The skyline of NYC was a paradise for his Cubist inclinations and he created a small but gorgeous set of pieces in response to it. NYC's great paradox – that despite its hustle and bustle and the jaded and disaffected stereotypes, there are tremendous moments of intimacy – was also a source of inspiration and fascinated him. See 'In the Subway,' which was one of the first large pieces he made when he got here. It's a painting of a couple caught in a beautiful moment of intimacy on the subway...a head resting on a shoulder. Another example of how we need each other."

On the other hand, despite the powerful effect of the Armenian Genocide on Samsonian's life, he only created a few pieces

Samsonian has not been forgotten in Armenia. His works are still occasionally exhibited there. Semerdjian visited Yerevan's National Gallery of Art six years ago and saw its collection of 25 Samsonian oils. He also visited painter Hagop Hagopian, who told him "You know, your grandfather was the one we all looked up to in Cairo."

Armenians in various parts of the diaspora also still remember Samsonian. Semerdjian said that often they contact him via email to "discuss the impact of a piece of art they bought or he gave them...He made indelible impressions, and I think he made them because of the quality of his work and vision, which lives on in private collections, museums, and family homes across the globe."

Still, Samsonian is not remembered at the same level as other notable Armenian painters such as Gorky. Semerdjian said that part of the reason was that Samsonian was "not much of a business man. He didn't promote very well." His wife tried to fill in the void, but she died at an

tion through exhibitions, etc., and was beloved by so many, sells privately for \$15-20,000 has much to do with the kind of machine that is creating the story/allure. And to do that requires capital and time and business savvy."

Now the family has initiated an effort to change this situation. It has begun to have his private collection of works professionally catalogued and photographed, and is trying to get scholars interested in placing Samsonian in the broader context of mid-twentieth century painting and Armenian diaspora painting in particular. It is approaching museums, according to Semerdjian, in order to get shows covering his seven decades of work. The first one recently took place at the Armenian Museum of America last September through November, and plans are afoot to have a version of this exhibition in Los Angeles by late spring of this year.

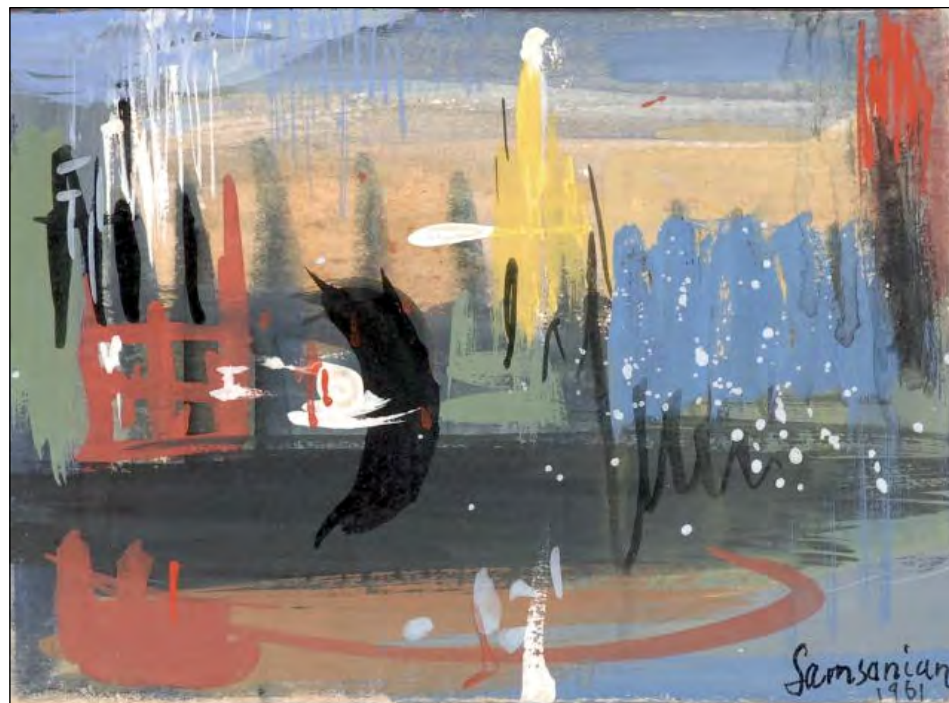
Samsonian's work sometimes pops up in unexpected places. A publishing company called McDougal Little used some of his images in a ninth grade textbook featuring contemporary artwork paired with contemporary literature. However, the family had to remain vigilant and ended up pursuing a class action lawsuit because the company published many more

copies than it had agreed to originally with Samsonian.

Another way the heirs promote his art is through the website rediscoveredmasters.com, which presents biographical information and images of 26 of his works. This website "proactively" promotes artists it feels are worthwhile to museums, galleries and collectors through curated exhibitions and essays. A second Armenian artist Rediscovered Masters promotes is Arthur Pinajian.

Samsonian's works are for sale privately through the family and through the Rediscovered Masters website. Gallery Z in Providence, according to Semerdjian, has a few pieces too. Samsonian does have a dedicated group of followers outside of the art auction house world. His smaller pieces sell for around \$1,000, while the larger oils are between \$15,000 and \$20,000 at present.

Semerdjian is optimistic about the future of Samsonian's works. He concluded, "But what's remarkable is how his work affected people and continues to affect. One look at those bold colors and gorgeous strokes and...I don't know...it just seems to continue to resonate and vibrate at a high frequency for those in the know."



"The Memory of the Valley," watercolor and ink by Simon Samsonian, 1962

directly on that theme. One was for a show on the fiftieth anniversary of the Genocide. There is however an indirect effect. Semerdjian said that "his work captures these glances into what I like to refer to as interpersonal or sometimes intrapersonal moments of reflections in our lives. One critic said that what the genocide took away for Samsonian he built back up in his paintings. That's why you see so many images of parenthood, protection, dark musings, and simple exchanges between lovers in the figurative works. The nonfigurative stuff is purely evocative." Semerdjian further explained that this means "evocative of emotional states of being that became motifs for him: protection, family, love, hopelessness, partnership, etc."

early age. Afterwards, Samsonian stopped trying to show and sell his works. He never tried to use a publicist, as far as Semerdjian knows. The move to the US also changed his exposure to the outside world. Semerdjian speculates that if he had stayed in Egypt his works might have appeared in big auctions of Middle Eastern art and received high valuations.

Furthermore, Semerdjian pointed out that "Money, or rather investment in the form of money – thinking of one's art as a business creates value. Why one painter who really never won any recognition – whether it be through community groups or state agencies – sells works posthumously at \$100,000 [each] and another who did win awards and garner atten-

## St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School To Celebrate 30th Anniversary in March

WATERTOWN – On Saturday, March 12, St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School (SSAES) will celebrate its 30th anniversary at the Sorensen Center for the Arts on the campus of Babson College in Wellesley, Mass.

This event is designed to bring together the Armenian community to celebrate the school's achievements.

"Celebrating our school's 30th anniversary is a testament to the resilience of our Armenian community and its unshakable belief in the value of a solid Armenian education," said Principal Houry Boyamian.

Located in Watertown, SSAES consists of a pre-school and an elementary school with a bilingual curriculum steeped in Armenian culture, including daily Armenian language lessons. Since 2004, every graduating

fifth grade class has taken a school-organized trip to Armenia.

A large group volunteers consisting of present and past parents is working to coordinate this event which is also a major fundraiser for the school. "We have a supportive community and we are expecting a great turnout," committee chair Sarkis Ourfalian noted.

The evening will start off with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, followed by a program in the theater-style auditorium, including a concert performance by singer Alla Levonyan from Armenia, and pianist Jasmin Atabekyan. The event will conclude with a dessert reception. Tickets are \$125 per person and may be purchased online: [www.mkt.com/ssaes](http://www.mkt.com/ssaes) or by e-mail at: [30years@ssaes.org](mailto:30years@ssaes.org).



Alla Levonyan



by Christine Vartanian Datian

## Avocado Crab Salad with Dijon-Mint Vinaigrette Dressing

### INGREDIENTS

4 large ripe avocados, halved and peeled  
1 1/2 pounds fresh cooked crab meat, cut up  
1/4 cup each red onions, red bell pepper, celery and/or celery tops, and green onions (finely chopped) and sweet gherkin pickles (minced)  
3/4 cup mayonnaise or Greek yogurt  
2 tablespoons fresh lemon or lime juice  
2 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley, minced  
4 hard-boiled eggs, roughly chopped  
4-6 slices well-cooked bacon, drained, broken into small pieces  
Sea salt, white pepper, Aleppo pepper or paprika to taste  
Bibb lettuce, sliced Roma tomatoes, black olives, celery tops (garnish) Lemon wedges (garnish)

### PREPARATION:

Combine the crab meat and the remaining salad ingredients in a large glass bowl, toss a few times, and check seasonings. Chill until ready to serve. Add dressing and salt to taste to individual portions

### Dijon-Mint Vinaigrette Dressing

### INGREDIENTS

2-3 tablespoons Dijon mustard  
3-4 tablespoons dry white wine  
2 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley, minced  
Juice of one large lemon  
1/2 cup olive oil  
1/4 cup fresh orange juice  
2 cloves garlic, mashed  
1/2 teaspoon each fresh chopped fresh mint, dill and thyme  
Sea salt and white pepper to taste

### PREPARATION:

Mix all dressing ingredients together in a blender or medium bowl. Adjust seasonings, adding more lemon juice or olive oil, if desired; chill before serving.

Spoon chilled salad into the prepared avocado halves (one avocado per person); drizzle with dressing or serve dressing on the side; garnish with lettuce, tomatoes, olives, lemon wedges, and celery tops. Serve with warmed rolls, lavosh or toasted pita bread.

Serves 4.

Christine's recipes have been published in the *Fresno Bee*, *Sunset* and *Cooking Light* magazines, and at <http://www.thearmeniankitchen.com/>.

For Christine's recipes that have been published in *Sunset* and *Cooking Light* Magazines, go to: <http://www.myrecipes.com/search/site/Datian>





## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## CALENDAR

## CALIFORNIA

**MARCH 6** — Author Dawn Anahid Mackeen to sign copies of her book *The Hundred-Year-Walk: An Armenian Odyssey*. St. Vartan Armenian Church, Sunday, Lecture/Book Presentation at St. Vartan Armenian Church. Sponsored by the AGBU, UC Berkeley Armenian Studies Department, and St. Vartan. 650 Spruce St, Oakland, CA.

**MARCH 16** — **Abril Books, Wednesday, Book reading and signing**, Author Dawn Anahid Mackeen *The Hundred-Year-Walk: An Armenian Odyssey*. 415 E. Broadway, Suite 102, Glendale, CA

## MASSACHUSETTS

**FEBRUARY 6** — **Tsapik, Tsapik Children's program featuring Nouné Karapetian and Zangakner** Performing Arts Ensemble. Sponsored by St. James Ereuni Armenian School. 4 p.m. at St. James Armenian Church Charles Mosesian Cultural & Youth Center - Keljik Hall, Watertown. Admission \$25; For tickets call Armine at 508-494-6008.

**FEBRUARY 12** — **Panel Discussion, "Nagorno-Karabagh: Where Is It Headed and How Did It Get There?"** 7 p.m., Friday. Moderated by Dr. Anna Ohanyan, Stonehill College. Introduction to history by Dr. Simon Payaslian, Boston University. At Northeastern University McLeod Suites, Curry Student Center, 3rd floor, 346 Huntington Ave., Boston. Organized by NAASR and the Northeastern Armenian Students Association.

**FEBRUARY 13** — **May 21** — **Multiple dates, authors E. Philip Brown and Tom Vartabedian will speak about their book, *Armenians of the Merrimack Valley*.** February 13, Book launch and presentation, 10 a.m. to noon, Haverhill Public Library, 99 Summer St.; February 18, Book-signing and presentation, 7 pm, Tewksbury Public Library, 300 Chandler St.; March 31, book-signing and presentation, 7 p.m., Buttonwoods Museum, 240 Water St., Haverhill and May 21, book-signing, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Vermette's Market, 6 Pond St., Amesbury.

**FEBRUARY 18** — **Thursday, 6 p.m., Hrant Dink Memorial Peace and Justice Lecture, "Complex Truths in Trials of Conflicts,"** Knafl Center, formerly Radcliffe Gym, 10 Garden St., Rakel Dink, Hrant Dink Foundation — Istanbul and Cemal Kafadar, Vehbi Koç Professor of Turkish Studies, Harvard University. Main speaker, Sir Geoffrey Nice, Gresham College Professor of Law. This event will be live streamed. Free and open to the public. Seating is limited. MAHINDRA HUMANITIES CENTER / HARVARD - mahindra.fas.harvard.edu

**FEBRUARY 20** — **Armenian Business Network Career Day** for Armenian high school seniors and college students, Saturday, 1-6 p.m., Microsoft N.E.R.D. Center in



**The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and the Northeastern University Armenian Students Association will host a panel discussion, "Nagorno Karabagh: Where is it headed and How did It Get There?" on Friday, February 12, on the campus of Northeastern University, at the McLeod Suites, Curry Student Center, 346 Huntington Ave., Boston. Speakers will be Prof. Simon Payaslian of Boston University and Prof. Anna Ohanyan of Stonehill College. The program will start at 7 p.m.**

Cambridge, MA. Meet prominent mentors from many professions. Don't miss out on this great opportunity! Registration required, Feb. 1 deadline. No charge. For details: [www.armenianbusinessnetwork.com](http://www.armenianbusinessnetwork.com).

**FEBRUARY 24** — **Resilient Women Series: Armenian Women in Iran**, Wednesday, 7 p.m. reception, 8 p.m. presentation. Speaker: Ani Babaian-Khachikian. Co-sponsored by AIWA New England Affiliate and NAASR at Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic Street, Arlington, MA. RSVP at [aiwanewengland@aol.com](mailto:aiwanewengland@aol.com) or 617.501.1215

**MARCH 6** — **Book Launch, commemorating International Women's Day: In the Ruins** by Zabel Yessayan. Sponsored by the Armenian International Women's Association. 2 p.m., Watertown Free Public Library.

**MARCH 6** — **Actor and director Jirair Papisian of Paris,**

**France** will speak and present a screening of his production of the musical "Gariné" at the AGBU Center, 247 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. Proceeds will support the Dikran Tchouhadjian International Institute. The event is cosponsored by the AGBU New England District Chapter, Amaras Art Alliance, and the Tekeyan Cultural Association. More details to come shortly.

**MAY 12** — **Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston Presents** the Dr. Michael and Joyce Kolligian Distinguished Speaker Series, with John Prendergast, founder of "The Enough Project," an initiative to end genocide and crimes against humanity, co-founder "The Sentry," a new investigative initiative focused on dismantling the networks financing conflict and atrocities. 7 p.m. Thursday at Charles and Nevart Talanian Cultural Hall, Holy Trinity, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge MA Info: 617.354.0632

**MAY 27** — **65th Annual Armenian Night at the Pops**, Featuring Boston Pops Orchestra, Keith Lockhart, Conductor; presenting Edvard Poghosian, cello. Presented by Friends of Armenian Culture Society. Symphony Hall, 301 Massachusetts Ave., Boston. For tickets and information, visit [facsboston.org](http://facsboston.org)

**SEPTEMBER 30** — **OCTOBER 2** — **25th Anniversary Celebration**, Armenian International Women's Association. Charles Hotel, Cambridge.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

**MARCH 19** — **Book-signing and presentation**, 1-4 p.m., Barnes and Noble, Salem, NH by authors E. Philip Brown and Tom Vartabedian will speak about their book, *Armenians of the Merrimack Valley*.

## NEW JERSEY

**MARCH 18** — **Cultural Committee of St. Thomas Armenian Church presents A Night at the Opera**, Anoush by Tigranian, HD Opera with K. Kasbarian, D. Levonian, A. Garabedian, M. Andonian. Friday, 7:30 p.m., Atrium, 174 Essex Drive, Tenafly, NJ 07670. Wine and cheese reception. Donation \$10 adults & children. For reservations, please contact: Talar Sesetyan Sarafian: (201) 240 - 8541 or Church Office: (201) 567 - 5446.

## NEW YORK

**APRIL 5** — **Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) presents Sahar Arzruni in Benefit Concert** "Together for Armenia," Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. An evening of solo piano music to benefit the Vanadzor Old Age Home administered by FAR. Merkin Concert Hall - Kaufman Music Center, 129 West 67th Street, New York. Tickets \$35, will go on sale in February 2016. Please contact FAR for more info: [nounefarusa.org](mailto:nounefarusa.org) or 212.889.5150.

## Ayline Amirayan Sings Forget Me Not

AMIRYAN, from page 10

Armenia and honor those brave soldiers who have fought for the Armenian cause," she said.

Amirayan prepared the audience for her closing song, *Forget Me Not*. "It was extremely important for me to write *Forget Me Not* in English," she said. "As Armenians, we know our story. For 100 years we've heard horrific stories through the eyes of our parents and grand parents. But I wanted the lyrics to be in English so non-Armenians would understand and feel why the title is *Forget Me Not!*"

When I listened to her latest rendition of *Forget Me Not*, the melody and lyrics kept playing over and over in my head, which suggests to me that this is a song that will be remembered. I asked her about her creative process.

"The melancholy melody came to me easily as I pictured my ancestors," Amirayan said. "The lyrics spoke to me through the forget-me-not flower, and I sang the song as if I were the flower itself. My voice reflects the

flower's black circle with the dark aftermath, the purple colors stretch toward unity and the yellow heart of the flower speaks to my vision of hope and my love for creativity."

The day after the Montebello event Amirayan joined 160,000 Armenians in the April 24th six-mile Marching to Justice walk in Los Angeles from Little Armenia in Hollywood to the Turkish consulate in Westward. "We have a beautiful culture," she told me and added, "the strength and determination of the march says we are all here. We hear the voices of our ancestors and as I walked uphill and looked back it was as if I saw thousands of our ancestors marching out of Turkey toward Deyr ez-Zor. But, we were not marching to death. We were marching toward life.

"We are still here and free," she continued. "How could an Armenian not be proud? We are unique. Hearing stories like how my grandfather, at age six, while hidden in a barn, witnessed Turkish soldiers decapitate his three

older brothers. We are the voices of those children who survived because of their strength. Had my grandfather been killed I wouldn't be here today."

The story of how Amirayan's grandfather survived is every Armenian's story. It has taken 100 years for the world to recognize the depth of our Armenian loss in 1915 and Amirayan's first songwriting experience gives our community a musical rendition of our tragedy. *Forget Me Not* needs to be in every Armenian home to acknowledge those who never returned.

Who knows how many beyond our community will be affected listening to the haunting melody and even just the first verse? "My black eye weeps a suffering tear, Painful dark memories of 100 years. My heart wilts, my soul is denied, I cry out for truth for those who died."

If you want to hear the melody and more of the lyrics of *Forget Me Not*, it is listed on iTunes for 99 cents. A bargain for the voice of the Armenian people and to never forget!

## NAASR Los Angeles Event to Feature Chris Bohjalian, Eric Nazarian

NAASR, from page 10

Ignatius is NAASR's first executive director. She earned a JD from Georgetown University and BA from Stanford University. She has served on NAASR's Board of Directors since 2014 and on its Executive Committee as treasurer. Her interest in Armenian Studies deepened after she went on the 2006 NAASR tour to Armenia and Historic Armenia, and upon returning drafted a young adult manuscript, "The Devil's Kaleidoscope," about a 14-year-old Armenian boy caught up in the Genocide. Her manuscript has received recognition from the New England Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators, the National League of American Pen Women, and the Somerville Arts Council. She has worked for more than 25 years as a lawyer and executive director, primarily with the Political Asylum Immigration Representation Project in Boston, defending people fleeing from persecution worldwide. She taught immigration and asylum law at Boston College Law School for ten years, co-authored *Immigration Law and the Family*, and authored a National Asylum Study for Harvard Law School.

The NAASR Leadership Circle was established to develop an elevated level of membership to join the association in facing the new challenges and demands of the 21st century. NAASR, established in 1955 and to mark its 60th anniversary during 2016, has led the movement to create, maintain, strengthen and perpetuate Armenian Studies in the United States, including pioneering initiatives to establish the first two chairs in Armenian Studies in the U.S. at Harvard University and UCLA.





# Mirror Spectator



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## COMMENTARY

# The Second Coming of President Hollande

By Edmond Y. Azadian

After the setback of the Switzerland vs. Perinçek verdict at the European Court of Human Rights this past October, it was most refreshing and reassuring to hear a major leader in Europe stand up for the Armenians. Indeed, the president of France, François Hollande, delivered a powerful speech in Paris on January 29 at the annual banquet organized by the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organizations in France (CCAF) and solemnly pledged to introduce a law in the French Parliament criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide. (See related story on page 1.)

Incidentally, unlike the US, Armenian lobbying groups in France cooperate under one umbrella, despite the traditional differences and animosities plaguing their political parties. The ARF (Dashnagtsoutiun) has strong ties with the ruling Socialist party and the ADL (Ramgavar) and other groupings and individuals are affiliated with RMP, the right-leaning party.

The CCAF annual banquet has become a tradition where movers and shakers in the community congregate. Therefore, any president or politician may miss the opportunity at his or her own peril. This time around, among the participants were legendary singer Charles Aznavour, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo and Armenian-American Sorbonne Professor Mark Moogalian, who wrestled a terrorist on a Paris-bound train from Brussels. The last two, incidentally, received awards at the banquet.

The highlight of the evening was the appearance of the French president, who delivered a well-crafted speech outlining the cause of justice presented by the recognition of the Armenian Genocide within the framework of French values and policies. He proudly said that he had visited Yerevan to participate in the centennial commemoration of the Genocide, representing not only the audience gathered at the banquet and his country France, but also in order to support the international struggle for justice.

While delving into the current crises in the world, especially the refugee problem, he indicated that today's refugees come from the same locations where the Armenian Genocide took place, Der Zor and Aleppo.

The French president discussed both phases of Armenian Genocide recognition at the French legislature: In 2001, the French parliament adopted a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide. However, in 2012, the French constitutional court struck down another law criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide. He was dignified enough not to put the blame on his predecessor – and opponent – President Nicholas Sarkozy, who was the actual culprit. Indeed, following the adoption of the law at the parliament, there was a time window when the president could sign and finalize the process, but Sarkozy, who had pledged to the Armenian community, with tearful eyes, that he would ratify the law, through deliberate procrastination allowed its opponents to gather enough votes at the Constitutional Court to annul the parliament's vote.

The French president painfully remembered the Perinçek case and he qualified another defeat at a further point not only a loss for the Armenian Genocide, but also a loss for France.

France has already a law on the books (Loi Gayssot) criminalizing the denial of the Jewish Holocaust. But legal experts can perform any manner of hair splitting to demonstrate that there exists a "difference" between the two cases.

The audience received the president's announcement that he has commissioned the former president of the European Court of Human Rights Jean-Paul Costa, who incidentally was in attendance, to draft a law "within a short time" to criminalize the denial of the Armenian Genocide in such a way as to stand up to any challenge, with a standing ovation.

In his concluding remarks, Hollande indicated that Armenia was ready to join Europe like its neighbor, Georgia. Perhaps the French president should have remembered that Armenia deserved to be part of Europe since World War I, when it stood by France and its allies, and by means of the Armenian Legion and soldiers in the Russian army, contributed to the Allied victory.

However, Mr. Hollande's predecessors reneged on their pledges to provide home rule to the Armenians in Cilicia under French protection. Had the Cilician plan survived, Europe would have extended all the way to Asia Minor, and today the West would not be obliged to beg Turkey to use Incirlik Airbase, which is at the heart of Cilicia, in Adana.

Perhaps Mr. Hollande's pledge to pass the new law represents the revenge of history. Great powers do not let remorse play a role in decision making, no matter what the cost is for another player.

Now that Armenia does not have too many friends which can stand by her on the international political stage, we have no choice but to be grateful to France for this new initiative. But at the same time, we need to remind them that this afterthought constitutes the minimum reprieve for their historic treachery in Cilicia, when the

French troops, after reassuring Armenians of their protection, evacuated Cilicia stealthily, leaving the unarmed Armenian population at the mercy of the Kemalist forces.

Although Hollande reassured his audience that his pledge is not tied to any elections, politics in Europe have witnessed many trials and tribulations, especially when it comes to issues related to the Armenians.

The French-Armenian activists deserve our appreciation. This is not the first time that they have been able to bring the president of the country to an Armenian function. In the US, with all fanfare possible, Armenians were able to oblige Vice President Joe Biden to attend a benign prayer service in Washington in May, during the centennial commemorations. That participation does not add up to a political endorsement. Perhaps, working together in the US we may be able to mobilize and politicize larger numbers of citizens, to have more visibility on the political radar.

At this point, let us welcome the second coming of Mr. Hollande and wait with anticipation for him to make good on his pledge.



# Undoing Years of Progress in Turkey

By Abdullah Demirbas

Entire towns and districts are under siege. Tanks ram through narrow alleys closed off by barricades and trenches. Residents are trapped indoors for weeks because of curfews. Those who venture outside risk sniper fire. Their bodies lie on the streets for days before they can be collected. Bullets fly in through windows and buildings collapse under shelling, killing those seeking shelter at home.

This is not Syria. This is Turkey, the European Union candidate country once hailed as a champion of the Arab Spring. The

conflict that restarted here after the breakdown of talks between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, last summer has turned into a devastating war in Kurdish towns and cities.

One of the most affected places is the city of Diyarbakir's historic Sur district, where I was mayor from 2004 to 2014. Sur has been under 24-hour curfew since the beginning of December. Many of its neighborhoods lie in ruins. Its historic buildings are damaged, once busy shops are shut, hospitals lack staff, and schools are closed. Tens of thousands of people have fled.

Sur's walls surround an ancient city that has been inhabited for millenniums. Its narrow

streets, spacious courtyards and elegant stone structures are reminders of a rich multicultural legacy – a legacy that has survived, albeit in an impoverished state, a century of conflict. Small but increasingly visible communities of Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Yazidis and other minorities live alongside adherents of diverse interpretations of Islam in what is now a predominantly Sunni Kurdish town.

Over the past decade, our municipality worked hard to revive and preserve this heritage. We oversaw the restoration of many historic buildings, including mosques and churches. The reopening of the Surp Giragos Armenian Church, which is now the largest see PROGRESS, page 15





## COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## Genocidaire Talaat's Last Interview Shortly Before his Assassination

Aubrey Herbert, British diplomat, adventurer, intelligence officer and Member of Parliament, conducted a rare interview with Talaat Pasha, in February 1921, just days before his assassination in Berlin by Soghomon Tehlirian.

As all-powerful Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, its despotic ruler and mastermind of the Armenian Genocide, Talaat had fled Turkey in November 1918 to avoid prosecution by the new regime. The 23-page interview with Talaat was published in 1924 (London) and 1925 (New York) in Herbert's memoirs titled, *Ben Kendim: A Record of Eastern Travel*.

Herbert first met Talaat in 1908 while stationed at the British Embassy in Constantinople (Istanbul). Eleven years later, Herbert received an unexpected letter from Talaat seeking a meeting with him "in any neutral country." Desperately seeking to rehabilitate his diabolical image in the West, Talaat claimed that "he was not responsible for the Armenian

massacres, that he could prove it, and that he was anxious to do so." Herbert turned down Talaat's request telling him: "I was very glad to hear that it was not he who was responsible for the Armenian massacres, but that I did not think any useful purpose could be served by our meeting at that time."

However, Herbert reversed his decision in February 1921, after Sir Basil Thomson, Director of British Intelligence, ordered him to leave immediately for Germany and meet Talaat. The secret rendezvous took place on February 26, in the small German town of Hamm.

Talaat told Herbert again that "he himself had always been against the attempted extermination of the Armenians." More incredibly, Talaat claimed that "he had twice protested against this policy, but had been overruled, he said, by the Germans."

Forgetting his own claims of innocence in the massacres, Talaat justified the mass killings by accusing Armenians of stabbing his country in the back during the war. Contradicting himself again, Talaat declared his support for Armenians by claiming that "he was in favor of granting autonomy to minorities in the most extended form, and would gladly consider any proposition that was made to him."

Talaat then switched the blame to the British for the Armenian killings: "You English cannot divest yourselves of responsibility in this matter. We Young Turks practically offered Turkey to you, and you refused us. One undoubted consequence has been the ruin of Christian minorities, whom your Prime Minister has insisted on treating as your allies. If the Greeks and Armenians are your allies when we are at war with you, you cannot expect our Turkish Government to treat them as friends."

Herbert and Talaat then decided to move to Dusseldorf,

Germany, where they continued their discreet conversation for two more days. Herbert reported Talaat's paradoxical attempt to cover up his role in the Armenian Genocide, while justifying this heinous crime. Talaat stated that "he had written a memorandum on the Armenian massacres which he was very anxious that British statesmen should read. Early in the war, in 1915, the Armenians had organized an army, and had attacked the Turks, who were then fighting the Russians. Three Armenian deputies had taken an active part; the alleged massacres of Moslems had taken place, accompanied by atrocities on women and children. He had twice opposed enforced migration, and he had been the author of an inquiry which resulted in the execution of a number of guilty Kurds and Turks."

Ironically, Talaat boldly told Herbert that he was not afraid of being assassinated. "He said that he never thought of it. Why should anyone dislike him? I said that Armenians might very well desire vengeance, after all that had been written about him in the papers. He brushed this aside." Two weeks later, Talaat was assassinated in Berlin by Soghomon Tehlirian.

Concluding his interview of Talaat, Herbert observed: "He died hated, indeed execrated, as few men have been in their generation. He may have been all that he was painted – I cannot say. I know that he had rare power and attraction. I do not know whether he was responsible or not for the Armenian massacres."

Only experts of that time period can verify the authenticity and accuracy of this lengthy interview. If true, what exactly were Talaat's aims in proposing "an Anglo-Turkish alliance" and why was the British government so anxious to talk to him?

## Undoing Years of Progress in Turkey

PROGRESS, from page 14

Armenian church in the Middle East, after nearly a century in ruins has encouraged "hidden" survivors in Turkey of the 1915 genocide to rediscover and embrace their heritage. Efforts to restore the old synagogue in memory of Sur's once vibrant Jewish community were underway before the eruption of violence last summer.

In 2012, Sur's community leaders established an interfaith dialogue group bringing together representatives of the region's different religions, cultures and civil society groups. Known as the Council of Forty, it has played a crucial role in keeping sectarian violence from reaching our city. Thanks to its efforts, Sur came to symbolize the vision of peaceful coexistence in a region plagued by intolerance.

It causes me immense grief to see that pluralism fall apart along with Sur's buildings. Sectarianism is destroying Syria before our very eyes. To avoid the same fate in Turkey, the Council of Forty has called on the government to lift the curfews, and asked all sides to end hostilities and return to peace talks within the framework of parliamentary democracy.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said recently that military operations in the besieged Kurdish towns would continue until they were "cleansed" of "terrorists." "You will be annihilated in those houses, those buildings, those ditches which you have dug," he threatened. But what peace can be built through destruction? Decades of military policies against the Kurds have shown only that violence begets more violence.

Many residents of these towns are poor families who were forced to flee the countryside when the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state was at its peak in the 1990s. Those who are digging trenches and declaring "self-rule" in Sur and other cities and towns of southeastern Turkey today are mostly Kurdish youths in their teens and 20s who were born into that earlier era of violence, poverty and displacement, and grew up in radicalized ghettos.

Now a new generation will grow up with the trauma of killing, destruction and forced migration. Where will they go? What will become of them? And how will an angrier generation of Kurds and Turks find common ground? The truth is that my generation may be the last to reach a peaceful settlement through dialogue.

Dialogue is possible when those in power want it. Last spring, the two sides were on the verge of a breakthrough after two and a half years of negotiations. The Kurds, when given a real and fair choice, have repeatedly picked politics over violence and opted for coexistence in a democratic Turkey, where their rights and identities are recognized, over separation. But as the destruction goes on, their faith in a political solution withers.

In 2007, Sur became the first municipality in Turkey to offer services in local languages, including Kurdish, Armenian and Assyrian, besides the official Turkish – a move that infuriated the authorities in Ankara, the capital, and led to my removal as mayor. In 2009, months after being re-elected with two-thirds of the vote, I was arrested on charges of separatism. (I was released five months later on health grounds and kept my role as mayor throughout my arrest.)

As I was rounded up along with hundreds of Kurdish activists and elected politicians, my teenage son left our house to join the PKK. "You are wasting time with your politics and dialogue," he told me. I dedicated my life to trying to prove him wrong and bring him home in peace. I have been discouraged before, but never lost hope. Today, I struggle to keep that hope alive.

(Abdullah Demirbas is the former mayor of Diyarbakir's Sur district and a founding member of the Council of Forty. This commentary originally appeared in the *New York Times* on January 26.)

## Sacred Justice: Mesrobian-MacCurdy's Book Describes Tehlirian's Mission to Gun Down Talaat

By Mitch Kehetian

In my 52 years as a newspaper reporter and editor I've interviewed some of the highest-ranking political voices at the state and national levels in America. On the Armenian scene were such giants as Simon Vratzian, Gen. Dro, and Reuben Darbinian. But there's one special person who to this day still stands out as my hero representing justice: Soghomon Tehlirian.

He was the one chosen to silence the infamous Talaat Pasha, who had mapped out the extermination of Armenians in Turkish-occupied Western Armenia. I met Tehlirian while attending an Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) convention in Boston. I still treasure our handshake to this day. Tehlirian died in 1960.

In 1961 as a reporter at the *Columbus Citizen-Journal* of Ohio, I was assigned to compile a feature on how Israeli agents had tracked Adolf Eichmann to his hideout compound in Argentina to be tried for his role in mapping the Nazi plan to exterminate Europe's Jewish population. My editors agreed I should also include how Tehlirian in 1921 served as judge and jury in tracking down the Eichmann of the Armenian Genocide. The feature was also published by the *Fresno Bee*.

Tehlirian's mission continues as a reminder, to be read and viewed for generations until political justice is recognized. Three books and a movie about Tehlirian address the execution that sent Talaat into the mode of a whirling dervish spinning into Satan's domain. Actor Eric Bogosian, author of a published book on Operation Nemesis said it best about Mesrobian-MacCurdy's achievement: "There are revelations in this book (*Sacred Justice*) that cannot be found anywhere else." While the silver screen docudrama "Assignment Berlin" was filmed in Detroit by producer Hrayr Toukhanian. Now we have Mesrobian-MacCurdy's new take on Tehlirian's mission that needs to be brought before cinema and television audiences.

Mesrobian MacCurdy's enlightening masterpiece *Sacred Justice* is a chilling account of how undercover Armenian agents tracked Talaat to Berlin, where he was hiding out with a new identity. But professor-author MacCurdy's published research is more than an account of the Genocide and Tehlirian's life. It includes top-secret letters, some studied with coded words by ARF agents.

The letters reveal how Tehlirian was selected to carry out the mission set by the committee that operated under the name *Hadug Kordz* – "special mission."

Tehlirian met all the requirements. Family members were victims of the genocide. He had military training, including knowledge of how to operate weapons and explosives, and was single. Furthermore, the letters reveal that the committee trusted Tehlirian to surrender after killing Talaat so that the cause would gain global attention through a court trial afterwards. Secrecy was ensured by a sacred oath.

After gunning down Talaat, the Armenian fedayee wait-

ed for the police as the fallen former Ottoman Turkish prime minister gasped his last breath of life in a street gutter near his Berlin hideout.

The letters reprinted in Mesrobian-MacCurdy's must-read book are so addictive that they draw one's soul into the course of the clandestine mission. The Syracuse Armenian's 375-page book fuels the desire for the *Hadug Kordz* to be resurrected in order to motivate uncaring bystanders and apologetic types, from the US State Department to the White House, to rightfully term the 1915 carnage a "government conspired genocide."

Mesrobian-MacCurdy now teaches creative nonfiction at Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass. Previously she served as professor and chair of the department of writing at Ithaca College. But Marian's history-revealing book only became possible when dozens of the secret letters her late grandfather Aaron Sachaklian had hidden in his attic study came to light. They were found in 1990 by her mother – 25 years after Sachaklian's death.

Sensing the historic value of the letters, Marian's mother tagged them for safe keeping at her home. Sachaklian was the logistical leader of the covert operation known as Operation Nemesis, and keeper of all correspondence.

The letters date back to the 1919 World Congress of the ARF when a secret resolution (*Hadug Kordz*) was adopted. Marian and members of the family knew little about Operation Nemesis.

The secrecy of the letters derailed any attempt by German prosecutors to uncover a list of conspirators during Tehlirian's trial, giving strength to the defense that Tehlirian carried out the mission as a "lone cell avenger." It worked. Tehlirian was found not guilty by the German jury – on a justifiable homicide ruling.

Tehlirian lived up to his sacred oath to remain silent at his trial, and to only repeat that Talaat was the murderer of his entire family, and that he carried out the assassination with no outside help. At the same time all correspondence relating to the mission was kept with Marian's grandfather under the seal of secrecy to blunt any prying into the ARF archives.

When the film industry initially focused on the Jewish Holocaust, it did by dramatizing the scripts detailing the historic episodes that sparked the *Diary of Anne Frank* and "Schindler's List."

*Sacred Justice* presents the very tenets of what Operation Nemesis achieved in silencing the architect of the Armenian genocide, and shares the previously unknown, secret letters. These letters draw the reader into the effort to execute the monster who boasted to American Ambassador Robert Morgenthau that he would eradicate the Armenian people.

*Abriss* Professor Marian Mesrobian-MacCurdy! We thank you for sharing your grandfather's hidden letters. They rightfully embrace the naming of Operation Nemesis. Yes. It was Sacred Justice.

(Mitch Kehetian is a retired editor of the *Macomb Daily* and former board trustee at Central Michigan University.)





## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# David Kherdian, Nonny Hogrogian Move to Marblehead

By Mary Reines

MARBLEHEAD, Mass. (*Wicked Local*) – Now that Newbery Award-winning David Kherdian and his wife, two-time Caldecott Medalist Nonny Hogrogian, are in their 80s, they've decided to stay put for once. Marblehead is their final destination.



Nonny Hogrogian and David Kherdian

Hogrogian's illustrations. Some are large paintings of people, reminiscent of the Great Masters – her favorite artist is Leonardo da Vinci. Others are free-flowing graphite or ink drawings of people, originals from children's books that she's illustrated. There are watercolor animals too.

"I love drawing animals," Hogrogian said.

Hogrogian is an award-winning artist and illustrator. She was an art director at Henry Holt and later Charles Scribner's before leaving to pursue full-time work as a book illustrator.

"I broke in that way," she said. "The first couple of books I did were for other people ... I wasn't expressing myself."

Hogrogian was awarded the Randolph Caldecott Medal for illustration in 1966 and 1972 and has illustrated and authored more than 60 books for children. One of her first books, *Once There Was and Was Not: Armenian Tales Retold* (1966), was given to Kherdian at a dinner party in 1970. That was his first knowledge of his future wife.

"I got three copies; one for me, one for my mother, and one for my sister," he said.

Kherdian is a widely published author of 72 books, 23 of them poetry. His awards include The Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, a

Newbery Honor Book Award, a Jane Addams Children's Book Award, a Friends of American Writers Chicago Young People's Literature Award, The Armenian Star Award and a nomination for the National Book Award.

When he finished his next book of poetry, *Homage to Adana* (1971), Kherdian called Hogrogian to do the cover. They were married the same year.

"For the last eight years, we haven't been apart for more than five minutes," Kherdian said.

Hogrogian went on to illustrate many more book covers for Kherdian, including his Newbery Honor winner, *The Road From Home: A True Story of Courage, Survival and Hope*, which is a biography of his mother, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. It has been in print for 35 years and translated into 16 languages.

In Racine, Wis., Kherdian was surrounded by Armenian immigrants. "Grow up and tell my story," they told him.

Kherdian and Hogrogian are the children of Armenian immigrants who survived the genocide. Their heritage not only brought them together, but also influenced their work. *Once There Was and Was Not: Armenian Tales Retold* was one of the first books that Hogrogian authored and illustrated.

"In the beginning, I was telling all Armenian stories that my grandmother had told me," Hogrogian said. "That was pretty simple for me."

One painting in their living room depicts Hogrogian's ancestors herded together, with a girl dancing in the foreground. It's a tribute to those who survived and those who were lost.

"My family and his family escaped," she said.

Hogrogian and Kherdian aren't religious, but they are spiritual. They have studied and practiced the teachings of Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff, an influential early 20th century Russian mystic, philosopher, spiritual teacher and composer of Armenian and Greek descent. He taught that most humans do not possess a unified mind-body consciousness and live their lives in a state of hypnotic "waking sleep," but that it is possible to transcend to a higher state of consciousness and achieve full human potential.

Hogrogian called Gurdjieff's teachings esoteric Christianity, and said he brought spiritual ideas from the East to the West. They compared his methods to Sufism and Buddhism. He is currently editing a book on Gurdjieff by Ocke de Boer.

"We study Gurdjieff for our own spiritual evolution," Kherdian said.

After moving to San Francisco in 1960, Kherdian ran with the Beat poets – Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti – before breaking away to focus on his own style and distinguish himself.

"I didn't want to be identified with the Beat poets," he said. "Those people were associated by a group label ... I've been a very stubborn individual all my life, a rebel actually."

Through their travels, Kherdian has taught writing classes as a method of self-study.

"It's proven to be very effective," he said. "People's patterns start early in life and it's invisible to the person ... We get fixed into a lot of patterns that are harmful to us."

He recently released a 25th anniversary edition of his book, *The Dividing River, the Meeting Shore*, a collection of poetry about the loss of his closest childhood friend. The new edition comes with a companion booklet that contains an interview and seven additional poems.

These days, the couple likes to read, take walks and go out for lunch. Hogrogian is working on a painting, but her sight is deteriorating so she doesn't drive. Still, they enjoy keeping busy. They gave advice on breaking into creative fields.

"Do it. You just have to push your way in," Hogrogian said. "There's always going to be people who tell you that you have no talent."

"I don't think it can be taught," Kherdian said. "But it can be learned. It has to come from you."

Sometimes, it takes a while to realize success. "It's very hard," Kherdian said. "A writer creates his own world. It takes a lifetime to have that kind of definition."

To schedule a reading or talk, Kherdian and Hogrogian can be contacted at [tavitnonny@gmail.com](mailto:tavitnonny@gmail.com).

## Human Rights Organizations See No Progress in Armenia

By Gohar Abrahamyan

YEREVAN (ArmeniaNow) – This week three human rights watchdogs, including two international organizations, have released their annual reports, showing lack of progress in terms of human rights protection in Armenia.

United States-based international human rights organization Freedom House on Wednesday released its annual "Freedom in the World 2016" survey, which assesses the level of human rights and freedoms in 195 countries and 14 territories around the world, classifying them as "free," "partly free" and "not free."

Armenia retained its "partly free" ranking, scoring 5 for "political rights" and 4 for "civil liberties" on a 7-point scale, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free.

Nagorno-Karabagh, presented as a "disputed territory" in the report, was also ranked as "partly free" unlike Azerbaijan that is included in the category of "not free" countries.

Armenia's neighbors Turkey and Georgia are "partly free," while Russia and Iran are "not free."

Arch Puddington, Vice President for Research at Freedom House, told VOA that Armenia's unchanging "partly free" status in recent years is primarily due to the Russian pressure and its negative impact, which also has made Armenia prefer the Eurasian – and not the European – Union.

"Armenia is in a very difficult region in terms of human rights," said the Freedom House representative. He specified that Armenia is surrounded by countries such as Azerbaijan and Russia, which have a very rigid authoritarian system, adding that "it is very difficult for democrats to function in such surroundings."

Meanwhile, according to the Human Rights Watch organization, the human rights situation

in Armenia in 2015 remained uneven.

In a report released on Wednesday, the HRW raised serious concerns about the government's interference with freedom of assembly in Armenia. Besides, the watchdog also presented concerns regarding media freedom, poor prison conditions, including overcrowding and mistreatment, as well as discrimination against LGBT people.

Human rights activists also express their concerns over the legality of the referendum on constitutional amendments, citing allegations of widespread vote buying, ballot stuffing, as well as intimidation and violence against observers.

The annual report of the Helsinki Committee of Armenia published on January 26 also raises the issue of violence, political persecution, repression of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly as well as torture.

In 2015, according to the report, instances of pressure against media representatives increased by 24 as compared to the previous year, and violence continued against a number of civic activists.

Both the Human Rights Watch and the Helsinki Committee of Armenia singled out in their reports the police break-up of a peaceful protest against the rise in electricity violence on June 23, 2015. More than 200 demonstrators were detained then, a number of journalists also suffered police brutality during the events.

Ruling Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) representatives, however, dismiss the criticism. Senior RPA lawmaker Hovhannes Sahakyan describes the latest reports of international human rights organizations as "not objective". In particular, regarding the Freedom House assessments, he told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that he didn't think that "connecting a country's freedom and democracy to one geopolitical entity or another is right and fair."

## Artsakh President Congratulates President on Army Day

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Artsakh Republic President Bako Sahakyan sent a congratulatory message on January 28, the Day of the Army to the Republic of Armenia, to the country's president, Serge Sargsian.

The address message is as follows: "Honorable President Sargsian, On behalf of the Artsakh people, the authorities and on myself personally I would like to convey sincere congratulations on the Day of the Army, a holiday that is considered very important for all the Armenians. The glorious Armenian army is the offspring of independence, the pride of all Armenian people, who love and cherish it like their child. Its brave soldiers, following the lead

of their ancestors, devotedly carry out the sacred duty of defending the Homeland, performing and displaying unique feats and courage. You have had a great personal contribution in the establishment and formation of the Army, its ongoing enhancement and development. You are doing your best for consolidating defense capability of the two Armenian states, solving issues and reaching goals of nationwide nature. I once again congratulate you and the whole personnel of the Republic of Armenia's armed forces on this cherished holiday and wish peace, good health and great success for the glory of Mother Armenia and the native people."

## Philanthropist Vardanyan Believes Armenia Can Become New 'Hong Kong' for Iran

VARDANYAN, from page 1

"Within the next few years, lots of foreign businessmen and specialists will be working in Iran; with characteristics of life in Iran in mind, many will not take their families with them. Armenia's geographical proximity to Iran and the possibility to fly there and back on weekend should make us think of creating comfortable conditions for wives and children of foreign businessmen to live in Armenia while the head of family is working in Iran," he said.

One of Vardanyan's biggest projects in Armenia is UWC Dilijan College, attended by about 200 students from 60 countries.

According to Vardanyan, new opportunities will arise in tourism as well.

"In the last few years, we've seen the sustained increase in number of tourists visiting particularly southern regions of Armenia. Development of new touristic routes and products will allow foreigners to continue traveling from Armenia to Iran," noted the philanthropist.

Vardanyan's another important project is the reconstruction of Tatev monastery in the south of Armenia. Five years ago world's largest "Wings of Tatev" reversible aerial ropeway was launched within "Tatev Revival" project. It is included in the Guinness book of records.