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## Concerns Reignited for Syrian Armenians

By Anush Mkrтчian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia is monitoring the latest developments in Syria, the Foreign Ministry said on Monday, March 10, amid renewed concerns about the security of Syria's Armenian community raised by the reported killings of hundreds of civilians blamed on Syrian government forces.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said over the weekend that at least 745 civilians belonging to Syria's Alawite minority were killed in two days of clashes between security forces and fighters loyal to the ousted regime of Bashar al-Assad in the Latakia province.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Syria's interim authorities to hold accountable the "radical Islamist terrorists, including foreign jihadis" who have committed "massacres against Syria's minority communities" in recent days.

"The United States stands with Syria's religious and ethnic minorities," Rubio said in a statement.

The Aleppo-based Armenian-language newspaper *Kantasar* reported that two Syrian Armenians are among the civilian victims. Their report said that Antoine Boutros and his son Faty were shot dead just outside the coastal city of Latakia.

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Security forces loyal to the interim Syrian government ride in the back of a vehicle moving along a road in the western city of Latakia on March 9, 2025.



### Jazz Piano Great Tigran Hamasyan to Tour US Showcasing New Recording

By Alin K. Gregorian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN/YEREVAN — Tigran Hamasyan is no ordinary musician, as anyone who has seen him play can see. The prolific composer and performer lives and breathes his music, becoming one with his piano and fusing jazz with rock and Armenian folk melodies, while winning over fans around the world.

Still, he wouldn't have it any other way, as music is his fuel. And as anyone who has seen him perform can attest, for Hamasyan, playing the piano is a full-body exercise.

"It's just natural. I just can't sit still. That energy has to come out some way. It is more relaxing. It's almost like doing martial arts or yoga on the piano," Hamasyan noted.

His new record, "Bird of a Thousand Voices," his 11<sup>th</sup>, featuring 24 tracks, shows the depths of his creative mind, while he explores the folk tale of the same name, called "Hazaran Blbul" in Armenian. And this latest effort, released in August, involves not just the record, but a video game, website and a theatrical production.

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## Human Rights Attorney Jared Genser Is Making the Case for Ruben Vardanyan

By Alin K. Gregorian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WASHINGTON — Those of us in the diaspora are seeing increasingly worrisome pictures from the trials of Karabakh (Artsakh) Armenian political prisoners in Azerbaijan. The trials, near-universally acknowledged as shams, seem focused on making an example out of one former Artsakh leader, Ruben Vardanyan.

While attorneys Siranush Sahakyan in Armenia and Philippe Raffi Kalfayan in France are working on the case of Vardanyan and the other political prisoners in Baku, the family has also hired noted international human rights attorney Jared Genser, managing director of the law firm Perseus Strategies, LLC, in Washington, to represent him.

Genser recently replied to a series of questions submitted to him about the work he is doing on behalf of his famous client.

Genser starting acting as Vardanyan's attorney in November 2023. Vardanyan and his fellow current and former leaders of Artsakh were rounded up by the Azerbaijani authorities in September 2023 after their forces staged a massive and deadly strike on the tiny republic, in effect ending its existence, after a brutal nine-month blockade.

The authorities there have singled out Vardanyan, separating his case from the other seven Armenian

leaders. They have not allowed any outside attorneys to represent him and in addition, keep adding to his list of charges.

When asked about the charges Vardanyan is facing, Genser replied, "Ruben is facing 42 politically-motivated charges under the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In short, he is being blamed for the existence of what the Azeri regime claims is the illegal Republic of Artsakh and everything that it has purportedly done that regime thinks is wrong recent years. If convicted, he faces life in prison."

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Jared Genser

### Armenia Expresses Concern Over 'Torture' of Armenian Prisoners in Azerbaijan

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Armenia claimed on March 5 Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan have been subjected to torture, citing evidence observed in photos published by Azerbaijan. More concerns are accumulating over the possible closure of the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in Azerbaijan, with its possible consequences for Armenian prisoners.

Following the claims of the Armenian side, the Azerbaijani state-run media outlet APA reported that Azerbaijani human rights defender Sabina Aliyeva had visited Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan.

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## ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

## Eight Injured, One Missing in Mount Aragats Avalanche

YEREVAN (News.am) — Rescue workers have not yet managed to reach the part of Mount Aragats where a nine-person expedition team was trapped under an avalanche on March 11, the Aragatsotn provincial rescue department of the Rescue Service of Armenia reported, adding that all members of this expedition team are Spanish citizens.

“Eight of them have physical injuries, one was trapped under an avalanche. At the moment, the Rescue Service is working. A helicopter has been sent to take the injured out from that area, and the ambulance will provide the corresponding medical assistance,” the department reported.

## Italian Experts to Help with Garni Temple Restoration

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Armenian authorities have been cooperating with leading Italian experts for restoring the bathhouse of the Garni Temple.

In 2019, Italian architect Lucio Spica, specializing in restoration work, developed and submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport a plan on “Re-valuing and Restoring the Garni bathhouse”, which envisages the restoration and reinforcement of the mosaic and replacement of the cover with modern architectural solutions.

The ministry launched negotiations with the Italian side and reached an agreement in 2024 to implement the mosaic restoration work by the L’Opificio delle Pietre Dure institute through the support of the Italian embassy in Armenia. The institute is the Italian culture ministry’s specialized organization in research and restoration of monumental art.

The bathhouse dates back to the third century CE.

## Ex-Ombudsman Urges Linking Peace Deal with Release of Prisoners

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Former Artsakh Ombudsman Artak Beglaryan has urged the Armenian leadership to make the conclusion of a peace agreement with Azerbaijan conditional on the release of Armenian prisoners illegally held in Baku.

At a news conference on March 10, Beglaryan, who heads the Union for the Protection of Artsakh People’s Interests and Rights NGO, emphasized the importance of addressing the prisoner issue.

“The release of prisoners should be a firm precondition for signing the agreement, not something that happens afterwards,” he remarked. “Otherwise, it would be impossible to discuss how a peace agreement could be reached while Armenian prisoners are being vengefully prosecuted, with their trials being used to undermine peace and accuse Armenia of certain crimes.”

“We must explore all possible mechanisms,” Beglaryan said.



Tamara Sargsyan (Head of General Education, RA MoESCS), Metaksya Davtyan, Acting Manager of COAF SMART Center, and Liana Ghaltaghchyan (Executive Director, COAF) at the COAF SMART Center in Dsegh, Lori region.

# A Safer Path to Education

## COAF Launches New Transportation Initiative for the COAF SMART Center In Lori

DEBET, Armenia — On March 7, The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) unveiled significant upgrades to its existing afterschool transportation system at an official ceremony on March 7 in Debet village, Lori region.

Thanks to a donation from Armenian-American philanthropist Jack Youredjian, COAF has acquired 16 modern buses and passenger vehicles that will provide free transportation seven days a week for approximately 1,500 children from 30



Gurgen Hakobyan, Operations Advisor at the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) presenting details on the safety and optimization features of the new bus fleet and transport management system.

communities across the region to COAF’s SMART Center afterschool program.

This investment in cost-free afterschool transportation marks a major advancement in Armenia’s education sector, ensuring children’s safety while enhancing access to quality learning opportunities. The transportation upgrade will revitalize the region by fostering community engagement and enhancing the quality of available educa-



Liana Ghaltaghchyan, executive director, COAF, and Jack Youredjian, long-time COAF supporter and major donor, and Armenian-American philanthropist.

tion options for local families.

During the event, COAF and JAC Motors signed a memorandum to express their commitment to collaborate on the implementation of transportation systems for future SMART Centers as well, most notably, the upcoming SMART Center in Armavir.

The event will be attended by representatives of the Government of Armenia, the Governor of Lori, Jack Youredjian—philanthropist and founder of the Youredjian Family Charitable Foundation—and COAF’s Executive Director, Liana Ghaltaghchyan.

COAF’s new fleet of 2024-model JAC vehicles represent the organization’s student-centric ethos, equipped with advanced safety features. All 16 vehicles are fitted with GPS tracking systems, driver behavior monitoring, surveillance systems for both drivers and passengers, and comprehensive biometric identification measures.

As part of COAF’s mission to make education more accessible, this new service is a significant achievement aimed at improving the well-being not only of local children but of the entire region.



Liana Ghaltaghchyan, Executive Director of the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF), giving her opening statement at the launch of the COAF SMART Center’s new transportation system, supported by Jack Youredjian, in Lori, Armenia.





## ARMENIA

# Defiant Vardanyan Appeals to Armenians from Azeri Jail

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ruben Vardanyan, a former Nagorno-Karabakh premier jailed in Azerbaijan, denounced his ongoing “show” trial, paid tribute to Karabakh’s displaced population and urged Armenians not to fall into “despair” in an audio message publicized by his family on Friday, March 7.

“I am in good shape, I feel strong, my health is fine, and I am at peace with myself and stronger in spirit than ever before,” the Armenian-born billionaire and philanthropist said on the 18th day of his hunger strike launched in protest against “egregious due process abuses” committed by Azerbaijani authorities.

“This is a protest against the very nature of this process itself, against the way the process is unfolding,” Vardanyan said in the 12-minute message recorded by the family during a phone call on Thursday, March 6. “I knew what I was getting into and I was and still am prepared for even worse conditions. I’m not a victim and I don’t want to be pitied because all this was a conscious decision.”

“My demands remain the same. If there is such a desire to judge me, judge me pro-

fessionally, publicly, openly, in accordance with Azerbaijani laws and legal procedures, along with everyone else,” he said in reference to seven other former Karabakh leaders who are standing a separate trial in Baku.

“Do not violate your own laws and procedures. Do not falsify documents, do not manipulate evidence and protocols,” he added, appealing to the Azerbaijani authorities.

Vardanyan went on to reiterate that he does not regret relocating to Karabakh in September 2022, one year before it was recaptured by Azerbaijan. He apologized to the Karabakh children who “lost their homeland” as a result of the September 2023 Azerbaijani offensive and the ensuing exodus of the region’s ethnic Armenian population.

“I was happy to be with you, the people of Artsakh, to always feel your love, warmth, gratitude and trust during that difficult time,” he said. “I’m proud of you — real, down-to-earth people dear to me — and I love you all sincerely.”

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Karabakh’s leadership from November 2022 to February 2023, was arrested at an Azerbaijani checkpoint in the Lachin



Ruben Vardanyan meets with residents of Stepanakert, January 24, 2023.

corridor during the exodus. He rejects a long list of accusations leveled against him. Those include “financing terrorism,” illegally entering Karabakh and supplying its armed forces with military equipment.

The 56-year-old tycoon, who had made his fortune in Russia, looked frail and had apparent bruises on his face when he was brought before an Azerbaijani military court last week. The images circulated by Azerbaijani state media added to public anger in Armenia with the Armenian government’s cautious stance on the separate trials of Vardanyan and 15 other Karabakh Armenians that began on January 17.

It was not until February 24 that the government denounced the “mock trials” through Foreign Ministry Ararat Mirzoyan. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s administration has since continued to face opposition accusations that it is doing little to try to secure the release of at least 23 Armenians remaining in Azerbaijani captivity. Pashinyan again claimed this week that Yerevan’s stronger reaction would only harm the captives.

Pashinyan was already accused by critics last fall of helping Baku legitimize Vardanyan’s continuing imprisonment with his scathing comments about the former Kara-

bakh premier made during an August 2024 news conference in Yerevan. Some of Pashinyan’s staunch supporters continued to attack Vardanyan on social media even after the start of his trial.

Speaking in Russian, Vardanyan alluded to his Armenian detractors when he thanked unnamed Azerbaijanis who “preserved their human image” in their dealings with him.

“And I sincerely pity and forgive all those [Azerbaijani officials] who behaved differently as well as those Armenians in Armenia who treat me and my family the same way,” he said in his audio message.

Vardanyan also appeared to aim a jibe at Pashinyan’s appeasement policy towards Azerbaijan when he stressed that Armenia needs a “real, long-term peace that’s not just signed on a piece of paper but also put into practice.”

“We must understand that nobody owes us anything and that real agreements can only be reached with strong people and a country that has an elite, honor and dignity,” he stressed.

He also told Armenians: “I realized here that one should never give in to despair, to indifference, and I understood why it is the most terrible of the seven sins... I urge you to never do that.”

## Armenia Expresses Concern over ‘Torture’ of Armenian Prisoners in Azerbaijan

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According to a statement released afterwards, former Nagorno-Karabakh State Minister Ruben Vardanyan and former President Bako Sahakyan, as well as other “individuals,” were “interviewed and medically examined.” The statement also claimed that Vardanyan and Sahakyan, as well as other imprisoned Armenians, said “that they had been treated humanely since their detention.”

APA noted that the visit was conducted with the members of Aliyeva’s National Preventive Group on the Prevention of Torture.

In contrast, Armenians on social media, as well as human rights defenders and some government officials, pointed out the wounds on Vardanyan’s face and Sahakyan’s apparently broken and missing teeth.

It was the latest evidence of alleged torture of Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan. According to official figures from Baku, Azerbaijan has acknowledged custody of 23 Armenian prisoners.

On February 28, the Armenian Foreign Ministry stated there were “clear signs of torture” of detained individuals in Azerbaijan.

On Wednesday, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reiterated that “prohibited influence is taking place through prohibited means, including physical, psychological, and pressure tools, and according to some information we have, by other prohibited means.”

In late January, Pashinyan expressed concern that the trial was “not only seriously worrying, but will be, and is being used to provoke new escalations in the region.”

### Risk of ‘Crimes against Life’

Armenia has also expressed alarm over the Azerbaijan authorities’ intention to close down the ICRC. Following reporting by Azerbaijani pro-government media, the ICRC said on March 5 that the Azerbaijani government had informed them of its intention to close their offices in Azerbaijan.

“Its closure means that Azerbaijan is halting the functioning of the mechanism that could ensure the protection of the rights of Armenians with its limited capabilities,” Siranush Sahakyan, the Armenian prisoners’ war representative at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), told CivilNet.

Sahakyan added that at the moment, the ICRC is the only international organization that visits Armenians, and after its closure, “we will not have international involvement at all, and the level of arbitrariness will significantly increase, in which conditions we do not exclude crimes against life.”

Sahakyan also argued that Azerbaijan “has a non-cooperative stance with international organizations dealing with torture issues.” To support her point, she cited a statement from the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) in July 2024 on the lack of cooperation from the Azerbaijani side.

“No torture prevention mechanism has had the opportunity to visit Armenians held in Azerbaijani prisons at this time, which has created favorable conditions for their torture,” Sahakyan said.

While Pashinyan has argued that “possible diplomatic efforts are being made” by his government to secure the release of Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan, Vardanyan’s lawyer Jared Genser has argued that “there is also so much more PM Pashinyan can do” for the release of Armenians, presenting his own list of suggestions, including requesting the support of the US and the EU.

On Tuesday, letters were submitted to the Foreign Ministry of Armenia and to Switzerland with a request to “implement a mechanism for consular access through a third country for Armenian prisoners in Baku.” The letter was signed by over 40 non-governmental organizations.

Several demonstrations have taken place in Yerevan since February 28, calling on the government and international organizations to pressure Azerbaijan to release Armenian prisoners — including former Nagorno-Karabakh officials — being tried in Azerbaijan.

At the same time, Mane Tandilyan, the president of Country to Live, a party affiliated with Vardanyan, said that she suffered from medical complications as a result of her hunger strike. Tandilyan went on hunger strike on March 1, to urge Vardanyan to stop his own, which he began on 18 February in protest against his imprisonment in Azerbaijan.

(This story was originally published by [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on March 6.)

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## INTERNATIONAL

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## Armenian Patriarchate Of Jerusalem Urges Protection for Syrian Christians

JERUSALEM (Armenpress) — Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate of Jerusalem on March 11 appealed to the international community, states, religious and humanitarian organizations, and individuals, urging them to focus on the protection of all Christians in Syria.

In a communique, the Patriarchate wrote in part:

“We, in particular, are moved by the plight of our Armenian Christian brothers and sisters who have lived for generations in this land, a place they sought refuge after the horrific Armenian genocide of 1915.

“Today, the safety and security of all Christian Communities in Syria are threatened once again by the violence and chaos that regrettably plagues this region. We raise our voices not only for the protection of all innocent lives, but especially for the Armenians who remain a living remnant of a people who endured the first genocide of the 20th century. They are not simply an ethnic group or a community of believers; they are a sacred witness to survival, perseverance, and the continued struggle for dignity in the face of genocidal persecution.

“The Armenians in Syria ... have already endured so much. They have rebuilt their lives after the Genocide, established vibrant communities, and contributed richly to the social, cultural, and spiritual fabric of Syria. Yet, they now face a renewed threat to their lives and heritage. ...

“We call upon the international community ... to urgently focus attention on the protection and preservation of all Christians in Syria. These communities are not just ethnic minorities; they are a vital part of the Christian presence in the larger Middle East, a presence that has endured for centuries.”

## Swedish Lawmakers Urge Action on Prisoners in Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Sweden-Armenia parliamentary friendship group on March 10 called for international action to secure the release of Armenians imprisoned in Baku on fabricated charges. The group warns that inaction will encourage further oppression and human rights violations.

“We, the undersigned members of the Sweden-Armenia Friendship Group in the Swedish Riksdag, strongly condemn the Azerbaijani government’s systematic and severe violations of human rights. The illegal imprisonment of Armenian detainees, including political figures and civilians, along with their physical and psychological torture and political persecution, constitutes not only a humanitarian crisis but also a blatant violation of international law. The arbitrary detention of individuals on baseless charges, used as a tool for political repression, is a direct assault on fundamental human rights,” the statement reads.

# Baku Sticks to Key Precondition for Peace

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov reiterated Baku’s main precondition for signing a peace deal with Armenia on Tuesday, March 11, one day after his Armenian counterpart said the two nations are now closer to ending their conflict than ever before.

“Despite the great progress made towards the normalization of interstate relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the signing of a final peace agreement, I would like to note once again that the existence of territorial claims against Azerbaijan within the framework of the Armenian constitution, Armenia’s armament and the tendency for revanchism continue to be the biggest obstacle in the peace process,” Bayramov was reported to say during a visit to Kazakhstan.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly singled out a change of the Armenian constitution among his multiple conditions for peace. While rejecting that demand in public, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has pledged to try to enact a new Armenian constitution through a referendum. But this is unlikely to happen before June 2026.

The two sides have said that they agree on 15 of the 17 articles of a draft peace treaty discussed by them. Baku responded on February 25 to Yerevan’s most recent proposals designed to bridge their remaining differences. Pashinyan said the next



The two sides meeting in October 2024.

day that they continue to disagree on the two other articles.

The Armenian premier last week complained about Azerbaijan’s failure to accept his proposals regarding transport links for its Nakhichevan exclave and again suggested that Baku may be preparing the ground to attack Armenia.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan likewise pointed to the lack of a positive Azerbaijani reaction to the “constructive” Armenian proposals on the transport links as well as a “mutual arms control and verification mechanism” when he spoke at an Indian think-tank during a visit to New Delhi on Monday.

“Moreover, we continue hearing high-level public statements and narratives pertaining to territorial claims against the sovereign Republic of Armenia, including through the so-called ‘Western Azerbaijan’ narrative,” he said.

Mirzoyan insisted at the same time that “today, more than ever, we are close to the signing of the peace treaty.”

Armenian opposition leaders maintain that Aliyev has no intention to sign any agreement before clinching more far-reaching concessions from Pashinyan. They say that Pashinyan’s appeasement policy has only encouraged the Azerbaijani strongman to make more demands on Yerevan.

## Aliyev, Erdoğan inaugurate new gas pipeline to Nakhichevan

By Xandie (Alexandra) Kuenning

During a state visit to Turkey on Wednesday, March 5, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, together with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, attended the opening ceremony of the İğdir–Nakhchivan (Nakhichevan) gas pipeline via video link from Ankara.

“The project we are inaugurating today will ensure Nakhchivan’s energy security.

Gas from Azerbaijan will be transferred to the exclave of Nakhchivan through [Turkey] via a swap agreement, permanently resolving this issue for Nakhchivan,” Aliyev said during the ceremony.

In turn, Erdoğan highlighted that the 80-kilometer pipeline — which has a daily transport capacity of up to 2 million cubic meters — would serve as “a sign of our common destiny with Nakhchivan.”

A memorandum of understanding (MoU)

regarding the pipeline was first signed between the Turkish company BOTAŞ and Azerbaijan’s State Oil Company (SOCAR) in 2010 in an effort to replace the exclave’s dependence on gas from Iran. A decade later, in 2020, Turkey’s Energy and Natural Resources Minister Fatih Donmez and Azerbaijan’s Energy Minister Parviz Shahbazov signed another MoU. Construction of the İğdir–Nakhchivan pipeline finally began in September 2023.

During their speeches at the pipeline’s inauguration, both Aliyev and Erdoğan also touched upon other joint projects, including the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan, Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum, and TANAP oil and gas pipeline projects.

In particular, Aliyev highlighted that in 2024, Azerbaijan’s gas exports reached 25 billion cubic meters — Turkey accounting for half of that volume — allowing European countries to strengthen their energy security.

Another joint project discussed was the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, which Aliyev noted “provides enormous advantages both for our countries and for a wider region.”

“This transport link has tremendous significance and benefits, especially in terms of uniting the Turkic world,” Aliyev said, adding that “Azerbaijan has always placed significance on the unification of the Turkic world and has spared no effort to ensure this unity, make it eternal, and establish relations based on common interests and shared history.”

Beyond economic and transport ties, the two heads of state also spoke about peace in the greater Caucasus region, with Erdoğan emphasizing that both countries “favor peace, stability and prosperity.”

“We only want peace in our region, we want cooperation, and we want all of us to develop together. For this purpose, we have taken a number of steps and demonstrated how sincere we are,” Erdoğan said.

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on March 6.)

## Concerns Reignited For Syrian Armenians

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The Armenian Foreign Ministry said, however, that there have been no Armenian casualties in the worst outbreak of violence in Syria since the fall of Assad’s regime.

“The Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia in Aleppo is in contact with local authorities and community structures,” it said in a statement to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “In recent days, there has been no change in the content of applications addressed to the Consulate by Armenian citizens: they mainly concerned current consular issues.”

An Armenian church in Latakia canceled a Sunday mass. Hagop Altunian, a former Latakia resident who moved to Armenia years ago, said his relatives and friends living in the area have told him that they now live in fear.

“They don’t leave their homes because they are scared,” Altunian told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on March 10. “They are even scared of talking by phone. Things are very tough for the local people. The Christians are in trouble.”

In an Arabic-language voice message, a friend of Altunian living in a local village told him that he and his family are hiding in a forest because they have heard that government forces killed 233 residents of a neighboring community.

Dalida Kahejian, another Syrian Arme-

nian now based in Yerevan, on Sunday, March 9, again spoke by phone with her daughter living in Kessab, another coastal town in the Syrian province.

“She has no electricity and their schools and churches are closed. ... They are thinking about getting out [of the country,] but they don’t have valid passports right now,” said Kahejian.

The Armenian government’s domestic critics have renewed their calls for official Yerevan to organize or facilitate the evacuation of Syrian Armenians.

Many in Armenia have already voiced concerns about the security of the Armenian community when the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) Islamist militant group swept to power in December. The new Syrian government formed by it assured the remaining Syrian Armenians and other minorities that their security and rights will be protected.

There were no signs of a serious Armenian exodus from Syria before the reported massacres in Latakia. An Armenian deputy foreign minister visited Damascus in January.

An estimated 80,000 ethnic Armenians, most of them descendants of survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey, lived in Syria before the outbreak of its civil war in 2011. At least half of them reportedly fled the country during the war. Thousands took refuge in Armenia.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Protest in Berlin Calls for Immediate Action Against Azerbaijan's Unlawful Detentions

BERLIN — Human rights organizations, activists, and concerned citizens gathered on March 10 at the Brandenburg Gate to demand the immediate release of Armenian political prisoners unlawfully detained in Azerbaijan.

The protest, organized by the Central Council of Armenians in Germany (ZAD), the Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV), Theophanu Club Germany, Working Group Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding e.V., IGFM Internationale Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte e.V., Deutschland, and #FreeArmenian-Hostages civic movement, called on Euro-



Prof. Tessa Hofmann

pean leaders to take urgent action against Azerbaijan's continued human rights violations.

Prominent human rights activists, including Jonathan Spangenberg, Chairman of ZAD, addressed the crowd, emphasizing the systematic persecution of Armenians and Azerbaijan's use of political prisoners



as bargaining tools in negotiations. “The detainees, including Ruben Vardanyan, are enduring inhumane conditions, with reports of torture and mistreatment. Vardanyan is currently on a hunger strike, and his life is at grave risk. We cannot stay silent,” declared Spangenberg.

The protestors stressed that Azerbaijan's actions violate international law, including the UN Genocide Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights. The demonstrators urged the European Union, Germany, and France to implement the following measures:

- Sanctions Against Azerbaijani Officials

- Targeted sanctions on individuals and institutions responsible for the unlawful detention and mistreatment of Armenian prisoners.

- International Monitoring of Prison Conditions – Pressure Azerbaijan to allow the UN Committee Against Torture and the International Red Cross to assess the prisoners' treatment.

- Immediate Release of All Armenian Detainees – Demand Azerbaijan comply with international human rights obligations and release political prisoners without conditions.

- Preservation of Armenian Cultural

Heritage – Investigate and prevent further destruction of Armenian cultural and religious sites in occupied Artsakh.

- Ensuring Safe Return for Displaced Armenians – Advocate for international protection mechanisms allowing Armenians to return to their homeland.

Speakers at the protest condemned European inaction, with Spangenberg referencing Germany's historical responsibility to prevent genocide and protect vulnerable communities. He criticized Chancellor Olaf Scholz's failure to take decisive action and called for a formal petition to the International Criminal Court against Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.

This protest follows ongoing diplomatic appeals by human rights organizations to the European Commission and the French government. Despite repeated warnings from the UN about the risk of genocide, meaningful international action remains absent.

The coalition of human rights organizations plans further demonstrations across Europe and will submit an official petition to the European Parliament urging immediate sanctions against Azerbaijan. Protest organizers also called on European citizens to raise awareness and pressure their governments to act against these gross human rights violations.

“The world must not turn a blind eye to Azerbaijan's crimes,” said Sarah Reinke, Head of Human Rights at GfbV. “The time for words is over; we need action now.”



## Armenian Churches' Appeal to Christians Around the World

The united representatives of all Armenian churches worldwide have issued an urgent appeal to Christians around the world, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the Armenian prisoners of war and civilians held in Azerbaijan.

The call for the immediate release of all Armenian prisoners of war and detained civilians reflects a deep commitment to Christian values and human dignity, underscoring the urgent need for peace and reconciliation. It highlights the importance of ending violence and inhumane treatment, promoting respect for the inherent dignity of all people, regardless of nationality. The path to lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan can only be realized when humanitarian concerns — such as the return of all prisoners of war and other detained civilians — are addressed.

Below is their letter, signed by 100

clergy members:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We, the united representatives of all Armenian Churches around the world stand together in the most urgent and heartfelt plea for the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners of war and detained civilians currently held in Azerbaijan.

This is not just a call for the release of innocent lives; it is a cry for justice, dignity, and the restoration of humanity. These individuals, taken in the course of conflict, have been subjected to unimaginable suffering, and their continued detention is a violation of every principle of human decency and Christian compassion. In the name of our shared faith, we can no longer remain silent. The time for action is now.

The inhumane treatment of these prisoners goes against the very essence of our faith. The violence, the suffering, the

torment they endure must end. The world cannot stand by while innocent people are held captive, deprived of their dignity and their basic human rights. The gravity of this situation is of the utmost importance, as the health of Ruben Vardanyan, former Artsakh State Minister, is rapidly deteriorating. Ruben is currently on an ongoing hunger strike in protest of the theatrical “court” proceedings by Azerbaijani authorities. Every single day increasingly critical and accountable.

We cannot and will not accept a future where such inhumanity is allowed to persist. All peoples of the region—whether Armenian, Azerbaijani, or any other deserve peace. Peace built on the foundation of justice. Peace where the dignity of every person is safeguarded, where the chains of suffering are broken, and where every soul is allowed to live in freedom.

We, the Armenian Churches across the world, demand the immediate return of

all prisoners of war and detained civilians to their families. This is not merely a humanitarian necessity — it is a moral imperative. The release of Armenian prisoners can be the beginning of a new chapter, one where healing replaces hatred, where understanding overcomes division, and where peace is not just a dream, but a reality.

We urge governments, international organizations and all people of good will to condemn this show trial as political and illegitimate, and to pressure the authorities involved to return these innocent lives to their rightful homes. Do not turn away from the suffering of others. Stand with us. Stand for justice. Stand for peace.

May the light of truth, compassion, and justice guide all of us toward a world where no one is left in chains, where every human life is valued, and where peace is more than just a word — it is a living, breathing reality for all.

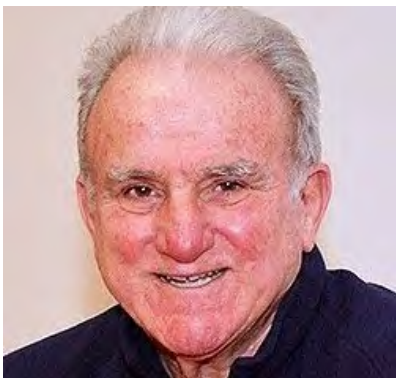


# Community News

## Steve Kurkjian to Be Inducted into New England Newspaper Hall of Fame

WOBURN, Mass. — The New England Newspaper and Press Association announced that four New England journalists, including Steve Kurkjian of the *Boston Globe*, will be inducted into the New England Newspaper Hall of Fame on March 28 in Portland, Maine, recognizing the most outstanding newspaper professionals from throughout the six-state region and their extraordinary contributions to the industry.

More than 100 individuals have



been singled out over the past 25 years for their extraordinary contributions to their newspaper, the news industry, and their communities.

The Hall of Fame awards will be presented at a celebratory dinner as part of the annual convention of the New England Newspaper and Press Association on Friday, March 28, at the Portland Regency Hotel, Portland, ME. Tickets can be purchased at <https://www.nenpa.com/convention-registration/>.

The association writes that Kurkjian, a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, made major contributions to investigative reporting, most notably with the *Boston Globe's* Spotlight team. He helped expose corruption in Somerville City Hall and political dealings in the MBTA, earning his first two Pulitzers. His role in uncovering the clergy abuse scandal in the Catholic Church further cemented his legacy. His leadership as the *Globe's* Washington Bureau Chief and his impactful reporting on a range of topics, from municipal bond dealings to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum art theft, showcased his versatility. Beyond his reporting, Steve mentored generations of journalists, instilling values of integrity, thoroughness, and humanity in the newsroom. His continued work in retirement, including his book on the Gardner theft and consulting for a Netflix series, attests to his ongoing dedication to journalism.

The association concludes: "But all of this doesn't capture Steve's most important contribution to our field. He is not only a legendary reporter but a beloved mentor and friend. He served as an example for hundreds and hundreds of reporters and editors, showing them that you can be a good person, a kind and caring person, and still be a hard-nosed, take-no-prisoners accountability journalist of the highest order."

The other three 2025 honorees are Paul Pronovost of the *Cape Cod Times* and Naomi Schalit and John Christie of the Maine Center for Public Interest Reporting.



Avatar's trivia event at St. Mary Armenian Church in Washington, D.C.

## Avatar Online School Teaches STEM Internationally

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

ROCKVILLE, Md. — In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when traditional educational institutions struggled to adapt, four Armenian-American women with PhDs in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) — Drs. Lana Yeganova, Armine Arustamyan, Astrid Babayan, and Margaret Khachatryan — saw an opportunity to fill a critical gap in math education. They co-founded the Avatar Learning Center, commonly known as AvatarMath, an online school designed to provide high-quality education in mathematics, science, and coding.

The founders have always had concerns about the quality of math education in public schools. As Dr. Yeganova put it, "We knew there was a void in teaching math. We were mentally ready." The pandemic merely accelerated the decision to launch a dedicated online math school for American children. The learning center opened its virtual doors in fall 2020.

"Why Avatar," I asked about the catchy name.

"The word avatar means manifestation or transformation and in the digital world, it represents a virtual identity. Education is about transformation, about giving students the ability to reshape their future. In a way, Avatar represents the journey of every learner—starting as one version of themselves and evolving into something greater," said Yeganova.

AvatarMath offers its own developed curriculum and teaching methodology, going beyond traditional material while aligning with US educational standards. The program emphasizes problem-solving techniques that foster analytical thinking, ensuring students gain a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.

*continued on next page*



## Nzhdeh Yeranyan Speak On 'Shattered Heritage: Museums and Cultural Loss in the Artsakh War' At NAASR

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host a hybrid (in-person and online) illustrated lecture by Dr. Nzhdeh Yeranyan of the History Museum of Armenia titled "Shattered Heritage: Museums and Cultural Loss in the Artsakh War," on Thursday, March 20, at 7:30 p.m. at the NAASR Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave.

The program is being held under the auspices of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) / Calouste Gulbenkian Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues and is co-sponsored by the Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies at Harvard University, the Armenian Museum of America, and the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS). It is open to all free of charge, and a reception will follow the program.

This will be an in-person event and also presented online live via Zoom (Registration: <https://bit.ly/41ipi0R>) and YouTube ([www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies](http://www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies)).

The impact of the 2020 Artsakh War and the 2023 forced expulsion on the region's cultural heritage, especially its museums, was devastating. More than 40 state and private museums and their collections were left behind in areas now controlled by Azerbaijan.

This presentation will highlight the deliberate targeting of cultural and educational institutions during the conflict, emphasizing that such actions constitute war crimes under international law. It will also explore the critical role these museums played in community life and reflect on the heightened vulnerability of museums, as their collections—unlike immovable heritage—cannot be remotely monitored. Finally, the presentation will address the ongoing challenges facing these museums and the broader implications of cultural loss.

Yeranyan is a cultural anthropologist specializing in the preservation and management of cultural heritage, particularly in crisis, conflict, and post-conflict situations. His research focuses on the colonial and post-colonial archaeology of Armenia, the Bronze-Iron Age landscape, and the preservation of the cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the protection of museums and collections. He is the Deputy Scientific Director of the History Museum of Armenia, Lecturer in the Department of Cultural Studies at Yerevan State University, and is currently a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Cornell University.

For more information about this program, contact NAASR at [hq@naasr.org](mailto:hq@naasr.org).



Dr. Nzhdeh Yeranyan





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Avatar Online School Teaches STEM Internationally

from previous page

“The ability to resolve mathematical problems at an early stage leads to analytical thinking. Even for students who don’t pursue STEM careers, these skills are invaluable. We teach how to think and how to resolve problems. With that, you can go anywhere,” Yeganova emphasized.

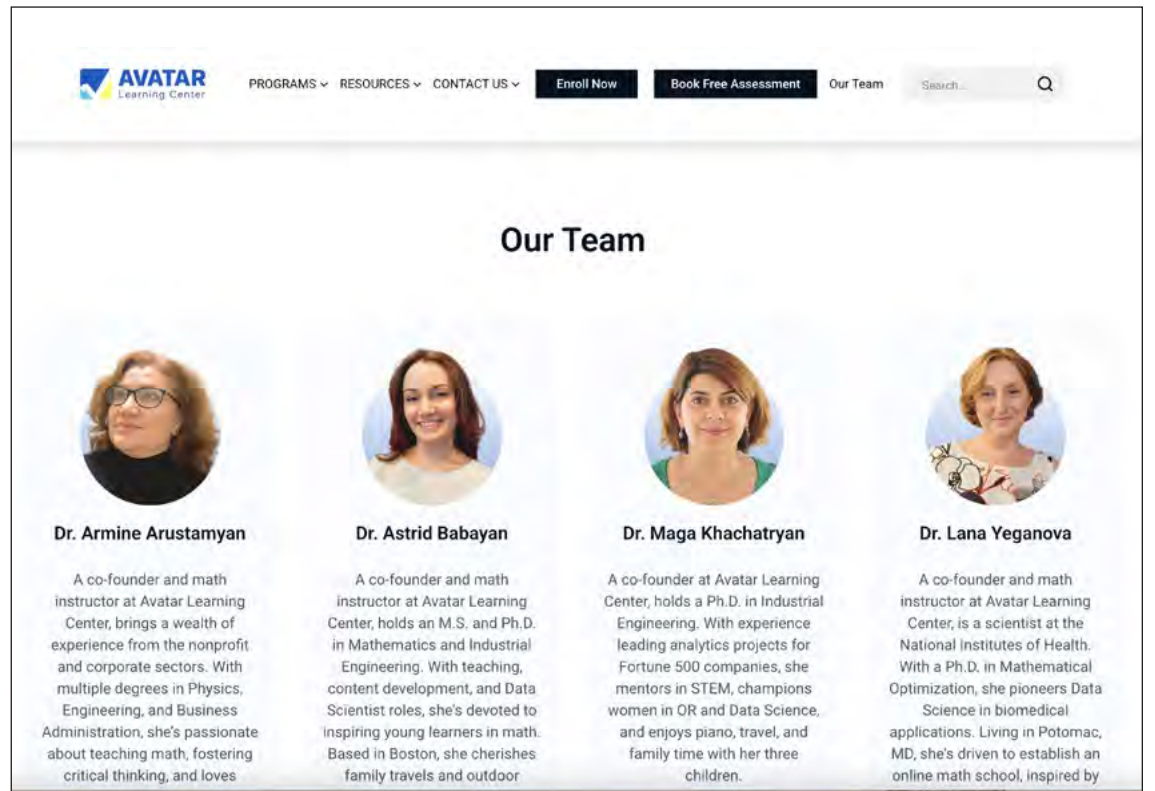
With an online format, students gain flexibility in their learning, allowing them to access high-quality STEM education from anywhere.

Beyond virtual classrooms, Avatar is involved in Armenian communities. The founders frequently organize educational events, such as math trivia games for children at Armenian churches and cultural centers, including St. Mary Armenian Church in Washington, St. Vartan Cathedral in New York, and the Rockville Science Center in Maryland.

Since its inception, Avatar Learning Center has helped more than a thousand students, with an active student base across the US, Canada and Armenia. The school’s impact has not gone unnoticed — *Washington Parent Magazine* named Avatar Learning Center the Best STEM School in 2022 and 2023, based on parent votes. “Parents have seen the results firsthand, and that’s why they vote for us,” stated Yeganova.

With its strong foundation in STEM, dedication to quality education, and deep community ties, Avatar Learning Center continues to expand, inspiring young minds to think critically and problem-solve with confidence. To learn more about this program visit the website [www.avatarlc.com](http://www.avatarlc.com).

A video report accompanies this article at [mirrorspectator.com](http://mirrorspectator.com).



The founders of Avatar Learning Center

# END THE DENIAL

# THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

## NYC ANNUAL COMMEMORATION

# SUNDAY

# APRIL 27, 2025

# 1:30PM

# TIMES SQUARE



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Primate Ordains Fr. Nerses Krajekian at Minnesota's St. Sahag Church

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL, Minn. — On February 21-22, 2025, Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan performed his first priestly ordination in the Eastern Diocese, ordaining Deacon Serop Krajekian into the holy priesthood of the Armenian Church, and bestowing him with the new name "Father Nerses."

The ceremonies took place at St. Sahag Church of Minneapolis/St. Paul, where Krajekian will serve as pastor, following the traditional 40 days of seclusion for a newly-ordained priest.

Bishop Mesrop recounted the extraordinary spiritual experience he and Fr. Nerses shared.

"The ordination was a powerful, unforgettable day," he said. "My heart is still overflowing with joy and gratitude, because I had the honor of performing my first priestly ordination in our Diocese at St. Sahag Church in Minnesota. We were blessed to witness a divine mystery unfold right before our eyes, as Deacon Serop Krajekian was transformed into a new creation in the Lord: Father Nerses."

Originally from Syria, Krajekian previously served at St. Sarkis Church in Charlotte, NC. "Although I have served in the church since childhood, I never thought I



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan anoints the new Fr. Nerses Krajekian, during the latter's priestly ordination at the St. Sahag Church of Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN. Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan (right) was Fr. Krajekian's sponsoring priest.

When the parish entered a period of transition without a pastor in mid-2020, Dn. Serop led Sunday services, and delivered the homily, for three years. "I'm grateful to the parishioners and clergy who recognized my potential in serving the church, and encouraged me to enroll at St. Nerses Seminary," he said.

On January 1, he began his service at St. Sahag Church, as its Deacon-in-Charge. The parishioners of St. Sahag Church organized a special service and reception on that occasion to welcome Dn. Serop, his wife Sevan, and their teenage children Aram and Meghry to the community.

"As I prepared for my ordination to the holy priesthood, I was grateful to Bishop Mesrop for his trust in me," said the new priest. "Going forward, I pray that God will enable me to spare no effort in carrying forward the church's mission, with reverence and holiness."

### A Divine Assignment

During the ordination weekend, the dramatic "Service of Calling" was held at the church on Friday, February 21. The following morning, February 22, Bishop Mesrop celebrated the Divine Liturgy and led the Service of Ordination, during which the new priest was formally blessed and anointed.

Longtime Diocesan clergyman Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan served as the sponsoring priest, with Avo Toghramadjian serving as the ordination godfather. Both held an honored place during the sacred and celebratory events of the weekend.

An ordination banquet in the church's Ararat Hall was an opportunity for the faithful of Minnesota, guests, and clergy from around the Diocese to congratulate Fr. Nerses and his family.

The day was also a proud and exciting moment for the people of St. Sahag Church, who have gone without a pastor for more than a year. Parishioners did a splendid job of organizing the ceremonies

and surrounding functions, and are eager to embark on a new era of spiritual leadership for the community.

In his remarks, Bishop Mesrop offered words of praise for the community and its new pastor. "A new priest means a new chapter, a new outpouring of grace, a fresh wind of the Spirit," he said. "Just as a baptism fills a family with joy, just as a wedding brings celebration, so too will the St. Sahag community, our Eastern Diocese, and the entire Armenian Church rejoice today, because God has raised up a new shepherd to lead His flock."

He continued: "To Der Nerses I say: This is your divine assignment. God has chosen you, equipped you, and He will sustain you. Yes, there will be challenges; but there will also be miracles. There will be moments of doubt; but even greater moments of divine strength. Stay faithful, stay humble, and tend to God's flock."

The ordination services were broadcast live on the St. Sahag Church Facebook page, where the recording can be watched.



Fr. Nerses Krajekian

would be a priest," Fr. Nerses said. "But God's plans are always surprising. Since my arrival in Charlotte in 2015, I served in St. Sarkis Church and was ordained deacon in 2019."

## Dr. Hakem Al-Rustom to Give Talk on the 'Enduring Erasures of Armenians in Turkey'

FRESNO — University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Alex Manoogian Professor of Modern Armenian History, Dr. Hakem Al-Rustom, will give a presentation on his new book, "From Natives to Foreigners: Enduring Erasures of Armenians in Turkey" on Friday, March 21, at 7 p.m., in the Grosse Industrial Technology Building, Room 101 (2255 E. Barstow Ave.-corner of Barstow Ave. and Campus Drive.), on the Fresno State campus.

The presentation is funded through the generosity of the Ralph Shabazian Armenian Memorial Fund.

What does it mean for a people to be transformed from indigenous inhabitants to foreigners in their own homeland? This lecture introduces the concept of "denativization" to examine how Armenians in Turkey underwent this transformation. Denativization extends beyond genocide and human rights violations, addressing the systemic erasure of Armenian presence, identity, and history. Through historical events, policies, and cultural shifts, the lecture illustrates how Armenians, once integral to Anatolia, were systematically marginalized and rendered alien in their ancestral land. Rather than viewing the Armenian genocide as a definitive endpoint,



this approach highlights its enduring afterlives — showing how erasure and marginalization persist through erasures and historical denial in the present.

Al-Rustom is the Alex Manoogian Professor of Modern Armenian History, assistant professor of history and of anthropology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is author of *Enduring Erasures: Afterlives of the Armenian Genocide* (forthcoming, July 2025) and the coeditor of *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation* (2010).

The lecture is free and open to the public.

The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.



Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Boston Chapter

presents a lecture

## Introduction to Education in Armenia Today

by



Vicky Kherlopian

Boston University Practicum Field Supervisor

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(use Norseman Ave. entrance)

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For info, contact [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net), 617 281-1647





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Haigazian University Celebrates 70th Anniversary in New Jersey

By Gilda Kupelian

PARAMUS, N.J. — The first celebration ushering more anticipated tributes to mark the 70th Anniversary of Haigazian University, located in Beirut, Lebanon, was held by the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) on March 4. Alumni and friends gathered for an elegant dinner hosted by the AMAA's recently appointed CEO/Executive Director Serge D. Buchakjian, and his wife Anita.

Upon warmly welcoming Rev. Paul Haidostian, PhD, president of Haigazian University, Buchakjian, an alumnus of Haigazian, referenced the University's unique position as the only Armenian University in the Diaspora, qualifying it as "the jewel of the higher education system of the AMAA in the Middle East." He underscored the accomplishments of

ent Arabic through his ministry.

Following the opening prayer delivered by Rev. Joseph Garabedian, pastor of the Armenian Presbyterian Church of Paramus, NJ and an AMAA Board member, Haidostian gave a presentation, highlighting 70 years of Haigazian University's major achievements.

He began with the founding of Haigazian University, named after Armenag Haigazian, a theologian, musician, academic, and linguist who became a victim of the Armenian Genocide. The University reflects "resurrection in action," especially since it has continued its mission despite many challenges. The President singled out Elizabeth Webb, an American missionary who witnessed the massacres in Adana, and was instrumental in laying the groundwork for Haigazian University. She purchased two buildings and offered them

Society launched the first rocket in the Middle East in the 1960s under the presidency of the university's founding President Rev. Dr. John Markarian. The launching is detailed in a documentary as well as in the global media including the *Smithsonian* magazine, "By early 1961, Manoug Manougian (a science teacher at Haigazian University) and his team built rockets that could travel nearly two miles. A year later, Cedar 2 made it about 8.6 miles up. In a country unaccustomed to competing with the major powers, their successes were increasingly the talk of the town. "We were known as the rocket boys and treated as rock stars," Manougian remembers.

In 2020, the following statement was aired as a final question on the syndicated American TV game show "Jeopardy:" In the 1960s this Mideast country had a space program and one of its rocket launches, the



Rev. Paul Haidostian, Ph.D., at left, presents a token of appreciation to AMAA CEO/Executive Director Serge D. Buchakjian



A scene from the dinner with AMAA CEO/Executive Director Serge D. Buchakjian greeting the guests

the guest of honor during his illustrious tenure of 23 years in challenging times as "the definition of resilience," and his authoritative status as "when he talks, people listen."

Rev. Dr. Haidostian is an AMAA scholar, academic, and a minister of the Armenian Evangelical Church. He is also Acting President of the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, President of the Armenian Evangelical World Council, and one of the Presidents of the Middle East Council of Churches. He enjoys the esteem of the Lebanese religious and political community, as well as the secular contingency of believers from all denominations whom he reaches in flu-

to the Congregational Church to educate Armenian girls in Lebanon. Those were the original accommodations that were later developed to become the current locale of Haigazian University.

Today, of the 600 students who attend the university each year, 43 percent are Armenians from all over the world. On average, 120 students graduate annually. Armenian and Non-Armenian Impartiality, in a multi-ethnic environment where students may have different political persuasions, is a welcome haven that Haigazian University provides everyone. It is where students leave everything behind and focus on academia.

The Haigazian (then College) Rocket

Cedar IV, is commemorated on a stamp.

One of Haigazian University's most successful programs is the Center for Continuing Education in various disciplines. Another example of its noteworthy departments is the Armenian Studies Program. Since Rev. Dikran Kherlopian, the first head of the Armenian Department, the University has excelled in Armenian Studies, and specifically in the Armenian language. Since 1970, The HU Armenological Review has published 1,600 academic reviews in 48 books in Lebanon, edited and printed at the recently established Haigazian University Press which already boasts 59 books. Proud of its Armenian identity, Haigazian University considers

itself an "Ambassador" representing Armenian History and Culture.

Partnerships with Armenian religious institutions, philanthropic organizations, and universities globally have been beneficial, including membership with the Association of American International Colleges and Universities (AAICU) and Consortium for Global Education (CGE).

Haigazian University boasts a cadre of professional alumni who have left their mark internationally.

Plans are in development for research centers, and teacher training for Armenian teachers around the world. Need-based and merit scholarships will be key to success. However, financial aid from various sources has dwindled in the past years, making funding a priority.

The evening resonated with alumni and friends to promote and support the "Jewel of the Middle East" that is Haigazian University. The hope is that the community at large will heed the call as well.

Rev. Hagop Akbashian, pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church and principal of the Armenian Evangelical Secondary School, both located in Anjar, as well as a Haigazian University alumnus, delivered the closing prayer and Benediction.

For more information about Haigazian University, visit the University's website at [haigazian.edu.lb](http://haigazian.edu.lb)



AMAA CEO/Executive Director Serge D. Buchakjian welcomes the guests



Haigazian University President Rev. Paul Haidostian, Ph.D. gives a presentation highlighting 70 years of the University's achievements.



Honored guests, from left, Taline Garabedian, Rev. Joseph Garabedian, Rev. Hagop Akbashian, Rev. Paul Haidostian, Ph.D., Serge D. Buchakjian, Anita Buchakjian, Michael Voskian, D.M.D. and Jacqueline Voskian.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# New Icons of Sts. Vartan and Shushan Blessed at St. Vartan Cathedral, on Vartanantz Day

NEW YORK — Two large-scale icon paintings dominated the sanctuary of New York's St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral, during its Sts. Vartanantz Day celebration on Thursday, February 27.

Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, presided over the occasion, which began with the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan, pastor of Holy Martyrs Church of Bayside, NY.

Diocesan Vicar Fr. Simeon Odabashian and Cathedral Vicar Fr. Davit Karamyan also participated in the service, as did a large retinue of deacons from the region. Khoren Mekanejian conducted the St. Vartan Cathedral Choir, augmented by singers from area choirs, with Kris Kalfayan accompanying on the organ.

A unique feature of the service was the consecration of the two new icons, depicting the cathedral's namesake St. Vartan, and his daughter St. Shushan. Both were donated by Adrienne Alexanian and the Edward and Grace Alexanian Fund. The Alexanian family has had a long and honored history of serving the Armenian Church and the Diocesan cathedral in particular.

After blessing the two icons, Parsamyan shared his blessing with the faithful in attendance. While Vartan is the "patron saint" of the cathedral, and a well-known personage in Armenian spirituality, it is rare to have him figure as the subject of a holy icon — and rarer still to have his sainted daughter Shushan in that role.

The two new icons are the work of Armenian artist M. Hovanessian, and are painted in accordance with the religious stipulations that dictate how saintly subjects should be portrayed to make them suitable for veneration. Each icon measures over eight feet in height, and will henceforth adorn the narthex of the cathedral, flanking



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan anoints a new icon of St. Vartan for the cathedral that bears his name: St. Vartan Cathedral in New York. The consecration took place during the Vartanantz Day celebration of Feb. 27. (Photo by Harout Barsoumian)

the entry portal on its southern wall, above the votive candle array.

Following the service, a dinner was hosted in the Diocesan Center's Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium, sponsored by the Knights and Daughters of Vartan. The program featured guest speaker Dr. Khatchig Mouradian of Columbia University, who described the efforts of the Armenian people to survive and thrive at various points of history, and told how these embodied the fierce spirit of St. Vartan the Warrior.

The Eastern Diocese welcomed Ara Kasparian, Master of Ceremonies, to give the Call to Order while Remarks were provided by Dr. Edward Sanossian and Silva Sanossian.

Renowned pianist Karen Hakobyan and cellist Sergey Antonov provided a beautiful musical program for the occasion.

## New Icons Build on a Long Family Legacy

Even before the construction of St. Vartan Cathedral, Adrienne Alexanian's family had always been involved with the Armenian Church and the Eastern Diocese. Her father, Edward, served as the chair of the Bronx Cathedral committee, and her mother Grace was the head of the Ladies Auxiliary.

nificant, benefaction are the two new icons of St. Vartan and St. Shushan that will henceforth hang prominently in the cathedral sanctuary. Every year, the Edward and Grace Alexanian Trust Fund donates some of its interest to a Diocesan project, and last year Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan suggested the idea of donating two icons, one of the cathedral's namesake St. Vartan, and the other of his daughter St. Shushan.

In a gesture that held great personal meaning for her, Adrienne allocated her parents' fund to completely underwrite the costs of the painting of St. Vartan, while she personally undertook the costs of the St. Shushan icon. As her parents before her devoted their efforts to the church, now she does the same for the patron saint's daughter.

Due to their beauty and their adherence to the rules of Christian iconography, Bishop Mesrop has designated the new paintings of Vartan and Shushan as the official religious images of the two saints, suitable for display and veneration in church sanctuaries.

"I learned by watching my parents that it was my responsibility and privilege to give back to my people," reflected Adrienne Alexanian after the icon consecrations on February 27. "I've always felt that when I am honored for my contributions, it is my parents' legacy that is being honored, for which I am profoundly grateful."

She added: "Going forward, you can be



Adrienne Alexanian, longtime cathedral benefactor and volunteer, stands alongside the new icon of St. Shushan, pious daughter of St. Vartan Mamigonian. Two heroic-scale icons of the saints were donated to St. Vartan Cathedral by Adrienne and the benevolent fund established in honor of her parents, the Edward and Grace Alexanian Fund. (Photo by Harout Barsoumian)

Inspired by her parents, Adrienne continued the family tradition of being involved with the church. At the age of 13, she enrolled in the Holy Cross Church's ACYO Juniors program, where she studied the faith into her 20s.

It was around that time that Adrienne was officially invited to work as a volunteer for the Diocese.

Since then, the vast majority of her volunteer and benevolent work has been devoted to the betterment of the Eastern Diocese. Some examples include the iron guards protecting the memorial trees around the cathedral, planted in honor of the Genocide; donating more 400 Divine Liturgy Books to the cathedral; refurbishing the sidewalk; and most notably the Golden Armenian Alphabet display mounted above the grand staircase approaching Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium, installed in the 1980s in her late father's memory.

Her most recent, and perhaps most sig-

sure that there will be more opportunities for my parents' fund and myself to contribute to the needs of our Diocese."



The new icon of St. Vartan that will henceforth adorn the southern wall of New York's St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral. The Vartan icon and its companion piece depicting Shushan, Vartan's martyred daughter, are the work of Armenian artist M. Hovanessian. (Photo by Harout Barsoumian)



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April 11 Lecture

How the Ottoman Armenian communal body was dismembered, disfigured, and later re-membered by the survivor community, tracing the histories of women and children rescued during and after the war



with author **Elyse Semerdjian**

holder of the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University, Worcester,

7 p.m. Friday at the Baikar Center

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

## Publisher, Columnist Sassounian to Be Keynote Speaker at Commemoration Dedicated to UN Recognition of Armenian Genocide

WATERTOWN — The ARF Sardarabad Gomideh, the Armenian National Committee of America of Eastern Massachusetts, the Leola Sassouni and Shushi chapters of the ARS, the Nejdeh AYPF Chapter, Hamazkayin and Homenetmen chapters of Boston, the ACEC, the AGBU of New England, St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, the Tekeyan Cultural Association and the Shahbazian Foundation are co-hosting a commemorative event titled "Forgotten, Unforgettable: Marking the 40th Anniversary of the UN's Recognition of the Armenian Genocide." The event will be held at the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (47 Nichols Avenue, Watertown) on Sunday, April 6, at 3:00 p.m. The event will be in English and free and open to the public.

The commemoration will feature Harut

Sassounian, the publisher and editor of the *California Courier*, as a keynote speaker. It will also include a presentation of the flags by the Homenetmen Scouts and a cultural performance by the ArtNova Hamazkayin Choir of Boston under the directorship of Artur Veranian.

After over a decade of struggle in the halls of the United Nations by Armenians, countering intense efforts by Turkey and its allies in NATO and the Islamic Conference, the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in August 1985, by a vote of 14 in favor, one against and four abstentions, adopted a report that included an extensive reference to the Armenian Genocide. This is the first time that a U.N. body recognized the Armenian Genocide. 2025 is the 40th anniversary of that recognition.

ognition.

Sassounian is a human rights activist and founder of the Armenia Artsakh Fund, which has delivered more than \$1 billion in humanitarian aid since 1989. As Senior Vice President of Kirk Kerkorian's Lincy Foundation, he oversaw \$242 million in infrastructure projects in Armenia. A former UN human rights delegate, he played a key role in recognizing the Armenian Genocide and has been widely honored for his contributions to journalism, philanthropy and advocacy.

ArtNova is Hamazkayin Boston's new adult choir, led by renowned conductor and music educator Artur Veranian, with support from the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center. Veranian brings decades of experience and has trained vocalists performing worldwide.



Harut Sassounian

## Rep. Latimer of New York Joins Armenian Caucus

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) welcomes Rep. George Latimer (D-NY) to the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, who recently met with community members at St. Gregory the Enlightener Church in White Plains, NY, where concerns about Azerbaijan's genocidal actions and threats against Armenia were conveyed. Additional priority topics raised included the unjust holding of hostages by Azerbaijan, the importance of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, and the right of return.

"We very much appreciate Rep. Latimer taking the time to hear directly from the community about key issues of concern, including the unjust holding of Armenian hostages," said Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny. "The Assembly welcomes his decision to join the Armenian Caucus, and we look forward to working

together to strengthen U.S.-Armenia relations."

Rep. Latimer, who formerly served as Westchester County Executive, and who shared remarks during the Edwin G. Michaelian Building Rededication Ceremony in White Plains last September, currently serves on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the House Committee on Small Business. He is a Member of the Congressional Labor Caucus and Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, among others.

"The Armenian American presence in New York, and particularly in Westchester County, has made a positive impact in business, culture, and in the private and public sectors," said Latimer. "As I serve New York's 16th Congressional District, and as a Member of the Armenian Caucus, I will ensure that the voices of the Armenian Americans are heard."



From left, Dennis Krolian, Zarine Arushanyan, Van Krikorian Assembly Chair Emeritus, Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny, Rep. George Latimer, John Vorperian, Ellie Krolian, and Parish Council Chair Arman Bedonian at the St. Gregory The Enlightener Church Library in White Plains, New York



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# Arts & Culture

## Project Save Gears Up to Celebrate 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

WATERTOWN — Project Save, the world's largest photo archive dedicated to preserving the regional, national and global Armenian experience, marks its 50th anniversary this spring with a bold new vision to expand its collection by encouraging people in New England, across the country, and around the world to contribute their Armenian family histories to this vital global resource.

The idea for Project Save started in the late 1960s in New York City, when founder Ruth Thomasian discovered that many in the Armenian community held photographs documenting their families' lives before and after the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Recognizing their historical significance, Thomasian dedicated her life to collecting and preserving such images, as well as documenting the people and the situations depicted in them. She established Project Save as a nonprofit in 1975. Over five decades, what began as a personal passion grew into an internationally recognized archive of more than 100,000 original photographs and ephemera spanning the Armenian diaspora in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

In 2021 Project Save hired Arto Vaun to be its first executive director. As an artist and academic, Vaun saw real value in the trove of history contained within the photos. "This is more than an archive. It's a living, growing record of Armenian life here, across the U.S., and around the world. In celebrating 50 years, Project Save is not just looking back — we're working to ensure stories like these are preserved for generations to come," he said.

Last year, Vaun relocated Project Save to its own dedicated space: a 2,000-square-foot headquarters with climate-controlled storage space in the Armenian-heavy community of Watertown, Mass. The new location has a public gallery and exhibition space, a conference/education room, and guest parking. Vaun says the organization's next phase includes more exhibits and programming, connections with like-minded nonprofit cultural and heritage preservation organizations, enhanced educational outreach to schools and universities, ongoing development of its online presence (projectsave.org) and social media platforms (@projectsave\_archives on Instagram), documentaries based on its archive, and more.

As Thomasian, who turns 80 this spring, steps away from day-to-day work on the project, Vaun plans to build on the founder's decades of work. One long-term goal is to position the archive as a central resource for immigrant and displaced communities across the U.S. and beyond. "The incredible legacy Ruth leaves us is the starting point for a new see ANNIVERSARY, page 15



Author and photographer Yulia Grigoryants

## 'Yearning for Connection:' Yulia Grigoryants' *Cosmic Solitude*

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

It is difficult to think of a more appropriate title for a collection of photographs that document the everyday lives of the last three remaining employees of the Aragats Cosmic Ray Research Station located 3,300 meters (2 miles) above sea level on the slopes of Mount Aragats in Armenia, some 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the closest village. Two scientists and a cook tasked with maintaining the facility live in quasi-complete isolation in temperatures averaging -15 degrees Celsius (5 degrees Fahrenheit), with snow covering the ground two thirds of the year.

It took photographer Yulia Grigoryants six years and her participation in the VII Masterclass — an ambitious training program aimed at developing new talent in documentary photography — in 2018-2019 to complete *Cosmic Solitude* (printed in Italy by EBS, 2024), a project that attempts to bring to light "this unique station and its mission to serve humanity's scientific endeavors." The research data collected from the Station's sensors and experimental laboratories contribute to the understanding of solar phenomena and their impact on the Earth's atmosphere and the space environment. A landmark discovery was the observation, in 2005, of solar protons with the highest energies ever recorded. The sighting is considered a unique contribution to high-energy cosmic ray physics.

The Aragats Cosmic Ray Research Station was established in 1943 under Soviet rule — Joseph Stalin's portrait still hangs on one of the walls — but has been largely neglected following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. A facility that at its height employed around one hundred scientists currently has three "devoted inhabitants" who work one-month shifts, with one month off, to maintain it twenty-four hours a day year-round. "Virtually abandoned" is how Grigoryants characterized the Station in her presentation at the Abril Bookstore Book Event at the Center for Armenian Arts in Glendale.

The artist divides her time between Armenia, her home country, and France where she has lived since 2017. As a child growing up in Armenia Grigoryants see SOLITUDE, page 14



At the Cosmic Ray Research Station on Mount Aragats, as photographed by Yulia Grigoryants

## Talin Suciyan's Book *Armenians In Turkey After the Second World War* Published

LONDON/NEW YORK—I. B. Tauris, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, has announced the publication of Dr. Talin Suciyan's *Armenians in Turkey after the Second World War: An Archival Reader of USSR Consular Documents*.

The book is part of the series Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World edited by Bedross Der Matossian (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

This reader brings to light newly discovered archival material compiled by the Soviet Consulate in Istanbul. The book reveals the lives and experience of Armenians in Turkey in the 1940s,



with a particular focus on the process of emigration to Soviet Armenia. The accounts, translated for the first time into English,

are comprised of Soviet officials' reports and first-hand testimony by survivors of their lives during the post-genocide period, making this an invaluable new contribution to the existing collections of Armenian survival testimonies. Placing the archival records on emigration in the context of both life in post-genocide Turkey and the repatriation (nergakht) project in the Armenian Diaspora, this book, which also includes the original Russian documents, will be a useful resource for researchers and students of Armenian and Turkish history.

Suciyan commented on the book saying: "Armenians after the Second World War sheds light on the lives of tens of thousands of Armenians who remained in the provinces of Turkey after the genocide, through their appearance in the Soviet consular archives of Istanbul. This rare resource, presented in both Russian and the English translation, contains the stories of Armenians seeking to emigrate to Soviet Armenia, whose existence and experience have been completely erased from mainstream Turkish and Armenian historiographies."

"This is a fascinating work that sheds light on the hardships faced by Armenians in Turkey following the genocide," said Der Matossian, editor of the series. "Suciyan has made a significant contribution to the history of Armenians in Turkey in the post-genocide era, particularly in relation to the history of repatriation after World War II."

Copies of *Armenians in Turkey after the Second World War: An Archival Reader of USSR Consular Documents* are available for purchase from the Bloomsbury Press website. Enter code GLR AT8 at the checkout on bloomsbury.com for 35% off.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# ‘Yearning for Connection:’ Yulia Grigoryants’ *Cosmic Solitude*

SOLITUDE, from page 13

was plagued with a feeling of being an “outsider . . . often feeling lonely without many friends by my side.” (Grigoryants was born in Azerbaijan but she and her family fled to Armenia when she was only four to avoid the pogrom against the Armenian population in Baku).

“The weight of my solitude didn’t inflict immediate pain; rather, it became a familiar companion, a silent companion I grew accustomed to, a companion that silently bore witness to my unspoken yearning for connection,” she writes in “The Weight of The Solitude,” a short essay published alongside the seventy photographs assembled in the elegant volume.

In her early 20s, in Yerevan, Grigoryants started making frequent trips to the mountains, specifically to Mount Aragats, to find “solace among the peaks.” These trips fostered a “deep love for my country, my historical homeland,” she avers. Despite a comfortable life in France with her husband and two children, the artist “ache[s] for Armenia.” Her biggest fear is that her children “may never have as deep a connection with Armenia as I do.”

“In France, the yearning for connection sometimes screams within me. However, the abyss remains,” she confided.

It is perhaps the need to penetrate this “abyss” that took Grigoryants to one of the world’s most remote scientific outposts whose isolated setting may evoke the feeling of isolation inherent in human existence. Acknowledging her own “unspoken yearning for connection,” “Loneliness is a common experience for many,” writes Grigoryants. Indeed, in an uncanny way, her shots of the deep blue skies and of the panoramic views of the expanses

of snow surrounding the many “huts” of the station, with Mount Ararat looming in the distant background some ninety kilometers away in Turkey, capture the vast empty spaces within. The images of the interior of the station, on the other hand, of Artash Petrosyan, the cook, sitting at the kitchen table surrounded by his appliances and pots and pans, reminiscing the time when he used to cook for a hundred employees, or of Laboratory Assistant Karen Asatryan playing pool alone — or



At the Cosmic Ray Research Station on Mount Aragats,

walking outside alone in deep thought with white snow all around — give us a revealing glimpse into the inhabitants’ “cosmic solitude.”

Grigoryants’s photographs invite much reflection. One wonders if Karen Asatryan, Edik Arshakyan and Artash Petrosyan have chosen the isolation of the station to escape the distractions of the external world so they can explore the “abyss” of their own inner worlds — “But I need solitude, which is to say, recovery, return to myself,” affirms famed philosopher Friedrich Ni-

etzsche — or if theirs is a selfless “mission to serve humanity’s scientific endeavors” in its efforts to create a better world. Clearly, the book highlights the importance of what the scientists do. What seduces the viewer, however, is the artist’s tremendous empathy for their situation. Grigoryants’s images that reach into the depths of their isolated lives reveal the desolation, perhaps even the fear, of working in an (inhumanly?) cold and remote setting, in laboratories that reach up to nine levels underground.

Notwithstanding, the three employees are not resigned to hopelessness. They return to their families in the nearby villages after their month-long shifts, only to come back “home.” “When you stay here so long, it becomes like a home,” says Lab Assistant Edik

The book gives no suggestion that the Research Station will end anytime soon. Indeed, *Cosmic Solitude* prompts the viewer to question a government that refuses to adequately fund a project that has made significant contributions to humanity’s efforts to understand its habitat. One can only hope that Grigoryants’s honest documentation will engage policy makers in discussions that may result in funding for the research facility. Her book is evidence of her faith in that possibility.

A new generation of women photographers is gaining visibility in an art form traditionally dominated by men — certainly not for lack of talented women. Anush Babajanyan, Diana Markosian, Armineh Johannes are only a few of the names that have been featured in the Armenian Press recently. These women use their art to engage social and political issues. Grigoryants’s work resonates on an even larger, a more profound level. *Cosmic Solitude* offers the viewer insights into the unseen

aspects of the human experience. The many shots of the views from the large windows of the buildings of the Station evoke the “isolation and solitude” her project set out to explore.

Grigoryants received the Best New Talent Award at the International Photography Awards in 2016. Her work has been exhibited and published in major outlets internationally.



Artash Petrosyan sitting in the kitchen of Cosmic Ray Research Station on Mount Aragats, as photographed by Yulia Grigoryants

Arshakyan, whose grandparents and father also worked at the station. Karen Asatryan celebrates the freedom working at the station gives him: “I like the freedom that I have here . . . [even if] sometimes you are trapped here, especially in winter.”

*Cosmic Solitude* is bilingual, with Anoush Ajemyan-Mkrtchian’s Armenian translations following the English originals of Grigoryants’s essays and detailed descriptions of the photographs. The book is available for purchase at [Abrilbooks.com](http://Abrilbooks.com).

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## My Greek Dish's Amazing Lenten Chocolate Sponge Cake

ATHENS — At My Greek Dish, discover over 200 of the best authentic Greek recipes and how to make them to perfection. Traditional and original Greek recipes made easy. Made from locally sourced, tried and tested Greek recipes with quick step by step instructions. This recipe and photos are courtesy of Eli K. Giannopoulos, the gifted food writer and blogger at My Greek Dish.

“The most moist Lenten chocolate cake that despite being an indulgent delight still complies with the dietary instructions of the Lenten season,” says Eli, who lives in Athens, Greece. “If you have ever tried making a Lenten chocolate cake before it is possible that you have faced the disappointment of a heavy, muddy, dull flavored cake, that despite your efforts, didn’t rise at all. You’re not alone. The first recipe I made worked well, but there was something missing. So, I decided to replace some of the water with orange juice (some orange zest will also make a nice addition), added some vanilla extract for extra flavor, and coated the cake with a cocoa based glaze with just a splash of cognac. The result was simply astonishing.”

“Over the past 8 years my readers have made My Greek Dish the number one destination for anyone searching for authentic Greek recipes. For that I cannot thank them enough. It all started with an idea. To collate and publish all those recipes that I loved when I was younger, the ones I made with so much love for my children and grandchildren. So go ahead, explore my delicious collections and don’t forget to leave me a comment, connect with me on Facebook or Instagram and sign up to my mailing list so you never miss out on my latest creations.”

“This recipe is one of my favorite desserts to serve at Lent, Easter, and at Christmas. It has replaced my usual cake recipes as a healthier, economical, eas-

ier but equally tasty version. And of course, this cake can really be enjoyed during any season of the year. If you are wondering how a cake with no eggs, butter, dairy products and chocolate actually tastes like a chocolate cake then you just have to give it a try.”

Suggestion from Eli: “Dissolve baking soda in the orange juice before using it in the cake mixture. Be careful when doing so as the baking soda will start foaming and it might end up making a mess. Adding the vinegar is really important and if you are afraid to use it, I assure you that no one will ever know it’s there.”

### INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 cups sugar  
1/4 cup corn oil (olive oil, soybean oil, avocado oil, coconut oil, canola oil, and sunflower oil are all excellent substitutes for corn oil)  
Juice of 3 or 4 oranges (1 cup fresh orange juice)  
1 flat tablespoon baking soda  
1/2 cup water  
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar  
3 cups self-rising flour  
6 tablespoons cocoa powder  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
Slivered almonds or chopped nuts as garnish

### Glaze:

1 cup powdered sugar  
3 tablespoons cocoa powder, sifted  
2 tablespoons corn oil (or substitute)  
5 tablespoons hot water  
1 tablespoon cognac (optional)

### PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 347°F.

In a large bowl, whisk together the oil and sugar. Set aside.

Dissolve the baking soda in the orange juice, stir, and add it to the oil-sugar mixture. Add the water, vinegar, and vanilla, and continue to mix these ingredients for a few minutes by hand or with an electric mixer.

Sift the flour and cocoa powder together in a bowl. Gradually add the flour-cocoa mixture into the wet ingredients and fold gently with a spatula or large spoon until combined.

Oil the bottom and sides of a non-stick pan and pour in the mixture. As with all cakes baking it the right way is the key to success. Bake this cake in a preheated oven for 50-60 minutes on the lower rack with both top and bottom heating elements on, and do not open the oven while baking. When it looks ready, check by sticking a wooden skewer or toothpick in the middle of the cake. If it comes out clean, your cake is ready. Remove the cake from the oven and let it cool before removing it from the pan.

Serves 12

Glaze: Combine all ingredients for the glaze in a bowl, and whisk together for a few minutes to combine. Invert the cake on a rack and pour the glaze over the cake. After a few minutes, place the cake on a serving platter or tray, and garnish with slivered almonds (or other chopped nuts of your choice). Enjoy this cake with a hot coffee or tea.

See: <https://www.mygreekdish.com/>

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.mygreekdish.com/recipe/lenten-chocolate-sponge-cake-recipe/>

Featured at: THE ART OF ARMENIAN & MIDDLE EASTERN COOKING, go to <https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/photos/a.301637150793/10158050676585794/?type=3&theater>

Eli is a contributor to Greek Recipes, Recipes for People Affected by Cancer, Produced and Published by Centre for Rural Health, University of Tasmania, Launceston Tasmania 7250 in 2020. See Eli’s recipes at: [https://www.cancersa.org.au/uploads/recipes/CCTAS\\_greek-recipes.pdf](https://www.cancersa.org.au/uploads/recipes/CCTAS_greek-recipes.pdf)

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Eli K. Giannopoulos at My Greek Dish

# Project Save Gears Up to Celebrate 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

ANNIVERSARY, from page 13  
phase of our work to come,” Vaun said.

### A Call to Action

As part of its 50th anniversary initiative, Project Save is urging Armenian families and individuals to contribute photographs to the archive. “Every family around the world has a significant story to tell, and photos are the best way to capture the essence of those stories,” Vaun said. “We want people to know their family’s history will become part of a larger global story, one that we have the experience to preserve and amplify.”

Vaun says making a Project Save photo donation process is simple: individuals reach out via phone or email to discuss their

collection with an archival expert and what types of photos are most effective to build and preserve the global story. Once the photos are received, the team will assess, archive and digitize a curated selection of them. Project Save accepts and processes only original photos, and donors maintain the rights to their own images.

People interested in learning more about making photographic donations to Project Save can read more at [projectsave.org/donate-photos/](https://projectsave.org/donate-photos/). Staff can be reached at [archives@projectsave.org](mailto:archives@projectsave.org).

### Year of Celebration

Vaun said Project Save’s anniversary year will include several public highlights: rotating exhibitions in their new gallery

space; a gala celebration of Thomasian’s tenure; a public discussion series called “Conversations on Photography” that connects diverse community histories through pictures and stories; and bi-monthly “Lens & Libations” events at the gallery to familiarize people with the archive and to support the Project Save mission.

The organization is working toward a fundraising campaign to establish an endowment that helps to secure its future. Vaun added that he and his expanding board of advisors envision a museum-like space dedicated to the Armenian diaspora and displacement stories worldwide.

Eventually, Vaun said he hopes the experience and knowledge gained from Project Save’s first half-century will help

the group become a broader resource for the stories and photos of other displaced and immigrant communities in the U.S. and beyond. “There are photo collections based on Jewish, Italian, and Irish histories, for example, and other communities,” he says. “But there are very, very few archives solely focused on photography. Our unique approach to preserving personal and family histories through photography can be informative, healing and celebratory,” Vaun noted. “We are part of a cultural movement that’s bigger than the Armenian population. It’s about history, memory and, just as importantly, it’s about empathy — a universal connection of our human stories, and making sure they don’t disappear.”



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Jazz Piano Great Tigran Hamasyan to Tour US

HAMASYAN, from page 1

In a recent interview from his home in Armenia, Hamasyan, 37, discussed his influences, latest album and upcoming tour, which is kicking off in Philadelphia. He will perform in Massachusetts at the Somerville Theater in Somerville on March 29.

"It is a super old Armenian tale," Hamasyan said. "With this project, we are creating more research projects too. The international community doesn't know much about this tale. It is the most popular fairy tale in Armenia," Hamasyan said.

As described in Hamasyan's website about the tale, Hazaran Blbul is about a generous king who opens the palace gates to share his property with his people. In the greedy subjects' jostling, a small child is trampled; his grandmother holds the king responsible and puts a curse on him. Only the bird of a thousand songs can lift it. And so the king sends his oldest sons on a quest to find the mythical creature. But when they return empty-handed, it's the youngest son Areg's turn. Before embarking on a journey that will lead him to meet demons and other peril, he visits the village girl Manushak and promises to marry her when he returns. However, it takes much longer than expected for him to return. Though Areg succeeds, and the bird brings peace to the kingdom once more with its song, Manushak has turned into a lily from sorrow.

Hamasyan said the tale is "very old. Research tells us there is mythology linked all the way back to 4,000-5,000 years. There are archetypes you can find in many, many tales around the world. The entire story is all about overcoming hardship, which is the essence of a lot of epic stories, such as not being afraid to fight the dragon. What really struck me was how much poetry was in the tale. There is a lot about sacrifice but at the same time the goal to reach this bird of a thousand voices is reached. Once the hero finds the bird, the hero will ask the bird to sing and the garden will bloom again and people who had turned into beasts will turn human again," he explained.

And as a musician, he found that "the idea that this is all happening with this song

The Bird of a Thousand Voices is a multimedia project with many platforms including games, stories and a full theatrical production. The delicate drawings and visuals are all created by Khoren Matevosyan, an Armenia-based artist with a unique, delicate style of drawing.

"It's an online game. The whole game is happening during one song. It's the hero's journey to find the bird and fight demons. It's not an ultra-realistic game. It is not about that. It's about creating an art piece. The story is a bedtime story. We wanted to create something in the medium where it can reach the younger generation. It is a

at. They put it on in the bar and midway through the first song, two guys in a suit took him to the KGB [offices]. He is lucky that through some connections he got out. You can imagine the sacrifice!"

"Music itself inspires me to create. When I'm in the world of music, nothing else exists. I am going by musical rules and laws. The material world kind of disappears," he said.

"In that way I am always searching musically," he said. "I'm constantly listening to music. Everybody is influenced by everybody. It just depends on what we grew up with. I feel childhood experiences have

happens for a reason. Information I got, my life developed in that direction," he said.

The music of Josquin de Prez, a French composer considered one of the greatest in the Renaissance era, who lived from 1477 to 1521 and who is considered part of the Flemish school, continues to inspire him.

"This was when Western polyphony was born in the School of Notre Dame," he said.

Similarly important composers he considers equally influential are Léonin (c. 1135–1201) who laid the foundation for the Notre-Dame school of polyphony and Pérotin who worked at the Notre-Dame cathedral from around 1160 to 1250.

In addition to such diverse musical influences, he is inspired by cinematography and photography. He cited the images by directors Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovsky and Stanley Kubrick, as well as Russian abstract art pioneer Wassily Kandinsky and Swiss-German surrealist Paul Klee.

## In Love with Folk Music

For Hamasyan, traditional Armenian folk music is a huge influence. "Folk music and folk arts to me are universal. It's also the hardest thing to arrange, to touch, because it can sound very gimmicky or cliché all of a sudden. It takes years of devotion to this music to find something that you can do that people can just listen to without thinking this is Armenian or something," he said.

He likes exposing non-Armenians to his country's music, which he weaves through his jazz compositions. "Most of the time the feedback I get is people want to find out where this music comes from. There is a lot of wanting to learn more about Armenian music and Armenian arts," he noted.

One constant in his life is the music of Norwegian jazz saxophonist Jan Garbarek, who has explored the music of Komitas, as well as classical music.

"I grew up listening to his [Garbarek's] music. His music is the reason I discovered my musical roots in Armenian folk music. He is a huge inspiration," he said. "His music inspired my music. He is one of those rare musicians. His music is part of my life, the soundtrack."

Hamasyan said he would love the opportunity to collaborate with him one day.

Hamasyan has scored the soundtracks for a few movies and added he would like to do more, but "only for art cinema."

"I want to write music for specific directors who are looking to create something for the sake of creating," he explained.

Currently, he is in the process of recording a new album, as well as writing several pieces that have been commissioned to him.

While some families pass heirlooms down through the generations, in Hamasyan's family, that treasure seems to be love for Led Zeppelin. His son, he said, is really into the band's music now. Hamasyan said he would love to be able to meet front man Robert Plant and introduce him to his son.

Hamasyan's tour will officially start in March, with dates in North America and Europe throughout the spring and summer. They will even go to South America and Asia.

"You really have to have discipline to stay sane and in a Zen mode. You are basically living out of your suitcase for weeks. It's challenging for sure," he said.

To see Hamasyan in Somerville, visit <https://www.somervilletheatre.com/production/tigran-hamasyan/>. To find out more about his latest record or to purchase it, visit <https://www.tigranhamasyan.com/music-thebird>.



Hamasyan's new recording "Bird of a Thousand Voices"

is really poetic. All the aspects of the tale are incredible but the aspect about the song is really touching."

Many Armenian writers released their versions of the tale, including Stepan Zoryan. Hovhannes Tumanyan was working on the tale for many years, Hamasyan said, but could finish only a quarter of it. "In his archives he writes that he was studying at least 30 different versions of it," he said.

Hamasyan's deep dive into the story of the tale took so long that during this production he and his wife had three children.

"I thank God I have these children every day but at the same time now I have to manage my time," he said.

huge project."

The multimedia musical spectacle will be staged in Berlin, Belgium, Armenia and Los Angeles. A documentary film is also planned. In addition, Hamasyan is going to release a toy based on the story.

## Inspirations from Near and Far

Hamasyan lives and breathes music and since childhood, has been immersed in varied, even clashing, genres of music.

"My father is a super rock fan. I grew up listening to Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath all day long. But at the same time my uncle was a jazz fan and I listened to Herbie Hancock and Miles Davis. At the same time, my grandparents owned a huge collection of classical music vinyls," he said.

He recalled a funny story about his father Karapet's love of heavy metal. "He literally would give up his month's salary to get the new Led Zeppelin album from an underground source" during Soviet times, Hamasyan recalled. "He told me recently he just got the new Black Sabbath album in '85 and he was in Gyumri and had a few drinks at the bar his friend was working

huge impact on shaping our adult life."

He said he loves recording and performing equally. "I like both. During recording sessions there is a little more pressure but musically good things happen because of that pressure," he said.

All his influences come out during his performances. So while the songs are composed, he has built in room to play.

"It's all written out but there is space where we improvise," he said.

"But given the fact that I am just a musician, these tunes always end up changing. We are in the search for finding new things to develop the music. Also sometimes you get on the road and play the song. We naturally have an inclination to try this and that."

Hamasyan was born in Gyumri and was just 1 1/2 when the 1988 earthquake happened. "We moved to Yerevan right after that," he said.

"My parents noticed I loved music more than anything else and they took me to a music school," he said.

They had encyclopedia volumes which he went through and found medieval and renaissance painters and composers.

"I don't know. Maybe it was supposed to be a sign for me to find them. Everything





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**MARCH 15** — Global Arts Live, in collaboration with The Friends of Armenian Culture Society presents: The Naghash Ensemble - First Boston Appearance! With its eye on the 21st century, the Naghash Ensemble combines the earthy spirituality of Armenian folk song, new classical music, and medieval polyphonic vocal music. 8 PM, Berklee Performance Center - 136 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston. Tickets: \$30, \$38, \$48, \$58 [www.globalartslive.org/content/event\\_page/10301](http://www.globalartslive.org/content/event_page/10301)

**MARCH 17** — Khachkar Café (For Men Only). Nishan & Margrit Atinikian Hall (200 Lexington St., Belmont, MA), Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church. Monday, 6.30 p.m. \$25 per person Includes a plate of Chicken and Lule Kebab Combo, salad, and hummus Ghlyema (Additional plate): \$15 Venmo: @HCACMA (Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in MA) For pre-orders: Call 617-489-2280 or email [holycrossbostonma@gmail.com](mailto:holycrossbostonma@gmail.com)

**MARCH 21** — Society of Istanbul Armenians of Boston presents The Secret Trio, consisting of Ara Dinkjian on oud, Tamer Pinarbasi on kanun and Ismail Lumanovski on clarinet, in concert at the Mosesian Center for the Arts, 321 Arsenal ST., Watertown. 7.30 p.m. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.mosesianarts.org](http://www.mosesianarts.org). Proceeds will benefit Armenian Schools in Istanbul.

**MARCH 22** — Lowell ARF 130th Anniversary. Dinner-Program. Featured speaker, Prof. Christina Maranci, Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies, Harvard University, who will discuss Destruction of Artsakh's Priceless Cultural Heritage by Azerbaijan. Kazanjian Ballroom, Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford, Rd., Chelmsford. 6 p.m. Reservations required. Call or email Armen Jeknavorian, 978-265-9479; [armenjeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:armenjeknavorian@gmail.com) or Ara Jeknavorian, 617-803-2612, [ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com). Adults - \$35. Students - \$15. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to assist the thousands of Artsakh refugees forced from their homeland and now living in Armenia.

**MARCH 25** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter presents a lecture by Prof. Sergio La Porta of California State University, Fresno, Titled "When Things Fall Apart: Disentangling Christian-Muslim Relations in Medieval Armenia," on Tuesday, 7 p.m., at the Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown (Use Norseman Avenue entrance.) With the support of Dean Shahinian and the co-sponsorship of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research and the Armenian Cultural Foundation. Free admission and reception. For info, contact [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net) or call (617) 281-1647.

**MARCH 30** — Special Lenten Luncheon - Hosted by the Ladies Guild of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church Nishan & Margrit Atinikian Hall (200 Lexington St., Belmont, MA), 12:00 PM. Featuring: Keynote Speaker: Dr. Cara Aghajanian, Dame of the Order of Malta & Honorary Presenter of the Servant of God Cardinal Agagianian A culturally rich program in the spirit of Lent Tickets: \$35 Reserve your spot: Contact Ingrid at 617-312-0805 Email: [holycrossbostonma@gmail.com](mailto:holycrossbostonma@gmail.com) Venmo: @HCACMA

**APRIL 3** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter presents a lecture by Vicky Kherlopian, titled "Introduction to Education in Armenian Today." 7 p.m., Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. (Use Norseman Avenue entrance.) Free; reception afterwards. For info, contact [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net) or call (617) 281-1647.

**APRIL 6** — The ARF Sardarabad Gomideh, the ANCA of Eastern Massachusetts, the "Leola Sassouni" and "Shushi" chapters of the ARS, the "Nejdeh" AYF Chapter, Hamazkayin and Homenetmen chapters of Boston, the ACEC, the AGBU of New England, St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, the Tekeyan Cultural Association and the Shahbazian Foundation cohost a commemorative event entitled "Forgotten, Unforgettable: Marking the 40th Anniversary of the U.N.'s Recognition of the Armenian Genocide." Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (47 Nichols Avenue, Watertown) at 3 p.m. The event will be in English and free and open to the public. Harut Sassounian, the publisher of the California Courier newspaper will be the keynote speaker. It will also include a presentation of the flags by the Homenetmen Scouts and a cultural performance by the ArtNova Hamazkayin Choir of Boston under the directorship of Artur Veranian.

**APRIL 10** — LET'S PARTY FOR THE PARK! Thursday, 7-9 p.m. Abigail Adams

Ballroom, InterContinental Hotel, Boston. Benefit to raise funds to Care for & Maintain Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway. Advance Reservations only. For reservations, [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support)

**APRIL 11** — Lecture by historian and author Dr. Elyse Semerdjian sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter. Semerdjian is the holder of the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of the Armenian Genocide Studies at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide, Clark University. Her new book is called Remnants. 7 p.m., Friday, the Baikar Center, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. (Use Norseman Ave. entrance.) Free admission. Book signing. For info, email [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net).

**APRIL 12** — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church presents a nostalgic concert by Marten Yorgantz and Meghedi Vocal Ensemble, artistic director Marina Margarian. If your child would like to perform on stage, they can audition to join Meghedi Children's Chorus every Saturday, 3.15 to 4.15 p.m. 200 Lexington St., Belmont. For registration and information, call 781-929-3415 or 781-439-3702.

**APRIL 13** — Piano Recital by Prominent Armenian Pianist Sahar Arzruni in tribute to Armenian woman composers. Works by: M. Kouyoumdjian, K. Gazrossian, A. Terzian. S. Karamanuk, D. Goolkasian-Rahbee, L. Hazarabedian, G. Chitchyan, and G. Chebotaryan. Organized by Armenian Cultural Foundation, Mirak Chamber Music Series. Co-sponsored by AGBU Boston Affiliate, AIWA New England Affiliate, Amaras Art Alliance, Sunday, 5 p.m., Robbins Memorial Town Hall (730 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington). Free and Open to the public.

**APRIL 15** — National Association of Armenian Studies and Research hosts author Nancy Kricorian in conversation with Nanore Barsoumian, IALA Literary Lights spring series event, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. To be filmed and posted online. 395 Concord Avenue, Belmont.

**APRIL 17** — Author Nancy Kricorian will appear at Porter Square Books, Cambridge, on Thursday at 7 p.m. Author talk and Q&A about her new book, *Burning Heart of the World*, followed by book signing. In Conversation with Lisa Gulesserian. Contact: Katie Haemmerle. 1815 Mass Ave., Cambridge.

**APRIL 27** — Book Launch: A Conversation and Reception with Narine Abgaryan, author of *To Go on Living*. Organized by Armenian Cultural Foundation, co-sponsored by Plough Quarterly, NAASR, AIWA New England Affiliate, Amara Art Alliance, Sunday, 5 p.m. Armenian Cultural Foundation (441 Mystic Street, Arlington).

**APRIL 27** — Remembrance of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide. Divine Liturgy, Reception, and Cultural Program with the participation of the Armenian Churches of the Merrimack Valley. Armenian Church. Guest Speaker, Aram Arkun, Performance by the Sayat Nova Dance Ensemble, and musical selections by parish youth. Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. Divine Liturgy will begin at 10:00 a.m. Special Sunday School Program for the Youth.

**APRIL 29-MAY 3** — 123rd Diocesan Annual Assembly & Clergy Conference April 29-May 3, 2025 hosted by Holy Archangels Armenian Church, St. Michael & St. Gabriel (Haverhill MA). Gala Banquet & Dance open to the public on Friday, May 2 at the Hilton Boston Woburn 2 Forbes Rd., Woburn, MA 01801. For more information, please visit <https://www.hyepointearmenianchurch.org/>

### NEW JERSEY

**APRIL 10** — AMAA NY/NJ Orphan & Child Care Committee invites you to a Rendezvous @ the Barnes Foundation - a guided tour of the Barnes Foundation Collection. Tickets: \$250, Lunch at 11 a.m., Guided Tour at 12:30 p.m. Roundtrip transportation provided from the Armenian Presbyterian Church (APC) in Paramus, NJ to the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA and back. For more info and RSVP visit: <https://amaa.org/rendezvousatthebarnes/>

### RHODE ISLAND

**MARCH 22** — The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church presents "A tribute to the music of Charles Aznavour." Presented by Berge Turabian, with guest singer Alvard Mayilyan. Guest of Honor Louise Janigian. Belcour of Newport (657 Bellevue Avenue, Newport). Saturday, doors open at 5:30 p.m. Concert at 6 p.m. Refreshments immediately following. Suggested Donation \$30. [3COMMON.COM/AZNAVOUR](https://3COMMON.COM/AZNAVOUR). Tickets also available at the church. Call 401-272-7712.

To send Calendar items to the *Mirror-Spectator* email [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com), and find the "calendar" section under the heading "More" or mail them to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.

## Pianist Svetlana Navasardyan in Concert at Fresno State

FRESNO — Pianist Svetlana Navasardyan will perform in recital as part of the Philip Lorenz Memorial Keyboard Concert Series at Fresno State on Sunday, March 23, at 4 p.m. in the Concert Hall on the Fresno State campus.

The concert is co-sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program of Fresno State and the Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation.

Navasardyan will perform works by Haydn, Brahms, Chopin and Komitas.

Navasardyan was born in Armenia and was distinguished as a People's Artist of the

Armenian SSR and was a professor at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan for many years.

An artist par excellence, Navasardyan is recognized as an "indisputable personality," who, as music critics have characterized her, "grows up to a symbol — a symbol of confrontation for anything that embodies the routine and predictability of modern pianism."

Navasardyan has a talent and style of performance which international reviews have portrayed as "superb and of a very rare flexibility" and as one characterized by a "uniqueness of vision and depth of personal

reading" — as "beauty... rarely heard!"

She has performed at major concert halls around the world, including the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the Opera House of Sydney, the Palais des Beaux-Arts of Brussels, the Salle Gaveau of Paris, and has widely toured internationally with recitals in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece, Japan, China, Australia, Egypt, Kuwait and elsewhere.

Tickets may be purchased at <https://www.ticketsource.us/whats-on/california/fresno-state-concert-hall/svetlana-navasardyan/e-egxdgk>.





## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
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**EDITOR**

Alin K. Gregorian

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Aram Arkun

**ART DIRECTOR**

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Christopher Atamian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Florence Avakian, Christine Vartanian Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald Papisian, Benjamin Poghosyan, Suren Sargsyan, Harut Sassounian, Hagop Vartivarian

**REGIONAL**

**CORRESPONDENTS**

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian, Michelle Mkhlian

YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott

BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

PARIS: Jean Eckian

SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian Demirjian

CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

**PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

**VIDEO CORRESPONDENT**

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

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# Armenia and Russia:

## A Century of Complex Relations and The Pursuit of True Independence

By Berge Jololian

Over the past century, Russia has played a pivotal role in shaping the political fate of Armenia. Following Armenia's brief period of independence in 1918, the nation was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920 and reemerged as an independent state in 1991. Whether through Tsarist expansion, Soviet-era policy decisions, or contemporary geopolitical strategies, Russian actions have often prioritized broader regional interests over Armenian sovereignty. This long-standing dynamic has led many to question the reliability of Russia as a partner in safeguarding Armenian interests.

At the turn of the 20th century, Western Armenia — including regions like Van, Mush, Sasun, Erzurum, and Kars — looked to Russia for liberation from Ottoman oppression. During World War I, Russian forces temporarily advanced into these areas, offering Armenians a fleeting hope. However, the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the rise of the Bolsheviks resulted in an abrupt withdrawal, leaving Armenians defenseless against continued atrocities during the Armenian Genocide (1915–23). This abandonment left a lasting scar on Armenian historical memory.

Following the fall of the First Republic of Armenia in 1920, Soviet Russia quickly established the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and worked to secure its borders. In the turbulent aftermath of World War I, when Turkish forces advanced into Armenian-populated regions, Soviet military actions and diplomatic efforts resulted in the treaties of Moscow and Kars in 1921. The Treaty of Moscow, signed between Soviet Russia and the Turkish National Movement, laid the foundation for territorial arrangements that significantly impacted Armenia. This agreement, misleadingly labeled a treaty of "Friendship and Brotherhood," designated Armenian populated areas such as Nagorno-Karabakh as autonomous within Soviet Azerbaijan, while placing Nakhichevan under Soviet Azerbaijani administration. Later that same year, the Treaty of Kars reinforced these territorial divisions, formalizing the transfer of Mount Ararat to Turkey and further separating Armenia from its historical and cultural roots.

While these treaties were driven by Soviet geopolitical calculations aimed at securing Turkish cooperation and stabilizing the Soviet southern frontier, they also contributed to long-term challenges for Armenia. The depopulation of Armenians from Nakhichevan and the strategic placement of Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan laid the groundwork for future conflicts, underscoring the complexities of Armenia's reliance on Russian diplomacy.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia found itself navigating a new geopolitical landscape. Russia remained a dominant regional power, often positioning

itself as a security guarantor while simultaneously pursuing its broader strategic interests. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the case of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). During periods of conflict, Russian peacekeeping forces have faced criticism for their inconsistent role. The nine-month Azerbaijani-imposed blockade of Artsakh saw Armenian communities endure severe hardships, with Russian forces failing to intervene decisively. Reports of profiteering by some peacekeepers, who sold their food rations at extortionate prices while remaining largely inactive, fueled growing skepticism about Russia's commitment to protecting Armenian populations.

Russia's geopolitical priorities, particularly its focus on Ukraine, have further complicated its engagement in the South Caucasus. Some analysts argue that Russia's inaction in preventing Turkey's direct involvement in Azerbaijan's 2020 military offensive was part of a broader strategy to ensure NATO-member Turkey remained neutral in Russia's war in Ukraine. This approach has raised concerns that Russia is willing to accommodate Turkish and Azerbaijani interests at the expense of Armenia's security.

One of the most contentious recent developments is the proposed "Zangezur Corridor" — an extraterritorial passage through Armenia's southern Syunik province, promoted by Azerbaijan with Russian backing. If implemented, this corridor would compromise Armenia's sovereignty and economic stability, potentially isolating the country from regional trade routes and increasing its vulnerability to external pressures. Russia's mediation in regional conflicts has often involved arming both sides while offering diplomatic reassurances, a strategy that has left Armenia in a precarious position. As Armenia reevaluates its national security policies, there is a growing realization that long-term stability requires a diversified approach to international partnerships.

Armenia's historical reliance on Russia has led to a complex relationship marked by both dependence and mistrust. While historical ties with Russia remain significant, Armenian policymakers are increasingly pursuing closer diplomatic, military, and economic relationships with countries such as the United States, France, India, the European Union, Georgia, and even Iran. These efforts aim to strengthen Armenia's strategic autonomy and provide a broader base for addressing regional challenges. Armenia's future lies in forging independent, diversified partnerships that support its sovereignty. It is imperative that the Armenian government charts its own course, reaffirming that sovereignty is not a privilege — it is an inalienable right.

A lasting partnership between Armenia and Russia can only be built on mutual respect, sovereignty, and genuine cooperation. While constructive criticism is essential for democratic governance, fostering unity and collaboration is crucial for strengthening Armenia's institutions. Rather than undermining the government, efforts should be directed toward strengthening it, ensuring it has the capacity to navigate Armenia's complex geopolitical realities. As Paruyr Sevak wisely wrote, "We are few, but we call ourselves Armenian, and we must help one another endlessly." Armenia's path forward must be shaped by resilience, strategic vision, and a commitment to securing its rightful place in the international arena.

(Berge Jololian resides in Yerevan, Armenia, and is a specialist in security and cybersecurity.)

# Syria's Republic of Massacres and Murder

By Sevag Hagopian

Many ask what is happening in Syria these days.

To summarize: Massacre. The victim is always the ordinary person.

The remnants of the former regime are committing massacres.

The new regime is committing massacres.

The army is committing massacres.

Various armed groups are committing massacres.

The government is committing massacres.

The opposition is committing massacres.

And if I were to expand on this, I would say that the previous government's greed, stubbornness and excessive self-confidence in not undertaking reforms, and the inhumane attitude of crushing those who demanded reforms, were what brought the situation in that country to this point. Let no one say that what began in Syria more than a decade ago was another game of Western powers to destabilize the region. It is the duty of the government of a given country to expose such plots and work accordingly and thwart them. Otherwise, this is the result.

And if we go deeper, we should understand that the fingerprints

of "civilized" Turkey are clearly visible behind a major portion of all this today.

Meanwhile, where is Armenia and where are we, as we witness this situation? It seems that to a not-insignificant part of the Armenian population that what is taking place is happening on another planet, many miles away from us, and that what is happening there does not concern us.

There is a large mass of geographically ignorant or indifferent Armenians who do not know that Syria is a country directly bordering the Armenian world, where Armenians lived and still live — Armenians who ended up there "thanks" to the genocidal Turks, and today once again are paying a heavy price, both in human and economic losses.

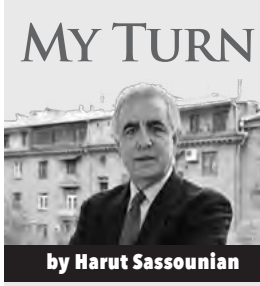
The current authorities of Armenia shortsightedly are still playing the "Crossroads of Peace" game with the same people. The very next day after achieving "peace" and opening the borders, our country could turn into the Armenian Republic of Massacres and Murders.

(Sevag Hagopian is the editor of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party newspaper *Zartonk*. This article is a translation from the Armenian version which appeared in the latter paper.)





## COMMENTARY



## MY TURN By Questioning the Genocide, Pashinyan Encourages Turkish and Azeri Denialists

There has been much debate recently among Armenians about Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's controversial statements regarding the Armenian Genocide.

Pashinyan's supporters argue that he has not denied the Armenian Genocide, but has merely asked questions. Meanwhile, his opponents condemn him for denying the Genocide or raising unnecessary questions about a well-established historical fact.

More importantly than internal Armenian debates is the damage that Pashinyan may have done to the Armenian Cause by repeating similar questions raised by Turkey and Azerbaijan, intended to cast doubt on the veracity of the Genocide.

The Turkish Coalition of America published last month an article titled, "Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan's Statement in Davos Zurich: Genocide was Moscow's Creation."

The Turkish Coalition added: "Pashinyan suggested that the long-standing accusations of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 may have been fabricated and that the topic itself was promoted by Moscow during the Cold War era.... Moreover, Pashinyan argued that the roots of the 1915 tragedy lay in false promises made to Armenians and their misplaced expectations.... This is not the first time Pashinyan has touched on the subject of "genocide" in ways that deviate from the traditional national narrative."

The Azerbaijani and Jewish media also took advantage of Pashinyan's pointless questions to deny the Armenian Genocide. Azerbaijan's Trend news agency published an article on February 25, quoting from a lengthy article in THEJ.CA (international Jewish news in Canada) written by a well-known Israeli denialist Rachel Avraham who describes herself as "the Voice of Baku." Avraham's article was titled: "Nikol Pashinyan and the Events of 1915." Avraham is "the CEO of the Dona Gracia Center for Diplomacy and an Israel-based journalist."

Avraham wrote: "Pashinyan opened the Armenian Pandora's box, which is something that cannot be questioned or doubted — the Armenian Genocide. Pashinyan raised doubts about the way Armenians interpret the events of 1915 and criticized how they have clung to their narrative over the years."

In the following two sentences, Avraham contradicted herself about the sup-

posed role of the Soviet Union in the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. She first wrote: "the Armenian narrative of the 'genocide,' along with the myths added to it, was invented by the Soviet Union and promoted by Karen Demirchyan, a member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Armenian Communist Party." She then claimed the exact opposite: "although the Soviets promoted the Armenian narrative and added myths to their interpretation of events, the Armenian narrative was not invented by the Soviets but by the Armenians themselves."

Avraham then made another contradictory statement: "On February 21, 1985, the Politburo of the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, discussed 'measures related to the 70th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide'.... Gorbachev agreed to the Armenians' demands but was forced to make the opposite decision due to opposition from veteran members of the Communist Party such as Tikhonov, Gromyko, and Grishin. They argued that supporting the Armenian narrative, which blamed the Turks for the genocide, would harm relations with Turkey, which were beginning to warm at the time. In that meeting, Gorbachev sided with the opposition of the three veteran members for the sake of Soviet internal politics, but a month later, after Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary, he removed all three from the Politburo and replaced them with people more accommodating to the Armenian issue."

Avraham then made the ridiculous claim that Uruguay recognized the Armenian Genocide in 1965 only after getting the green light from Moscow. Going further, she claimed that no country recognized the Armenian Genocide until Armenia's independence in 1991. She is wrong because Argentina recognized it in 1985, Armenia in 1990, Cyprus in 1982, Pres. Ronald Reagan in 1981, and the U.S. government in 1951, in an official document submitted to the World Court.

Pashinyan does not seem to realize that he is the prime minister of Armenia. As such, his words have consequences for the Republic of Armenia, Armenians worldwide and the Armenian Cause. Furthermore, his statements are observed by friends and foes alike around the world. The governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey are always ready to exploit every word he says to damage Armenia's interests. Therefore, Pashinyan has to be very careful in his public pronouncements. He needs the assistance of professional speech writers and expert advisers. The problem is that he is inexperienced and listens to nobody. Recently, when he was asked in the Armenian Parliament whom he consults before making a decision, his answer was: "I consult no one."

Pashinyan will depart from his office someday, but the damage he leaves behind for Armenia and Armenians will last for decades. That is why, the sooner he steps down, the better for Armenia.

It is truly a disaster for Armenians that the prime minister of Armenia is joining with the presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkey in raising questions about the Armenian Genocide.

# Iran's Loss May Be Turkey's Gain in Mideast Upheaval

By Negar Mojtahedi

The ceasefire between Turkey and an outlawed Kurdish group could further empower Ankara to fill a regional power vacuum after Tehran and its allies were battered in warfare with Israel, foreign relations expert Henri Barkey told Eye for Iran.

"Iran is very alone at the moment" said Barkey, an adjunct senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington DC.

The push for a resolution to a decades-old insurgency by the Kurdish Workers Party against the Turkish state comes as the Middle East's tectonic plates shift and global alliances are in flux as President Donald Trump cast upends US commitments.

"We have a completely changed strategic situation in the Middle East," said Barkey, "no one at the moment has any dominance in the Middle East and it's up for grabs."

"Iran, for the foreseeable will not be able to do what it used to do in the past," added Barkey.

After 15 months of direct combat and proxy warfare pitting Iran against Israel throughout the region, Tehran has come off worse.

It's main ally Hezbollah in Lebanon took a heavy toll from an Israeli ground invasion and air strikes. Most notably, Iran's oldest ally in Syria's Assad dynasty was

toppled by Sunni Islamist rebels closer to Turkey, giving Ankara a new regional ward.

The jailed leader of the PKK Abdullah Ocalan called on its members to lay down arms in an address from his island prison near Istanbul on February 27.

That announcement was followed by a ceasefire days later which ended 40 years of armed struggle for a Kurdish homeland.

While President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rapprochement is largely driven by domestic political considerations to create a new constitution enabling him to run for a third presidential term in 2028, Turkey stands to likely make gains in Northern Iraq, where many PKK fighters are stationed.

Turkey's gains may be Iran's losses.

"Both Turkey and Iran would like to influence Iraqi Kurds," said Barkey.

The Turks and PKK making peace formally will help in those efforts to increase influence.

Barkey characterized the relationship between Turkey and Iran as complex, but one in which there are at least cordial ties and a stable border. Both Islamic nations, however, are revisionist with ideals of grandeur.

Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hakan Fidan, said in an interview with Al Jazeera Arabic last month that Iran's foreign policy of relying on militias led to more losses than gains.

Recent diplomatic tensions between Tehran and Ankara represents a broader shift in the Middle East.

Add to the mix Turkey reportedly offering to send peacekeepers to Ukraine, contingent on the war ending with Russia – and Israel, striking southern Syria and attempting to increase ties with Syrian Kurds.

Israel says it part of a new policy to demilitarize southern Syria, but the new government led by the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) hardline Islamist group which is close to Turkey has denounced Israel.

"The Israelis also are risking by going too far into trying to punish the Syrians, forcing the Syrians, essentially to look for allies," said Barkey on Eye for Iran.

One ally that Damascus will not reach out to is Tehran, maintaining its anti-Islamic republic stance.

"That's it," said Barkey on there being zero chance that Iran could reestablish itself in Syria, while Ankara enjoys a close relationship with the new HTS leaders.

"The Syrians and HTS blame Iran for propping Assad in power all these years, that Assad would not have succeeded in staying in power this long, or even winning the civil war if it wasn't for Iranian support."

Reports: The offer of Turkish peacekeepers in Ukraine Turkey is not signaling support of Ukraine by offering up peacekeepers, said Barkey.

Rather it's a chance for Erdogan to appear relevant on the world stage. Iran, on the other, despite its relationship with Russia, is irrelevant.

"Before Iran was a very useful if not a direct instrument of the Russians but a useful actor on the international scene because it created so many problems for the United States and its allies," said Barkey.

Barkey questioned Iran's ability to send ballistic missiles to Russia after significant blows by Israel to its stockpile.

Meanwhile, Russia has positioned itself as a mediator between Washington and Tehran over potential nuclear talks.

"No leader has done more for Russia than Trump, so Moscow could pressure Iran," Barkey told Eye for Iran.

"It is quite possible that the Russians will put some pressure on the Iranians, whether it's real or make believe," said Barkey.

The changing alliances, new world order and the stable unpredictability of Trump, may further destabilize the Islamic Republic while Turkey gains the upper hand in the region.

(The full episode of Eye for Iran with Henri Barkey, an adjunct senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, on YouTube or you can listen on Spotify, Apple, Amazon, Castbox or any major podcast platform. Negar Mojtahedi is a Canadian Iranian journalist and documentary filmmaker. This piece was originally published on Iran International's website, www.iranintl.com, on March 7.)





# Human Rights Attorney Genser Is Making the Case for Vardanyan

GENSER, from page 1

“When Ruben was arrested in September 2023, he was remanded to pretrial detention on three charges — financing terrorism, participation in the creation and operation of armed groups not sanctioned by law, and illegal crossing of the state border. It was only after over a year in pretrial detention that the Prosecutor announced the 42 charges listed above. By adding new charges, the government was able to restart the clock on his pre-trial detention, beyond the two additional four-month extensions of his detention in 2024. These are clearly not the actions of a legitimate judicial system, and speak to the political motivation behind Ruben’s detention.”

Of course, one of the biggest obstacles in this case is not being able to directly communicate with his client as he is not allowed to go to Azerbaijan and nor can Vardanyan freely contact him. “Given the sensitivities of the situation on the ground, I am not in a position to share this information publicly. I can say that I do regularly receive limited information from Ruben. But because of claims that they involve ‘state secrets,’ neither Ruben’s wife [Veronika Zonabend] nor I have been given the indictment or the alleged evidence against him. This violates his right to have international counsel of his choosing and his right to prepare a defense, as protected under international law,” Genser said.

In Azerbaijan, Vardanyan’s family has retained a local attorney.

All the legal experts involved with the case anticipate an unfair judgement but hope to fight it. “We are deploying an array of legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts. We are, for example, expecting a judgment from a major international tribunal in the coming weeks that is evaluating if Ruben’s detention is or is not compatible

with Azerbaijan’s obligations of international law,” Genser said. “If we prevail, this body will publicly call for Ruben’s immediate and unconditional release. We are advocating on Ruben’s behalf all around the world. For example, for the first time, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk just issued a statement call for the immediate release of all Azeri political prisoners and the Armenian prisoners too. We have engaged the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe. We have engaged the U.S. government and the French government. We are collaborating and sharing information with many NGOs. And we are also speaking as widely as possible with the media. What I have just described is only a small fraction of our efforts. As with the proverbial iceberg, effective work on political prisoner cases is only 20 percent visible and 80 percent of the is done privately and behind the scenes.”

For the second time during his incarceration, Vardanyan has launched a hunger strike, now past two weeks. He had to leave court at least once when his blood pressure spiked. The once heavy-set Vardanyan now looks gaunt and unwell.

“Ruben courageously launched his hunger strike [on February 19], and as you can imagine that has taken a severe toll on his health. As you can read more about in my statement, after only one week of the strike, Ruben had lost six kilograms, his blood pressure was recorded at the dangerously high rate of 140/110, and his pulse was elevated at his hearing on February 25<sup>th</sup>. At his age, and with how his body is tolerating the hunger strike and imprisonment, he will not be able to sustain the strike without further compromising his health. It is of the utmost importance that his trial is postponed through the remainder of his hunger strike

and that a doctor from our international team visit him in prison,” Genser said.

Asked how the Armenian diaspora could help, he urged action and reaching out.

“The Armenian diaspora must continue to push for the release of the political prisoners. One place to start is the Free Armenian Prisoners website, which has a section called ‘Take Action.’ I encourage readers to sign the petition and send emails to your ambassador in Baku to encourage trial monitoring, to President Aliyev sharing your concern, and even to Ruben himself expressing your support. Armenian-American NGOs have also been pushing for politicians in the U.S. and abroad to take action on the political prisoners – I would encourage you to support and amplify the work of these organizations, as well as write to members of congress directly to echo these requests and express your concern,” Genser said. “Contrary to people’s belief, the mere fact that Armenia and Azerbaijan do not have diplomatic relations does not mean there isn’t a lot that Prime Minister Pashinyan and his government can do to help. I recently posted on my X account @jaredgenser a detailed list of things they can do (see here). It has been heartening to see that the Armenian Foreign Minister and his Ministry are now speaking out against the imprisonment of the political prisoners. Both Armenians in Armenia and those in the diaspora should thank the prime minister for the changes in his Government’s approach to freeing the prisoners and urge him to engage personally.”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his administration, until this month, were either quiet about the arrest of Vardanyan and seven other Artsakh military and political leaders, or suggested those arrested were somehow at fault. In March, both Pashinyan and Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan have called for the release of those imprisoned in Azerbaijan on political grounds.

“It has been disappointing, but we strongly welcome recent statements by Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan calling the process in Azerbaijan against the political prisoners ‘mock trials’ and from Arme-

nia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressing concern about Ruben’s health and hunger strike. I am grateful the government of Armenia is changing its approach and I urge Prime Minister Pashinyan to get engaged personally and to speak out publicly to help bring them out of Azerbaijan,” Genser said.

Until recently, Amnesty International had been quiet on the matter, but within the past month the group issued a statement in support of Vardanyan.

“Amnesty International is and has been a key partner on issues relating to Nagorno-Karabakh and the arbitrary detention of Armenians in Azerbaijan, and we appreciate the work they have done,” Genser said. “We regularly share with them all relevant information on Ruben’s case as updates emerge, have spoken with them about how we can partner to support the political prisoners, and we expect them to continue to report publicly on their findings and to advocate for their release.”

Vardanyan has become a symbol for many, yet he is still a man and one with a loving family.

“It has been incredibly hard for Ruben’s family, as you can imagine. But Ruben’s courage, his strength and his determination to persevere and to prevail has been really inspiring not only to his family but to me as his lawyer and to so many others who care deeply about the people of the Republic of Artsakh. Nonetheless, it is an especially difficult time with Ruben on a hunger strike and the family is very worried about his health and welfare,” Genser noted.

Genser is an human rights lawyer based in Washington. He founded Perseus Strategies. He has been referred to by the *New York Times* as “the Extractor” for his work freeing political prisoners worldwide. He has served as pro bono counsel to five Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. He also teaches at Stanford Law School and has taught at three other major law schools. He is the author of three books on the UN human rights system, with his most recent book titled *The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Commentary and Guide to Practice* (Cambridge University Press).

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