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# AGBU



ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION

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December, 1991

Dear Friends:

## Earthquake and Independence Tragedy and Hope

Three years ago, just days after the December 7, 1988 earthquake, Dr. Mihran Agbabian of the University of Southern California and Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian of the University of California toured the devastated areas of Armenia. Apartment buildings, homes, schools, farms, factories, stores and offices lay in total ruin throughout one-third of the country. The death toll was over 25,000 and hundreds of thousands were left homeless.

Looking at the unbelievable devastation, they realized that outside expertise had to be provided to prevent such destruction and tragedy from ever occurring again. As educators, they were even more convinced that long-term training in modern systems and technology was the only viable, permanent solution. The dream of an American standard educational institution in Armenia was born!

But as the months passed and the struggle for self determination continued, it became clear that even a grander scope was needed; that a cadre of industrial engineers and business managers would be essential if Armenia was to succeed in the transition from a centralized controlled economy to a free market economy, priorities for a country on the road to independence.

In 1989, enthusiastic about the far reaching prospects, the AGBU Central Board of Directors voted unanimously to give its commitment and support to the establishment of the American University of Armenia by securing facilities, working with the Armenian government and providing all operational expenses for planning and implementation. AGBU's decision to accept the initial fiscal obligations encouraged the University of California to pass an unprecedented resolution to give full academic leadership to the new proposed independent American University of Armenia.

The generous contributions of thousands of donors to AGBU's Armenia Recovery programs funded not only our soon to be completed Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Center and the 60,000 sq. ft. Cold Food Storage at a cost of \$8,000,000 but gave us the ability to guarantee the initial stages of the American University of Armenia.

We knew it would be a challenge to take on such a bold project and we knew it would be a risk because millions would soon have to be raised to assure the future of the University. But it was a challenge and a risk we were convinced we must take for the future of Armenia. Costly training in the United States for students from Armenia would never supply the number of qualified professionals needed and anything less than a high standard Western academic institution in



Armenia would never accomplish our goal for a country suffering 70 years of repression and neglect.

And maybe it's also because we know how generous our members and friends have always been through the years when the cause is right.

On September 23, 1991, after two and a half years of planning what sometimes seemed to all of us an almost impossible dream, the AGBU and the University of California, in cooperation, opened the American University of Armenia (AUA) in Yerevan.

The Armenian government's allocation of one of the finest buildings in Yerevan to house the University has without doubt added to AUA's successful start. Lecture hall and auditorium, both complete with simultaneous translation equipment, libraries, classrooms, offices and large dining room are all available for the sole use of AUA.

One hundred graduate students are today enrolled in English Language, Computer Application, Earthquake and Industrial Engineering, International Business and Human Resource Management courses. Fifteen American professors and instructors comprise the teaching staff with Dr. Agbabian appointed President of the AUA, Dr. Der Kiureghian, Dean of Engineering and Dr. Stepan Karamardian of Stanford University, Dean of Business Management.

If I, personally, ever wondered whether the challenge, risk and sleepless nights, worrying about how AGBU is going to raise millions, were worth it, I quickly forgot after a recent trip to Yerevan. The students' enthusiasm and interest in the University is simply overwhelming.

First it has given them tremendous encouragement. They know they are unique in attending the only existing independent American educational institution in all of the Soviet Union (or what was the Soviet Union) and Eastern Europe.

Second, it has given hope. They know that a new set of opportunities are available to them; opportunities to compete on a global level; to be equal.

I interviewed some of the students and instructors just to get an idea of how things were progressing. Costa Vilaikas, the computer instructor, told me the first week was tough. Many of the students had never even used a typewriter let alone a computer keyboard. But after 3 weeks they had caught up so fast he was behind in his lessons. You have to realize this is a country where computers were outlawed four years ago.

On the day a new shipment of library books arrived from the United States, all the students asked to postpone the next day's test so that they could immediately take out the books overnight to read. There is such a hunger for current reading material. In the Polytechnic Institute they are learning electronics from 1960 textbooks.

Along with six hours of classes each day, a full load of homework is given - which must be turned in first thing each morning. Often I found parents, wives and husbands approaching me on the street to inform me that their sons or daughters or spouses were enrolled and that they never saw them anymore. "Too much work," they would say, smiling. There is considerable tension among the students, worried that they may not make it.



You cannot imagine how important the American presence is. Normal preparations for study, research or problems that may occur, reactions and methods you and I take for granted, have to be relearned in Armenia after 70 years of repressive totalitarian rule.

In addition to the established academic program, AUA instructors are organizing classes for local English teachers. In March, Dr. Karamardian will open a Business Research Center compiling computerized data on production and natural resources in Armenia and industrial managers will be invited to attend special courses on marketing and financial management.

In September 1992 the second class of students will be admitted. The following year, additional fields of study will be added and a limited number of students from neighboring republics and abroad will be accepted.

With annual expenses of \$1,000,000 a year that include academic and administrative salaries, travel, text books, library books, lab equipment, computers and supplies, the University project is an ambitious undertaking.

Certainly for the AGBU it is the single most costly, long-term program in our active 85 year history.


It is an investment in the future.

Opportunity, education and technology will be the only means of survival for 3,500,000 Armenians on the long, arduous road to true independence.

Won't you join us in making it all possible.

You can make a difference.

With appreciation,



Louise Manoogian Simone  
President

P.S. All contributions up to \$1,000 will be allocated for the purchase of text books, supplies and lab equipment.

All contributions of \$1,500 to \$2,500 will be allocated to sponsor students in intensive English and computer application courses.

Contributions of \$5,000 to \$50,000 will be allocated to sponsor students studying for their Master's Degrees in Business Management and Engineering.



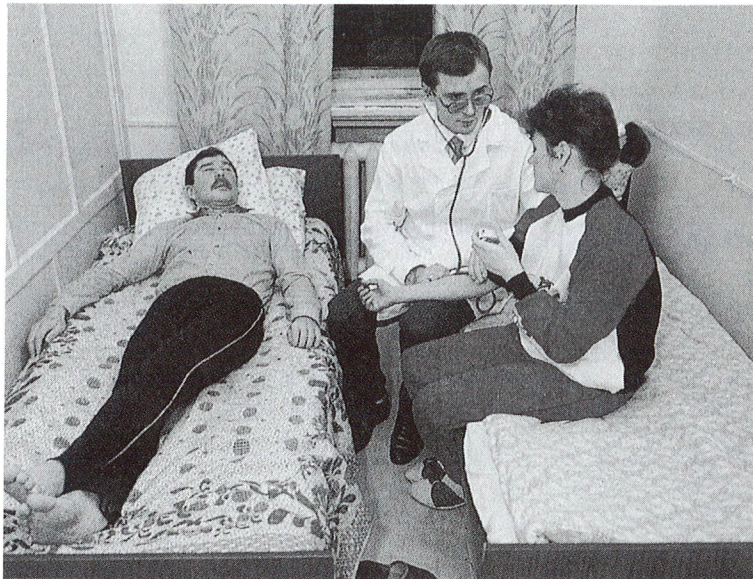
the southern part of the district, an angry knot of babushkas had gathered outside the village bakery in Duminichi (population: 7,000). The morning's bread delivery was nowhere in sight, and it was almost 9 o'clock. In the Russian countryside, where feed grain is distributed only to state and collective farms, peasants have no way to feed their livestock except with loaves of bread; the problem was not feeding themselves, but feeding their cows. The peasants were resentful, but not hungry, and seemed a little surprised at the question. "We've all got cellars full of tomatoes and

potatoes and cabbage and onions," said one woman. True, meat was rationed to one kilo a month. But many people slaughtered their own livestock. "There's no hunger here," said another old lady. "I lived through the second world war, the destruction, the suffering. The Russian people are patient. We'll live through this."

No one looks a gift horse in the mouth. Officials in Moscow last week heartily welcomed Bush's initiative, and even opposition skeptics were reluctant to say flatly that food aid wasn't the kind of help they needed most. But Red Cross officials out in

the provinces have other methods of staving off hunger. Nikolai Manuilov, who runs the Red Cross in Tula, has rented a piece of farmland for growing vegetables so he can give his blood donors a good meal in exchange for a pint. "Farming is not the Red Cross's business, and I'm a doctor, not a commercial manager," admits Manuilov. "But these are the times we live in." Russians are finding unorthodox ways to solve their own problems without central government (following story). And sometimes the small-scale solution does more than big-time aid. ■

## The Secret to Soviet Aid: Think Small



PETER TURNLEY FOR NEWSWEEK

**Fighting infection:** *The Institute of Epidemiology in Kiev*

The American plan to give the Soviet Union \$1.5 billion in food aid is good news for U.S. farmers. But it's help on the wrong scale. The Soviets need something more like George Bush's idea of a model farm where Soviets can learn about efficient production. Here are a few low-cost projects that could help the Soviets to their feet:

■ In Kiev the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident left immune systems vulnerable to hepatitis, diphtheria and the AIDS virus. The Institute of Epidemiology there hopes eventually to produce diagnostic kits for the entire Soviet Union. But without a \$70,000 machine that meas-

ures chemical preparations into tiny test tubes, assembling the kits takes too long to be feasible. These machines are made in the West.

■ Project Hope has already used a few hundred thousand dollars of U.S. money to distribute medicines around Soviet Central Asia. The American doctors were appalled by what they found. One little hospital in Muinak had no running water. Its infant-mortality rate was as high as 100 per thousand births, 10 times the U.S. figure. More medicines are needed. But so is a longer-term project to train doctors in low-tech Western health care. Project Hope has training clinics un-

derway in Moscow and Armenia. Setting up one in Central Asia might cost as little as \$3 million over five years.

■ Everyone agrees that the Soviets need training in Western know-how. But bringing them to schools in the United States is expensive, so the University of California and the Armenian General Benevolent Union have found a better way. This September, the American University of Armenia opened its doors in Yerevan, offering M.A. degrees in business, industrial engineering and earthquake engineering. The university's American professors have imported everything from paper clips to an entire library. One hundred students are now undergoing intensive English and computer training. The university hopes eventually to offer a full range of departments for 5,000 students. But the 6,000-ruble tuition, while more than a year's salary for most Soviets, doesn't begin to cover the school's hard-currency expenses. The university is looking West for funding.

■ Soviets fear that discontent in the Army could lead to another coup attempt. Perhaps the greatest single source of military anger is a lack of decent housing, especially for troops returning from Eastern Europe. The German government granted Moscow about \$5 billion to build housing. But the Ministry of Defense says that defense factories producing the

construction materials are overburdened. So why not invite suppliers from outside the Soviet military-industrial complex? Joint-venture construction companies, of which 75 are registered across the Soviet Union, could build villages for the military in the near future. A new contract from the West would give impetus to the private construction industry.

■ The U.S. public television series "Adam Smith's Money World" has been a big hit on Soviet TV. But its descriptions of leveraged buyouts, greenmail and Christie Hefner's Playboy empire are a little remote from everyday concerns. Soviet programming officials say a simple primer of basic business terms would go a long way toward educating the public in capitalist economics. But the officials lack the business know-how—and the ability to make a slick show that would attract viewers. Alvin H. Perlmutter Inc., a New York production company that worked on "Adam Smith," is interested in gearing a series to Soviet viewers, including segments on the concepts of free pricing, accounting, credit and taxes. "The only thing that's keeping us from doing it is money and sponsors," says Nancy Pelz-Paget, director of special projects at Perlmutter. "We used to broadcast propaganda," says Leonid Zolotarevsky, director of international programming at Soviet TV. "Now we're ready for this new kind of propaganda."

CARROLL BOGERT in Moscow