

Interview With Dr. Mihran Agbabian, Chairman of AESA First World Congress

Q: Professor Agbabian what are the objectives of the World Congress?

A: There are two principal objectives. One is to provide a forum for Armenian Engineers, Scientists and Industrialists. To give them an opportunity to present papers and establish lines of communication among them. Hopefully, they will recognize the possibility of strength through cooperation, technical strength. Technical strength is important in the same way that cultural strength is. Very little is being said and done about the fact that Armenian engineers, scientists and industrialists are making major contributions in the world and the credit is not being given to their Armenian descent. This was one of the motivations. Having the opportunity for them to communicate with each other would achieve that.

Then of course, the second objective is "OK," what do we do with all this capability and technology that these Armenians possess? Where can we best put it to use? Obviously, it's in our own homeland. This is the second objective. To focus on issues of critical importance for Armenia, ecology, energy resources, earthquake safety, and explore avenues of cooperation.

Q: Is there one individual who was initially responsible for coming up with the idea of a World Congress? And why was it planned?

A: Yes, there is. I was approached by AESA to participate in the World Congress two years ago by Dr. Hagop Panossian, who was President of AESA at the time. He had the support of the AESA Council, and he was very enthusiastic about it.

At that time the principal emphasis was going to be Energy Resources and the Environment in Armenia. Considering the serious nature of both issues, something had to be done by the engineers and scientists of the diaspora to assist our colleagues in Armenia.

Q: Who will attend the World Congress?

A: We've invited 15 engineers and scientists from Armenia. They include persons from the Armenian Academy of Sciences, Yerevan State University, the Polytechnic Institute of Yerevan, and from the Ministry of Education. We also expect two Armenians from Moscow, from the Institute of Economics for the U.S.S.R. which is under the direction of Mr. Abel Aganbegyan. We have engineers and scientists from Argentina, Australia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Q: Are there any particular highlights during the course of the World Congress?

A: Yes, there're several. We have four major activities. 1) Technical sessions where we will discuss topics on energy, environment, safety, and industry automation; 2) Two workshops, one on opportunities for industrial ventures in Armenia and the other on earthquake safety measures to be taken in Armenia; 3) A panel discussion which will include participants from different backgrounds. They will look at the new challenges that have to be met in Armenia following the earthquake. For example, revitalizing industry that was devastated, reconstruction, improving the educational program, and so on; 4) Finally, the banquet on Saturday evening at the Century Plaza Towers which will feature two keynote speakers. Congressman Robert Dornan, who was one of four congressmen to visit Armenia after the earthquake, will speak about his impression and experience in Armenia. The Rector of the Polytechnic Institute of Yerevan, Professor Yuri Sarkissian, will speak on the new plans they have regarding engineering education, in view of new demands for Armenia's technological advancement.

Q: What other topics will the world Congress address?

A: Academician Movsessian from the Armenian Academy of Sciences will speak about *The Effect of Population Growth on the Animals and Plants in Armenia*. The possibility exists that some species might become endangered. This is a serious problem that the diaspora is unfamiliar with.

Another topic that will be explored is Information Technology. We all know that information, communication, and computer applications in Armenia are very far behind Western Technology. The level of communication in Armenia must be upgraded so that they can make progress.

Q: Did the earthquake have an impact on the planning of the World Congress?

A: Yes, it did. At first we were concerned that maybe we should cancel the World Congress in view of the tragedy. I was in Armenia during December, 1988, two weeks after the earthquake and we discussed this with several people from the Academy and Polytechnic Institute. They said, on the contrary, it's even more urgent that a World Congress take place. They wanted us to go ahead with it and they said they would participate. The earthquake changed the picture. It now had to be addressed in the World Congress. I didn't eliminate the other issues, they're equally emphasized. But we then introduced into the program earthquake safety in the reconstruction projects and the strengthening of the buildings in Yerevan.

Q: Have Glasnost and Perestroika had an impact on the planning of the World Congress?

A: Yes. We had to revise our preliminary plan by adding another half day session and a workshop. There is a plenary session on Saturday afternoon. Professor Hrair Dekmejian, from USC, will speak on Perestroika, opportunity for Armenia. Mr. Schahgaldian, from the Rand Corporation, will speak on the Status of the Diaspora Scientists and what their present and future roles are in connection with the economic changes that are taking place in the Soviet Union.

Q: How do you perceive the World Congress? As a conference for Academicians or as a conference that includes a wider range of individuals?

A: When we first started planning the Congress, it was moving primarily in the academic field. The speakers were from Academia. We felt that the Congress was going to have a very important effect on the scientific segment of the Armenian community, but we later realized that this was not enough. It was necessary for us to bring together not only the scientists who think in terms of scientific innovations, but also the industrialists who have to use such innovations and apply them in introducing consumer goods, and upgrade the standard of living in Armenia. We changed the name of the World Congress and added Industrialists. Among those participating are a number of industrialists who are concerned about the issue of how technical knowledge can be used to improve the industry of Armenia. The World Congress now has a much broader interest to the community.

Q: What will the World Congress accomplish?

A: The development of joint ventures with Armenia or exposing new ideas, at the World Congress, that can lead to joint ventures. We're hoping that the industrialists will see an opportunity to develop joint venture enterprises in Armenia. We also expect that new Task Forces will be established to complement those already in existence. These



Dr. Agbabian in the town of Spitak, near the epicenter, which was destroyed completely by the earthquake.



Dr. Agbabian at the nuclear power plant, 100 kms from the earthquake epicenter. The plant was not damaged but it will be shut down for fear of a future disaster.

Task Forces will implement the ideas generated from the World Congress. The proceedings of the World Congress will be published as a permanent reference for those who wish to benefit from it.

Let me add one more thing about the World Congress. There are many ideas for projects floating around. People on their own or representing various groups are going to Armenia exploring all these possibilities. That's fine. But nowhere have I seen master planning of all these activities. Armenia receives these visitors and one ministry or another becomes involved. From this side there is little coordination. Everyone goes his way. We think the World Congress will provide an opportunity for

people to recognize all the possibilities and then prioritize the needs of Armenia.

Q: Will there be a second World Congress?

A: I am hopeful. I stated at the very beginning when we took this responsibility to organize the World Congress that plans be made to carry out a second and third World Congress. My thoughts are to hold the second in Yerevan and the third somewhere between the US and Yerevan. I've suggested Paris because there is a very strong Armenian community in France. If not every year then every two years. World Congresses of this type should be organized to inform and alert the community regarding the issues that the World Congress will address.