



An Evening of Art & Education in Support of the American University of Armenia

*By Taleen Babayan
AUA Development Communications*

GLENDALE, U.S. – Among a showcase of rare Armenian paintings, the American University of Armenia (AUA) held a special event for its Pillars at the home of Razmik Grigorian on Saturday, October 6, 2018, in Glendale, California, where the city’s Mayor Zareh Sinanian and State Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian were on hand to champion the University and its worthy cause.

Grigorian’s ties to AUA were solidified during a visit to the campus, where he had a chance to tour the University with President Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, witnessing students in action who are eager to learn and become an important part of the country’s future.

“Armenia has no natural resources but it has the brainpower and energy of youth,” said Grigorian, a developer and community activist who is an avid art collector. “Dr. Der Kiureghian and his counterparts did something right with AUA by creating a university fit for the 21st century.”

Providing updates from Armenia to the donors gathered in the room, Dr. Der Kiureghian emphasized the “Western approach” AUA adopted during its inception.

“We are essentially preparing the next generation and investing in the future of the country,” said Dr. Der Kiureghian, who noted that AUA currently has over 4,000 alumni, the vast majority of whom live and work in Armenia. “Our earliest graduates are coming of age and have taken on significant roles in the Armenian government.”

With nearly 2,000 students now on campus among the 5 undergraduate and 9 graduate degree programs, over half of them receive tuition waivers and financial assistance.

“We make sure we are open to all Armenians, regardless of the ability to pay,” said Dr. Der Kiureghian, stressing the importance of need-blind admissions, a policy that is maintained thanks to the unrestricted funding received through the 100 Pillars of AUA program, comprised of donors who have dedicated themselves to the advancement of the University.

These contributions have indeed been put to good use as new degree programs and courses have emerged, remaining on par with the evolution of society and the job market. Observing the growth of the sciences and IT sector in Armenia, which has now been dubbed “Silicon Mountain,” AUA established new Bachelor of Science degree programs in Engineering Sciences and Data Science, as well as a Master of Science degree in Strategic Management, in order to stay ahead of the curve.

“Armenia has enormous potential to develop this field,” said Dr. Der Kiureghian. “This industry is one that requires brains, computers, the internet and management skills, and that is very suitable for Armenia.”

The opening of the brand new Student Union, Faculty Center and Amphitheater, funded by the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad Program (ASHA) of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), has also brought about positive changes on campus, as has the increase in the number of students from abroad who are studying at AUA, marking a record high of 233 academics from the U.S. and 28 other countries. In addition, AUA’s endowment has grown three-fold over the course of four years, as the University of California fund managers carefully oversee the investment.

Recognizing the Pillars in attendance, including Adour and Arsho Aghjayan, Vigen and Houry Ghazarian, and Garo and Rebecca Minas, Dr. Der Kiureghian praised their commitment to the University through the 100 Pillars of AUA program, where donors pledge \$50,000 over the course of five years, allowing the institution to continue to thrive as it enters its third decade.

Shedding insight into why they decided to support AUA, Mr. Ghazarian said that “education is the way to become a progressive country, especially for Armenia that has limited resources.”

“We see that our brethren in Armenia are sacrificing so much to create a better Armenia,” said Mrs. Ghazarian. “By becoming an AUA supporter, we have joined this big family of like-minded individuals.”

The couple expressed their appreciation at the letters they receive from students who have benefited not only from their contribution as Pillars but also from the Endowed Scholarship they created in memory of their parents.

“We have seen how the funding has helped change their futures,” said Mr. Ghazarian. “We feel we are playing a small role in changing Armenia.”

The parents of AUA’s youngest Pillar, Adour and Arsho Aghjayan said they made the commitment to become Pillars at the request of their son Nareg, who visited Armenia and AUA in 2015 as part of a delegation with the State Department for environmental protection, while he was in law school.

“On his return he was so impressed with AUA, he asked us to be Pillars and continue the interaction between the Diaspora and Armenia,” said Mr. Aghjayan.

New Pillars Garo and Rebecca Minas said they appreciated “the vision of the founding members of AUA” and that it is “only through higher education that Armenia can become an economically independent country.”

The couple made their commitment after visiting AUA in person and were impressed with the “enormous amount of energy on campus.”

“Seeing the desire of students to excel gave me the inertia to become a part of the 100 Pillars of AUA,” said Mr. Minas.

In his remarks, California State Assemblymember Nazarian said that AUA is “training human capital for the next century.”

Referring to AUA as a “hub of innovation,” Nazarian pointed out that the leadership and vision of AUA will help Armenia flourish.

“It takes money and resources to be able to develop the future,” said Nazarian, who presented California State Assembly certificates to both Grigorian and Dr. Der Kiureghian for their commitment to the advancement of Armenia and the Armenian people.

Mayor Sinanian, who traveled to Armenia and visited AUA along with a delegation from the California State Legislature last month, elaborated on his connection with AUA that dates back to the beginning of the school’s founding when he interned at the institution in 1993 for two and a half months.

“I wanted to volunteer in Armenia during its dark days because I felt I had to be there and be of service during the war,” said Mayor Sinanian, who regularly travels to Armenia, and praised the work of AUA’s leaders.

“The Revolution may have seemed like a one day event but it was an accumulation of efforts by AUA and the culture it instilled in its students that played a great role,” said Mayor Sinanian, who has witnessed the country’s progression due in major part to institutions like AUA.

“The University brings a new way of thinking, knowledge and modernity,” concluded Mayor Sinanian. “We need to promote this institution and make sure AUA is well-financed in order for this progress to continue.”

Speaking on behalf of Senator Anthony J. Portantino was his field representative Arda Tchakian, who said that the Senator enjoyed his recent trip to Armenia and AUA with the California State Legislature and appreciates the strong ties between the University and the State of California. She highlighted the recent bill the Senator signed, allowing tuition waivers to the UC Hastings College of Law to AUA alumni who are California residents.

Professor Osheen Keshishian, editor of the Armenian Observer, who has been present at AUA’s multiple graduation ceremonies, encouraged guests to visit AUA’s campus, calling it Armenia’s “educational center.”

In the positive spirit of the evening’s gathering, Grigorian made a final announcement at the close of the Art & Education reception by naming himself as a Pillar of AUA.

“Education is what Armenia needs right now to empower the youth and the bright minds,” said Grigorian. “Because of my belief in AUA, I have decided to become the 84th Pillar and fulfill my pledge to the University that has brought so much to Armenia.”

Founded in 1991, the American University of Armenia (AUA) is a private, independent university located in Yerevan, Armenia, and affiliated with the University of California. AUA provides a global education in Armenia and the region, offering high-quality graduate and

undergraduate studies, encouraging civic engagement, and promoting public service and democratic values. For more information about the American University of Armenia and its donor opportunities, please visit www.aua.am.



AUA Pillars Vigen & Houry Ghazarian



Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian presenting certificates to Razmik Grigorian and President Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian



AUA Pillars Vigen & Houry Ghazarian, Gayane Hovakimyan, Razmig Grigorian, Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, Garo & Rebecca Minas and Arsho & Adour Aghjayan



Razmig Grigorian with Mayor Zareh Sinanian and Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian



*Pillar Adour Aghjayan, Razmik Grigorian, Mayor Zareh Sinanian, Arsho Aghjayan
and President Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian*

AUA INSIDER
NEWS AND EVENTS FROM THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA