



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA  
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July 18, 1991

Remarks addressed to the Board of Regents of the University  
of California on July 18, 1991

by Mihran Agbabian

Acting President, American University of Armenia

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The December 7, 1988 earthquake in Armenia was a major tragedy for the people of that Republic in the Soviet Union. One out of seven persons of the entire population of 3.5 million became homeless in a matter of seconds. The industrial and agricultural production capacity of Northern Armenia was totally destroyed, and more than 25,000 people died, buried in the rubble of the buildings of cities and villages.

The National Academy of Sciences of the United States sent a delegation of scientists and engineers to Armenia twelve days after the earthquake to investigate and to provide assistance. Professor Armen Der Kiureghian of the University of California at Berkeley and I were members of this group. We observed that the Technical University in Leninakan (now renamed Gumayri) was among the many schools that were completely destroyed. More than 300 students and about 100 faculty and staff were killed at this institution.

Upon our return to the United States Professor Der Kiureghian and I wrote letters to charitable institutions, sympathetic Senators and Congressmen, and a number of educators, suggesting that a Technical University, modelled after the American system of education, replace the destroyed institution. Professor Stepan Karamardian of the University of California at Riverside joined us in this campaign, and we agreed that the new American University in Armenia should have a broader mission than technical education for the region of Gumayri in order to meet the needs of a country that was trying not only to recover from the devastation caused by the earthquake but was also taking strides toward the establishment of a democratic government.

The response from two persons made us realize that the dream of establishing an American University in Armenia would become reality. Louise Simone, President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, responded with the promise of financial support, and Dr. William Frazer agreed to explore the possibility for the University of California to provide administrative and academic guidance.

While we were conducting our negotiations with the government of Armenia, a national election was held for a

new Parliament, and by a substantial majority, the deputies voted to replace the Communist government with a democratic government. The new leaders were almost all members of the faculty of the State University of Yerevan and scientists and economists of various institutes. They enthusiastically embraced our plan to establish an American University in Armenia, and they provided us with assistance beyond our expectations. We now have a temporary building in the capital city of Yerevan that was used for the political education of young communists, and we have a 375 acre land, 15 kms outside Yerevan, for a future campus. Graduates of the State University and other teaching and research institutes will be our prospective students in the graduate programs of Business Management and Engineering. Other Colleges and departments will be added in subsequent years. Classes will begin in September, 1991, for intensive training in English and Computer Applications before the students start their regular program for the degrees of MBA and M.Eng.

I have heard from many government officials, educators, and persons from all walks of life in Armenia that this University means to them as much now, and even more in later years, than the humanitarian aid that they received from many nations following the earthquake. Armenia has turned away from the Communist way of life, and an American educational institution at this critical time will give them the constructive alternative for which they were waiting during the past seventy years.

As an alumnus of the University of California, I am delighted that the University of California will be the pioneering institution that will provide this opportunity to a nation and its surrounding regions at one corner of the Soviet Union so that they may come in direct contact with the United States which they regard as the champion of freedom and democracy.

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7/18/91