

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 22, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE ALEXANDRIA-GYUMRI SISTER CITY COMMITTEE

ISSUE: Receipt of 2004 Annual Report from the Alexandria-Gyumri Sister City Committee (Attachment).

RECOMMENDATION: That Council receive the report and thank the Alexandria-Gyumri Sister City Committee for its efforts.

DISCUSSION: The Alexandria-Gyumri Sister City Committee was established in 1990 to identify and mobilize Alexandria organizations and citizens to assist in the reconstruction efforts following the 1988 earthquake in Gyumri (formerly Leninakan), Armenia. Since that time, the Committee's mission has been broadened, via the sister city agreement, to promote cultural, educational and professional exchanges between the citizens of Alexandria and Gyumri. Early projects included an educational exchange program which provided training for graduate architects in historical preservation activities at Virginia Tech's Alexandria Center and art exhibits featuring children's art from Armenia.

Gyumri has not recovered from the devastating effects of the earthquake and most of its residents still live in temporary housing. Because of the extraordinary need, the Gyumri Sister City Committee has focused on the needs of children. Using the Armenian Festival, which has been held on an annual basis in Market Square since 1993, as its primary fundraising tool, the Committee has funded the following projects: concerts and lectures featuring young Armenian artists at the Masonic Temple and The Lyceum, support for elementary level teacher training in Armenia, support for five destitute orphan children since 1999 through a program run by the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and heating fuel, equipment, and English textbooks for Gyumri schools. The Committee also sponsors a Christmas party for 200 needy children living in the Gyumri State Orphanage each year.

The Committee's funds are maintained in a special donation account by the City of Alexandria. Total cash available as of February 24 is \$20,588.97. The Gyumri Sister City Committee has a formal process for soliciting and considering proposals for assistance from Gyumri. The process requires information to verify the requesting organization's legitimacy and operations in the

community and a description of their accounting of funds and reporting on the progress and sustainability of its activities. In the future, the Committee will extend and focus its efforts on providing assistance to the citizens of Gyumri and fostering cross-cultural understanding between our communities.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENT: March 2004 Annual Report of the Alexandria - Gyumri Sister City Committee

STAFF: Rose Williams Boyd, Director of Citizen Assistance

ALEXANDRIA – GYUMRI SISTER CITIES COMMITTEE

Report to the Alexandria City Council

MARCH 2004



HISTORY

A violent and devastating earthquake shook much of Armenia in the cold winter of December 1988. Particularly hard hit was the city of Leninakan – of a population of 70,000, an estimated 19,000 perished. Estimates suggested that over half of the housing of the city had been rendered unusable and the economy of the city and the region was essentially destroyed.

Many Alexandria citizens petitioned the Alexandria City Council to assist with mitigation of the effects of the widespread death and havoc caused by the 1988 earthquake. An ad hoc committee was organized to provide assistance to Leninakan and a year later, on March 27, 1990, the Alexandria City Council formally established the “Alexandria – Leninakan Exchange Committee” to develop a long-term program of cultural, educational and professional exchange between the citizens of Alexandria and Leninakan. A delegation of Alexandria City officials, led by then vice mayor Patsy Ticer, traveled to Armenia to meet with officials of Leninakan to formalize the agreement.

Coincidentally, the city of Leninakan was previously named Alexandropol, and has historically been known as Gyumri. After Armenia regained its independence, at the fall of the Soviet Union, the citizens renamed their city Gyumri.

The official “Sister City” relationship between Alexandria and Gyumri was formalized by an agreement signed later in 1990. A resolution passed by the City Council on October 11th of that year changed the name of the Leninakan Exchange Committee to the “Alexandria – Gyumri Sister Cities Committee.” The Mayor of the city of Gyumri visited Alexandria at that time and presented gifts to the city of Alexandria on behalf of the citizens of Gyumri.

PURPOSE

The Alexandria – Gyumri Sister Cities Committee has undertaken various projects to assist the people of Gyumri in addressing their extraordinary and pressing needs. The children of Gyumri has been a particular focus of the Committee’s efforts. Further, the Committee has worked to enhance appreciation of the Armenian culture in Alexandria and Northern Virginia and to foster understanding of American culture by the citizens of Gyumri. The Committee’s activities are all centered around these goals.

The Alexandria – Gyumri Sister City Committee (the “Committee”) works with the citizens of Gyumri through various organizations, some in Gyumri and others in the U.S. with close ties to Gyumri. An “official” relationship with the Gyumri city government has been dormant for some years. Many organizations and individuals partner with the Committee to achieve these goals. The Committee receives generous contributions from individuals and raises funds through the annual Alexandria “Armenian Festival” and other cultural events. The following is a list of the many organizations that help support the Committee’s efforts:

4



- ✓ Armenian Missionary Association of America
- ✓ Armenian Network of America
- ✓ Embassy of the Republic of Armenia
- ✓ Fund for Armenian Relief
- ✓ International Research and Exchange Bureau (IREX)
- ✓ Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia (ISAR)
- ✓ Knights of Vartan & Daughters of Vartan
- ✓ Saint Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church of Washington
- ✓ Soorp Khatch Armenian Apostolic Church of Washington
- ✓ The United States Peace Corps

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

~CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING~

- ❑ Each year, since 1993, the Committee has organized the **Alexandria Armenia Festival**, which has proven very popular, attracting thousands of visitors and wide community support. The Festival offers delicious Armenian food, live Armenian vocal, dance and instrumental entertainment, and arts and crafts. This event increases the understanding of Armenian culture and history in our region and raises funds for projects in Gyumri.
- ❑ **Concerts & Lectures.** The Committee has presented concerts of young Armenian artists at the Masonic Temple and the Lyceum, and has held lectures on Armenian culture and history. It has sponsored an exhibition of Armenian children's art and supported exchanges of secondary students between Alexandria and Gyumri. In recent years, the Committee sponsored recitals of very talented young Armenian-Americans, at the Masonic Temple and the Lyceum. These events add to the resources the Committee has for Gyumri projects.
- ❑ The Committee helped organize the display of a sculpture by renowned artist Fred Sagoyan at the American Red Cross headquarters in Washington. This gift was financed by Mr. Frederick Hart. This beautiful artwork recognizes the assistance received from the American people during the devastating 1988 Armenian earthquake.

~HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE~

- ❑ Through the International Research and Exchanges Board ("IREX"), a well-known American non-governmental organization, the Committee has sponsored elementary level teacher training. This project included the development and publication of **textbooks** in Armenian that were widely disseminated by the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science and enhanced the curriculum in mathematics, languages, social science, natural sciences and the arts. Further, it fostered the training of teachers in the use of the new resources.
- ❑ Five destitute orphan children have received consistent, sustaining support from the Committee since 1999 through a program run by the Armenian Missionary Association of America. Known as the "Alexandria Children," Karineh Petrossian, Anahit



Haroutounyan, Rouzanna Sargissian, Litit Mekertichian, and Aramik Mghdesian attest to the invaluable support they are provided in annual letters to the Committee.

- ❑ A project entitled “**Winter Warmth**” benefited the children of the Gyumri State Orphanage through a proposal from Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Gyumri. Funds were used for heating fuel and warm clothes for the orphans. The Committee has also sponsored Christmas parties for the 200 needy children living at the orphanage.
- ❑ From time to time, the Committee responds to appeals for funds for such things as **heating fuel for schools** in poor neighborhoods. The Committee has provided funds for the purchase of badly needed **school equipment** such as a fax machine, tables, chairs and desks for various schools in poor Gyumri neighborhoods.
- ❑ **English language textbooks** have been provided to Gyumri schools under Committee sponsorship.
- ❑ Early in its history, the Committee co-sponsored an exchange to educate local architects from Armenia about seismic design at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. The Committee provided housing and tuition for participating architects.

~ **FINANCIAL STATUS** ~

- ❑ The Committee’s funds are maintained by the City of Alexandria. Total cash available as of February 24, 2004, is \$20,588.97. This includes our contribution to the Armenian Missionary Association of America (“AMAA”) on December 16, 2003, in the amount of \$1,600.00. Our Committee continued its support of orphans sponsored by the AMAA.
- ❑ Additional financial information can be provided upon request.

GOING FORWARD . . . PLANNING FUTURE ASSISTANCE

The Alexandria – Gyumri Sister Cities Committee will extend and focus its efforts to provide assistance to the citizens of Gyumri, and to foster cross-cultural understanding between our communities. Events sponsored by the Committee to raise funds and enlighten our citizens about Armenia have been widely supported by the community and have provided needed assistance to the citizens - primarily children - of our Sister City, Gyumri.

The Committee has a formal process for soliciting and considering proposals for assistance to Gyumri. We encourage qualifying requests from community organizations that focus on the needs of children, including education. The process requires information to verify that the organization’s legitimacy and operations in the community. Requesting organizations are required to describe their accounting of funds and reporting on the progress and sustainability of its activities. We plan to fund the proposals that are most consistent with our criteria.

Current events compel us to make an even greater effort to better understand and appreciate other cultures and to actively help them to achieve a better life and a greater appreciation of our own culture and values. The Committee is happy to report continuing success in this endeavor!



~ The Children of Gyumri ~



GYUMRI – Fifteen years later...

By **Gayane
Abrahamyan**

ARMENIAN NOW

GYUMRI -- Fifteen years have passed since the day December 7 was written in black on the republic's calendars, when three major cities of Armenia became ruins, when thousands of children became orphans.

But life goes on. Those mothers with names of lost children on their lips, with strength of spirit, gave birth to new children. A new generation was born - a post-earthquake generation, spared the horrifying disaster, but inheritors of the outcome.

Life in Gyumri is divided into two parts: before and after the earthquake. They recall "before" with delight. "After" brings tears, blotted only by the joy of children and the limitless Gyumreysi humor.



PHOTOLURE

1999



PHOTOLURE

Children born after the earthquake are in their middle teens. They opened their eyes in ruins, and it is only from their parents' stories that they've heard of a once beautiful town. ArmeniaNow asked some of the "after" generation to write about their thoughts of everyday life in Gyumri, and of their dreams . .

"When I was born, beautiful Gyumri with many buildings and houses of culture had turned into a pile of ruins," writes 14 year old Artur Ghoukasyan. "I spent my childhood in a beautiful park of

Gyumri which, however, was turned into a collection of metal domiks (the Russian word for 'temporary houses'), everything around would remind of the destructive earthquake."

Ani Hakobyan started her essay with an intriguing sentence: "I love my town very much, but when I was small, I did not." This sincere childish confession is followed by an explanation.



"I didn't like it because it was ruins, we were playing where once children have died... but growing up I understood what great strength Gyumri has and what patriotism and humor the people of Gyumri are gifted with." Ani dreams to become a "world famous journalist, so that I tell the whole world what country Armenia is and what an amazing town my Gyumri is."

Fourteen year old Hayarpi Hovsepyan and her twin sister Sirarpi were born five months after the earthquake, in a hospital in a metal domik. They have lived in a domik and went to school in a domik.



PHOTOLURE

"... everything around would remind of the earthquake."

"When we stepped into our new school made from stone, it seemed we were entering a paradise where kindness and care rule," writes Hayarpi.

A few years after the earthquake, tragedy again struck the family. The girls' father was killed in the Karabakh war in the battle for Shushi.



PHOTOLURE

"My mother doesn't work, I have no father, I almost don't remember him because we were small when he went to war. It's hard without a father, but I am proud that he died in the name of his nation and fatherland," writes Hayarpi and at the end of her essay she expresses her longed for dream. "I wish I could see our town standing, the situation of our people improved, working places created and the most important thing is that there never ever is a war."

Hayarpi's sister also dreams of peace; however she describes the post earthquake years during which her childhood has passed in more details.



"People remember the earthquake today and they always will, so many children were left without parents. Freezing cold, no electricity, no heating and no home. I was a little girl, but I still have these images in my eyes, believe me, those were not years one could envy..."

For Sirarpi life is not so interesting. "Home to school, school to home," she writes. "I dream of studying in Yerevan, and I wish I could be in the US..."



PHOTOLURE

The line of her various dreams ends the following way, "Let love and peace rule the world, so that no one grows up without a father like me."

Thirteen year old Nona Asatryan's birth was a ray of sunlight in a house that perished in mourning.

"The earthquake took my two brothers' lives; my mother says if I were not born she would have gone mad," Nona writes. According to Nona her parents had great hopes for her brothers; however today she is the one who's obliged to make these hopes come true. "I will do my utmost not to disappoint my parents," she writes.

Nona does not wish to leave her town, she says she will just study and come back, "I want to become a good doctor, they are needed here so much. I love my town and I'll stay here."



~ Mount Ararat ~



~ A Church in Gyumri ~



ARMENIA

- ❖ Biblical legend has it that *Noah's Ark* survived the floods and safely rested upon Mt. Ararat (16,946 ft.) in the Caucasus Mountains, the historic home of the Armenian people.
- ❖ The Armenian people formed their first Uartian state as early as **7th century B.C.**
- ❖ Yerevan, the present day capital of Armenia, is as old as Babylon and Nenevah and far more ancient than Rome. Indeed, the Armenians are equal in antiquity to any people on earth; ancient history includes invasions by Semiramis, aiding Priam of Troy, serving on the field of honor against Alexander the Great, allied with Persia, at enmity with Egypt, warring against Rome.
- ❖ **Kar Hunge, The Armenian Stone Henge**, which was discovered near Medzamor River (Armenia), is nearly 7,500 years old. Kar Hunge is 3,500 years older than Stone Henge (England) and is 3,000 years older than the Egyptian pyramids. The Kar Hunge observatory is evidence of one of the world's most advanced and ancient civilizations. See <http://www.angelfire.com/hi/Azgaser/Metsamor.html> for more information.
- ❖ The oldest known **metal smelting** furnaces were uncovered at Medzamor River, not far from Yerevan.
- ❖ Celestial **stone calendars** tracing the movements of the stars were also discovered at Medzamor River, which date back to the time when Hixos migrated from Armenia to Egypt.
- ❖ One of the earliest written records of Armenians is carved in Cuneiform characters on the **Behistun Columns**, part of which reads: "Emperor Darius says: I sent my servant Dadarshis to Armenia and gave him the following orders: 'Go and conquer the rebellious people who fail to obey me...' " (518 B.C.)
- ❖ Emperor Tigranes the Great, 95-56 B.C., made Armenia one of the world's **largest empires** of the time.
- ❖ Historical evidence indicates an exchange of letters between a person named Jesus and King Abkar V of Armenia. (9-46 A.D.)
- ❖ According to tradition, two of the twelve **disciples** traveled and preached in Armenia: Thaddeus (43 A.D.), and Bartholomew (60 A.D.)
- ❖ In 301 A.D., Armenia became the **first nation** in the world to declare Christianity as a national religion.
- ❖ Some of the relics from the Apostles Thaddeus and St. Gregory the Illuminator can be found in the vaults of the Holy Etchmiadzin (first built 303 A.D.)
- ❖ The oldest carved stone cross ("Khatchkar"), was found in the Armenian village of Tzorap. (360 A.D.)
- ❖ St. Mesrop Mashtots invented the Armenian alphabet (**36 characters**) in the 5th century A.D., the first recorded sentence of which was "Seek wisdom and advice to learn the ideas of men of genius." St. Mesrop Mashtots also invented the Georgian alphabet.
- ❖ The word "**apricot**" comes from Latin description of the fruit – *Persica armeniaca*.
- ❖ The description of the color "**Carmine Red**" originates from the red dye extracted from Vortan (worm) Karmir by ancient Armenian carpet-weavers.
- ❖ The Armenians and Greeks "weave the finest and handsomest **carpets** in the world." – Marco Polo



- ❖ During the first quarter of the 20th century, as the Ottoman Empire was dying, it is estimated that nearly **1.5 million** Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turkish Troops in what is now eastern Turkey. This is considered by many governments and historians to be the first genocide of the modern era.
 - “I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915.” – Henry **Morgenthau**, Sr., U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire
- ❖ In 1918, Armenia declared its independence from the Russian Empire and adopted one of the most progressive and democratic constitutions of the time, granting universal suffrage to all its citizens.
- ❖ In 1920, Armenia, with its population reduced to a meager 700,000 became a constituent republic of the USSR (Soviet Union), partly for protection against the Ottoman Turkish Troops.
- ❖ In one of **Hitler's** speeches, when asked how he expects to get away with his treatment of the Jews during WWII, he responded, “Who still talks nowadays of the extermination of the Armenians?”
- ❖ Even though many countries around the world have formally characterized the atrocities committed by the Ottoman Turks against the Armenians as a “Genocide,” Turkey has yet to acknowledge the Genocide and accept responsibility.
- ❖ In 1921 and 1922, the progressive groups in Armenia launched a rebellion against the harsh communist regime imposed by Moscow. After a brutal suppression campaign, Joseph Stalin issued a decree and assigned the historically Armenian autonomous region of Nagorno Kharabakh to Azerbaijan, in part to help influence Azerbaijan's decision to join the Soviet Union.
- ❖ Nearly 70 years later (1988-1991), the Armenians living in Nagorno Kharabakh endured **ethnic cleansing** at the hand of Azeri nationalists. Consequently, the Armenians conducted a democratic referendum and voted overwhelmingly to declare independence from the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan (Kurds, Russians and other minorities in the region also voted for secession from Azerbaijan).
- ❖ Azeri nationalists, supported by Turkish ultra-nationalists, responded with a bloody campaign of suppression. Many extremists flocked to Azerbaijan from Chechnya, Afghanistan and Turkey to help the Azeri aggressors. However, by 1994, Armenian forces were able to secure *de facto* independence. To this date, there is a cease fire agreement.
- ❖ Unfortunately, even today, as a consequence of the Nagorno Kharabakh conflict, there exists a complete **blockade** on Armenia by its neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan.
- ❖ On September 23, 1991, Armenia became one of the first Soviet Republics to declare independence and today it enjoys a thriving democracy.
- ❖ To date, Armenia is the only former Soviet Republic that has privatized land ownership, in an effort to become a free-market economy.
- ❖ On March 5, 2003, presidential elections were held in Armenia and Robert Kocharian was re-elected as president.
- ❖ Current day Armenia is 11,490 square miles, slightly larger than the state of Maryland.
- ❖ The Armenian currency is the Dram.
- ❖ The Armenian flag has equal horizontal stripes of Red, Blue and Orange.



- ❖ The population in Armenia is approximately 2.5 million. In addition, nearly 7 million Armenians live in various countries/continents around the world, including the United States (nearly 4 million), Canada, Russia, Ukraine, France, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Singapore, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, India and Africa.
- ❖ Most Armenian last names end in “*ian*” or “*yan*,” which means “from.”
- ❖ Throughout history, Armenians have made enormous contributions to the global development of political theories, the arts and constitutional democracy. Unfortunately, due to the almost successful genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Turks, and the joining of Armenia to the Soviet Republics, not many of these accomplishments are widely known. Nevertheless, some famous Armenians you may have heard of include Aram Khatchatourian (Composer), Komitas (Composer), Sayat Nova (Composer), Arno Babajanian (Composer), Allen Hovhanness (Composer), Archile Gorky (Painter), Hovhannes Ivazovsky (Painter), Martiros Saryan (Painter), Moses of Khoren (Historian), St. Gregory of Narek (Theologian), William Saroyan (Pulitzer Prize winner), Henry Troyat (Writer), Victor Ambartoumian (Astronomer), Artem Mikoyan (Designed the Russian MIG fighter planes), Anastas Mikoyan (Former President of the Soviet Union), George Dukemajian (former Governor of CA), Justice Arabian (CA Supreme Court), Calouste Gulbenkian (Founder of former Iraq Petroleum Corp.), Kirk Kerkorian (MGM), Ruben Mamoulian (Film Director - first multi-sound/multi-color film), Sergei Parajanov (Film Director), Atom Egoyan (Oscar nominated director of *The Sweet Hereafter*), Ross Baghdasarian (Cartoonist, *The Chipmunks*); Charles Aznavour (Entertainer), Raffi (Children’s Music), Cher (Actress), Mike Connors (Actor), Avetis Zildjian (Cymbals), System of a Down (Rock Group), Djivan Gasparian (Duduk), David Nalbandian (Tennis), Garo Yepremian (NFL), Steve Bedrossian (Baseball), Youri Djorkaeff (World Cup Champion France), Jerry Tarkanian (NCAA Coach), Tigran Petrossian (Chess World Champion), Gary Kasparov (Chess World Champion).
- ❖ To learn more about Armenia, please consult the following resources, some of which were used to help gather the information contained in this document: Armenia, A Historical Atlas, Robert H. Hewsen; Armenia, Survival of a Nation, Christopher Walker; Armenia, State People Life, Arthur Tcholakian; A Passage to Ararat, Michael J. Arlen; Armenian Genocide in Perspective, Richard Hovanissian; Black Dog of Fate and The Burning Tigris, Peter Balalkian; “A Problem From Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide, Samantha Powers (Pulitzer Prize); Ararat (movie, Egoyan director); www.armenia-online.de; www.anca.org; www.cilicia.com.

“I should like to see any power in the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a new Armenia.”

~ William Saroyan ~

14



~ The Armenian Alphabet ~

Ա Բ Գ Դ Ե Ջ Է Ը
Թ Ժ Ի Լ Խ Ծ Կ Ն
Ձ Ղ Ճ Մ Յ Ն Շ Ո
Չ Պ Ջ Ռ Ս Վ Տ Ր
Յ Ի Փ ք Օ Ֆ Գ Դ Ե Ն

Աա	Aa	Խխ	KHkh	Չչ	CHch
Բբ	Bb	Ծծ	DZ dz	Պպ	Pp
Գգ	Gg	Կկ	Kk	Ջջ	CHch
Դդ	Dd	Հհ	Hh	Ռր	Rr
Եե	Yy	Ջճ	TS ts	Սս	Ss
Ջզ	Zz	Ղղ	GHgh	Վվ	Vv
Էե	Ee	Ճճ	Jj	Տտ	Dd
Ըը	Ee	Մմ	Mm	Րր	Rr
Թթ	Tt	Յյ	HhYy	Տտ	TS ts
Ժժ	JHjh	Նն	Nn	Իի	Vv
Իի	Ii Yy	Շշ	SH sh	Փփ	Pp
Լլ	Ll	Օօ	VO vo	Քք	Kk



~ The Members of the Committee ~

- Helen Bertot
- Martha Bitar
- Christopher Born
- Zachariah Brevis
- Michael Constandy
- Cynthia Gurne
- Samuel Gyulnazarian
- Kay Harbinson
- Kenneth Hill
- Diana Papazian
- Dean Shahinian
- Andranik Andy Torosyan

Any questions, comments, concerns, and support for our organization is greatly appreciated and welcomed. You can contact us through the City of Alexandria:

Alexandria-Gyumri Sister City Committee
C/O: Citizens Assistance Office, City Hall
P.O. Box 178
Alexandria, VA 22313
(703) 838-4800

Very truly yours,

Andranik Andy Torosyan

Chairperson

16

