

Armenian Parliament Member Hranush Hakobian Participates in an Event to Benefit the Armenian American Wellness Center in Armenia

By James Faris

WASHINGTON, DC – On the evening of February 28, approximately a hundred and fifty people gathered at the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia to hear from Hranush Hakobian Ph.D., member of the Armenian Parliament and chair of the Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture and Youth Issues of the National Assembly of Armenia, in a tribute to the “Mothers of Gumri”.

The event was sponsored by *The Embassy of the Republic of Armenia, H. E. Amb. Arman Kirakossian*, and the *Armenian American Cultural Association, Inc. (AACA)* in support of the life-saving work of the *Armenian American Wellness Center (AAWC)* in Armenia in its mission to save, prolong and improve the lives of women in Armenia through early detection and treatment of their breast and cervical cancer.

Since Armenia’s independence in 1990, Hranush Hakobian has served four terms as a member of the National Assembly of Armenia. Ms. Hakobian holds a Ph.D. in Law, a Master’s Degree in Mathematics from the Yerevan State University, and a Master’s Degree in Political Science from the Academy of Political Sciences in Moscow. She has also briefly studied International Law in the United States. She has served Arme-



Honorable MP Hranush Hakobian, keynote speaker of the Event, addresses the attentive audience eager to hear about the present developments and progress in Armenia.

nia in several capacities, including Minister of Social Security (1996- 1998) and Chair of the Standing Committee on Health, Social Services, and Ecology of the National Assembly (1994-1996). She has authored 85 laws on issues concerning women, children, health, privatization and human rights in the Armenian Parliament.

M.P. Hakobian is in the United States as the official

guest of the Armenian American Cultural Association, Inc., the US sponsoring organization of the Armenian American Wellness Center, which is a humanitarian health project in Armenia. As a volunteer, she serves as Co-President of the Wellness Center, along with Rita Balian, and together they are responsible for the operations, development and expansion plans of the Center.

Sonia Crow, the vice presi-

dent of AACA, served as emcee for the evening. “This event is being held as a tribute to the ‘Mothers of Gumri’. Gumri is a city which is still struggling to overcome the devastating effects of the 1988 earthquake. AAWC’s Monthly Medical Missions have been extended to encompass the women and mothers of Gumri. Living in a high health care risk zone, the women of Gumri are subjugated to severe stresses and diseases, among which are breast and cervical cancer. The children of Gumri (ages 6 to 13), have joined forces with us at the AACA/AAWC by producing these paintings displayed on the walls which are for sale today. The proceeds will go towards continuing to provide life-saving medical services to their mothers during AAWC’s monthly missions.” She also announced that an anonymous donor would match all the funds raised on that day. Then she invited the Ambassador to the podium.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Arman Kirakossian introduced M.P. Hranush Hakobian saying “From the very first days of Armenia’s independence, Hranush Hakobian has committed herself to improving the Armenian State through her capacity as a member of the National Assembly. Apart from her active public service, Hranush Hakobian finds time to help

Armenian women through her work with the Armenian American Wellness Center.” Ambassador Kirakossian closed his remarks by expressing the Embassy’s and his personal appreciation of Hranush Hakobian and Rita Balian for their tireless work on behalf of the women of Armenia and wished them further success in their future endeavors in helping saving lives of mothers.

M.P. Hranush Hakobian then took the podium. “The most serious problem facing Armenian women today is poverty and the polarization between the rich and the poor,” said Ms. Hakobian, “yet one of the ways we can fight poverty is by providing women with access to modern health care facilities, and this is the reason why we founded the Armenian American Wellness Center.”

“The Armenian people are held up by four pillars: the first pillar is the Armenian language; the second is the Armenian Church; the third is the Armenian culture; and the fourth pillar is the Armenian family, of which the mother plays the predominant role. Therefore it is of vital importance that we, as Armenians, ensure the health and well-being of our mothers and sisters in Armenia in order to guarantee a productive future for Armenia.” Hakobian concluded her remarks by saying: “I believe that when Armenians are healthy, Armenians are wealthy and happy, and this will lead to a strong and secure Armenia.”

The event also included a musical program organized and coordinated by Leon Khoja-Eynatyan, faculty member at the prestigious Levine School of Music in Washington, DC. The program consisted of three musical pieces, the first of which was from Armenian American composer Alan Hovhanness and was performed by Nayiri Poochikian on violin, Virginia Lum on piano, and Leon Khoja-Eynatyan on percussion (marimba). This was followed by a piece from Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu and performed by Mrs. Poochikian and her daughter Hoorig on violin with Ms. Lum on piano. The final piece of the program was from Japanese composer Keiko Abe and was performed as a solo by Mr. Khoja-Eynatyan, along with the performer’s own improvisation. The musical program, especially the final piece, was received with great enthusiasm.

AACA President and Co-founder Rita Balian then gave



L to R are: Eugenia Sidereas, Officer at the Armenian Desk of the State Department; Manouk Topouzian, Minister –Head of Government Administration of Armenia; Barbara Brocker, Controller of the American International Health Alliance; Rev. Fr. Khoren Habeshian, Pastor of Soorp Khatch Armenian Church; H.E. Amb. Arman Kirakossian; Hon. MP Hranush Hakobian; Rt. Rev. Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian, Pastor of St. Mary’s Armenian Church; Manvel Badalian, Chairman of the State Council on Civil Service of Armenia; Rita Balian, AACA President & CVO and AAWC Founder; H.E. Amb. Michael Lemmon, Former US Ambassador to Armenia; Christina Tomlinson, Special Assistant and Executive Secretariat for the US State Department.

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Rita Balian, Founder of Armenian American Wellness Center (AAWC) in Armenia, shares a photograph of how the future Wellness Center, donated by the government of Armenia, will look after renovations in Yerevan.

closing remarks, commenting on AACA's vision for the future of the AAWC. "I began this project seven years ago with the goal of taking one mammography unit over to Armenia to aid in the prevention of breast cancer. With the help of Hranush and as a result of the hard work and dedication of everyone associated with the AAWC/AACA, we have since seen our goal of one mammography unit evolve into a state of the art Wellness Center for diagnostic and pre-

ventative health care with two satellite clinics. As we look to the future and begin our renovations of the building donated to us by the Armenian government, we envision a modern health care center that focuses not only on the health of our mothers and sisters in Armenia, but a health care center that will help to improve and prolong the lives of the entire family. I would like to thank everyone who has ever donated a "gift of hope" or volunteered their time to our noble cause. I would also

like to thank all of our committee members who have helped to make this event, benefiting the mothers of Gumri, such a great success."

The guests were then invited to participate in a raffle by giving a "gift of hope", a donation which will be used to provide free mammograms and pap smears to women at the Wellness Center. The winners received boxes of chocolate which were specially created with the AAWC logo through a business and philanthropic partnership



Violinist – Nayiri Poochikian and Percussionist Leon Khoja-Eynatyan performing a piece by Alan Hovhanness composed in 1957, titles Suite for Violin, Piano and Percussion, Op. 99.

between the AAWC and the Grand Candy Company of Armenia. One raffle winner also went home with a very special painting from one of the children of Gumri.

In attendance at the event were Armenian Ambassador to the U.S, H.E. Arman Kirakossian and his wife, Susanna; former U.S. Ambassador to Armenia H.E. Michael Lemmon and his wife Michele; Donna Dowsett-Coirolo, Armenian Country Director from the World Bank; USAID Team Leader for the Caucasus, James Watson and his wife Susan; Joseph Simone, the Founder of the International Spirit of Life Foundation, along with his wife Osa; Gerald Hill, Director of Global Outreach for Disease Management from Capital Technology Information Services, Inc.; Barbara Brocker and Suzanne Grinnan from the American International Health Alliance; from Interna-

1,200 women through early detection and treatment of their breast and cervical cancer. The Center was initially established in Armenia as a response to the alarming increase of breast cancer cases and the critical need for accurate and early detection of the disease. In January 2002, with the addition of gynecology and pathology departments, the *Mammography Center* was renamed the *Armenian American Wellness Center* to better reflect the range of services it now provides.

A satellite clinic was opened in the suburbs of Yerevan in April 2000. Among the recent achievements of the Wellness Center is the opening of a second satellite clinic on July 6th, 2003, in the town of Gavar located in the Gegharkunik District of the Lake Sevan Region. In addition to mammography and basic gynecological services, the



R to L are: Hon. MP Hranush Hakobian; H.E. Ambassador Arman Kirakossian and his wife Susanna; H.E. Ambassador Michael Lemmon and his wife Michele and son, Alexander (sitting on the couch).

tional Relief and Development, President and CEO Arthur Keys and his wife, Jasna Basaric-Keys, Director of Public Health for IRD; and many members of Washington's Armenian American community.

The *Armenian American Wellness Center*, previously known as the *Armenian American Mammography University Center*, was established in April 1997 by Founding President and CVO (Chief Volunteer Officer), Rita Balian, with the overwhelming contributions and assistance of hundreds of donors, volunteers, U.S. medical teams, corporations, institutions, and the U.S. and Armenian Governments and their respective embassies. The AAWC has screened over 53,000 women, and has helped to save, improve and prolong the lives of over

Gavar Clinic will also provide American style primary health care services for the entire family. The AAWC, with its Yerevan Clinic and two Satellite Clinics, now has a total staff of 36 people, most of who have received additional training in US medical institutions and provide high quality clinical services to their patients. Since the establishment of the AACA, its overhead expenses have not exceeded 3% of its total grassroots fundraising.

During M.P. Hakobian's visit to the U.S., the AACA organized several meetings with various medical providers, institutions, and Armenian American communities in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago to discuss present issues and future expansion plans for the Wellness Center.