A BRIDGE NAMED "ARMENIAN"

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Jirair Tutunjian, 17 May 2014

AMSTERDAM—A bridge, which was frequently used by 17th century Julfa Armenian merchants as passageway, was named ARMEENSEBRUG (Armenian Bridge) at an official ceremony here on May 15.

The inauguration was attended by Armenian Ambassador Dzunik Aghajanian, Rev. Daron Tadevosjan of the city's Sourp Hokee Armenian Apostolic Church, Amsterdam Chief of Planning Rob Kaatee, General Secretary of Street Naming Hans Tomson, and Nicolai Romashuk Hairabedian, the man, who after years of effort, achieved his dream of giving the ancient bridge its Armenian name. Also present at the unveiling ceremony were representatives from the AGBU, Abovian, and Ararat organizations, in addition to members of the Sourp Hokee Church congregation.

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Ambassador Aghajanian said she was "very proud because the bridge symbolizes the centuries-old friendship between the two peoples and will continue to do so for centuries." Mr. Tomson said that while the process of naming the bridge had taken a long time, he hoped the structure will symbolize the continued friendship of the people of the Netherlands and Armenians." Addressing Armenians, his colleague, Mr. Kaatee, said: "This is your bridge." He also echoed the sentiments of Mr. Tomson and the ambassador.

Watching the culmination of his many years of effort, Jerusalem-born Mr. Romashuk Hairabedian, said: "This is big victory for the Armenian people because of their worthy share in Dutch history, starting in the 4th century when Armenian Saint Servatsius/Servaas of Maastricht arrived here and continuing with the participation of Armenian merchants in the Golden Age of the Netherlands, the printing of the first Armenian Bible (1666-1668) and the participation of Soviet Armenian soldiers in

the liberation of the Netherlands at the end of the Second World War."

Mr. Romashuk Hairabedian, who gave each bridge crosser a red clove signaling victory, spent years researching at the Dutch National Archives at the University of Amsterdam to establish the bridge's connection to the Armenian merchants and then several more years to convince the municipality to consider his initiative to name the bridge Armenian. "I am dedicating my work to the centenary of the Genocide of Armenians," he said.

A resident of Assen who settled in Holland in 1976, Mr. Romashuk Hairabedian is the founder and chairman of the Armenian Social and Cultural Foundation. He was responsible in bringing a large khachkar from Armenia and in establishing an Armenian cemetery in Assen, the only one in the country. The cemetery is named Hrant Dink.

Following the ceremony, attendees walked to the nearby Sourp Hokee Apostolic Church.

Getting to the Armenian Bridge is easy. Take the metro at the Centre Station and get off after one stop (New Market). Signs there will direct you to 22 Krom Boomssloot. When you get there you will see the Sourp Hokee Church. ARMEENSEBRUG is visible from there. When new maps of Amsterdam are printed, they will include Armeensebrug.

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