

AN UNPRECEDENTED 46 PARLIAMENTARIANS JOIN CANADA-ARMENIA FRIENDSHIP GROUP

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Press Release by ANCC, 29 March 2009

In a democratic country, such as Canada, it is fair play in politics to promote any organisation or political party short of misrepresentation when national interests are at stake. Unfortunately, that civic obligation is not honoured, and it is a commonplace phenomenon to see pronouncements where there is an implied message that the authors represent the whole community or its majority. Readers are reminded of this concern while reviewing ANCC's most recent press release of 29 March 2009 copied at the end of this posting.

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Keghart.com contacted some friends who are active in the community and are aware of the ins and outs soliciting their comments. Below are some points that the readers may take into consideration.

* The event is certainly a positive one as more and more parliamentarians become aware of Armenian issues. Nevertheless, that's where the whole show stops. In the past, many organizations - including the AGBU - have worked hard to create this awareness and expand the group.

* ANCC certainly deserves credit for doing a lot, but to trump it as an incredible achievement is certainly an exaggeration.

* Regarding [Raymonde Folco](#) - one of the new vice chairs of the Friendship Group - the ANCC worked very hard to defeat her in the last federal election. Thanks to non-ANCC committed friends, she has put aside that episode. For ANCC to claim that she is a friend of Armenians because of their "lobbying" requires a lot of cheek.

* The Canada Armenia Friendship Group has been around for a long time and its ardent supporters included Sarkis Assadourian and Eleni Bakopanos.

* This Friendship Group is not the equivalent of the US "Armenian Caucus". It has no official status, no funding, and it is not related to voting in parliament. It is simply a friendship group as its name suggests, related to creating awareness. The Canadian [Parliament](#) recognizes only five Associations - Canada-China Legislative Association, Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association, Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group, Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary

Association, Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, and on the multilateral side Canada is a member of seven associations which include: Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association, Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, Inter-Parliamentary Union. These parliamentary groups obtain official funding and have clear policy agenda.

* Mr. Taro Alepian, Chairman of Congress of Canadian Armenians filed the following communication:

The Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC) is controlled by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation of Canada (Tashnags). When the Canada-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group (CAPFG) was given a list by the ANCC of Armenian community leaders, they were unaware that the ANCC had purposefully left out everyone from the numerous organizations throughout Canada that are "Etchmiadsnagan". The parliamentarians, who acted in a trusting fashion, were fooled. That is why we were not present at the gathering in Ottawa referred to in the ANCC press release dated March 29. I asked Harold Albrecht, the new Chairman of the CAPFG, whether he was aware that what the ANCC was doing was misrepresentation, and he replied that he was totally unaware and that he would like to work more closely with us in the future.

Perhaps more devastating to our reputation as a community is what will be happening in April of this year. The Congress of Canadian Armenians, with the enthusiastic support and input of over 20 major Armenian organizations from across Canada, is hosting a significant event on April 21 in the Parliament Building in Ottawa to mark the 5th anniversary of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the House of Commons. All Members of Parliament, many Senators and the Ambassadors of countries that have also recognized the Armenian Genocide are invited. Those who voted in favour of the recognition will be honoured.

On March 14, in a formal letter delivered to Dr. Vagharch Ehamdjian who is Chairman of the Tashnags in Canada, I requested their support and involvement in this event. Similar letters were sent to four other organizations that are closely affiliated with the Tashnags. The Central Board of the Tashnags formally replied on March 20, declining our invitation and saying that in fact they will not even attend our event. They further said that they had decided to hold an identical event to ours in Ottawa on April 28 exactly one week after our event. Not a single "Etchmiadsnagan" organization has yet received an invitation to their event.

Can you imagine the confusion among the parliamentarians who have now received two identical looking invitations from what they thought was a single community? Can you picture the embarrassment?

We are still hopeful that in time we will be able to cooperate with the Tashnags in such matters. To date all of our numerous approaches have been rebuffed by them. Perhaps with pressure from their own rank and file, all of whom are good Armenians, they will relent. Let us hope so for the sake of Armenian interests.

With kind regards,
Taro Alepian
Chairman, Congress of Canadian Armenians

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Roupen Kouyoumjian
March 29, 2009

An Unprecedented 46 Parliamentarians Join Canada-Armenia Friendship Group

Ottawa –A record number of Canadian House of Commons and Senate members have joined the newly-reconstituted Canada-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group. During the March 25 Annual General Meeting, Harold Albrecht (Kitchener-Conestoga, MP) was elected chair of the group. Nicole Demers (Laval), Reymonde Folco (Laval-les Iles) and Peter Stoffer (Sackville-Eastern Shore) were elected vice-chairs. Senators Con Di Nino and Jerahmiel S. Grafstein, both of Ontario, were also elected to the board.

The friendship group's past-chair, Hon. Gary Goodyear, welcomed and thanked the parliamentarians and said: "Members of the group, those from the Armenian community and all those who contributed to this group's success deserve our praise."

Hon. Goodyear emphasized "Armenia needs the help of the outside world to overcome its difficulties. Facing an unjust blockade by two of its neighbours, a devastating earthquake in 1988 and a shortage of financial and technical capital, Armenia has welcomed Canada's support." He added that Canada and Armenia are continuing to "pave a road to a peaceful and prosperous relationship and I look forward to the results."

Hon. Goodyear praised the Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC) and its executive director, Aris Babikian, for the support they provided him during his three-year tenure as head of the Canadian-Armenian group.

Following his election as chair, Mr. Albrecht thanked his colleagues for their trust, and for the privilege granted to him as chair of the group. He said: "Your interest in Canada-Armenia relations will continue to give rise to a prosperous future that rests on the foundation of an already peaceful and rewarding friendship. The work we do here is important to the three million Armenians living in Armenia and to the over five million in the rest of the world and particularly the 80,000 Canadian-Armenians who live in every province and territory of Canada."

Mr. Albrecht said that he extended "our gratitude for the contributions of the Armenian people and all Canadians who are of Armenian descent." He said that he considered "Canadian Parliament's recognition and Prime Minister Stephen Harper's recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 were important milestones in our journey forward. Armenians have courageously worked to move beyond the pain of the past and work toward a brighter future."

The new chair concluded his remarks by reassuring that "Canada stands as a friend with Armenia. As an interparliamentary friendship group, we have the privilege and duty to work together to build on our accomplishments."

Following the election of the rest of the board, the new chair invited Dr. Girair Basmadjian, president of the ANCC, to address the gathering. After thanking the friendship group and its new board, Dr. Basmadjian reminded new members that the task of the group has changed drastically since its formation 24 years ago. "Today many more challenges face Armenia and the friendship group. Establishing a Canadian embassy in Armenia, the lingering effects of the devastating 1988 earthquake, the illegal blockade of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan, the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict, and Canada-Armenia bilateral relations are among many issues which will challenge the group," said the head of ANCC.

Dr. Basmadjian concluded his remarks by wishing the friendship group success, and pledged ANCC's support and solidarity. In addition to Dr. Basmadjian, the annual meeting was attended by Krikor Der Ghazarian, Paul Douzjian, Roupén Kouyoumjian, Edward Agopian, and Aris Babikian, and

board members of ANCC.

The meeting was followed by an ANCC-hosted reception to celebrate the momentous event. During the reception many of the new members of the friendship group had the opportunity to get acquainted with ANCC representatives and with the committee's 45 years of advocacy. The parliamentarians also had the opportunity to discuss many of Canadian-Armenian community's concerns.

Also attending the gathering was Hagop Evereklian, chief of staff, Ministry of Immigration, Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

In preparation for the annual general meeting, the ANCC and its affiliated nation-wide chapters and supporters worked diligently in the last few months to solicit the participation of the largest number of parliamentarians possible in the friendship group. On March 11, an ANCC delegation joined Executive Director Aris Babikian to launch a final blitz in Ottawa to urge ministers, MPs and Senators to join the Canadian-Armenian group. During the blitz ANCC members met more than 50 parliamentarians. The ANCC is confident that soon the friendship group's membership will reach sixty.

The ANCC is the largest and the most influential Canadian-Armenian grassroots political organization. Working in coordination with a network of offices, chapters, and supporters throughout Canada and affiliated organizations around the world, the ANCC actively advances the concerns of the Canadian-Armenian community on a broad range of issues.

