CALL TO RELOCATE HEMSHILS FROM KYRGYZSTAN TO ARTSAKH

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George Mkhitaryan, 23 December 2011

George Mkhitaryan is project manager in charge of an urgent plan to relocate Hemshil families from Kyrgyzstan to Artsakh. The following is a call to all Armenians to help realize the vital mission.. The document is published unedited to preserve its originality in form and content. **Editor**

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We, the Association of Hamshen Armenians, want to offer you this joint project, probably the most prominent in the entire history of our nation. The project of Repatriation of the Hemshils (Islamized Hamshen Armenians) in Nagorno-Karabakh.

This project has already been discussed by the Armenian public. We need to mention that it immediately caused a disturbing resonance in Azerbaijan and Turkey, which points the project strength and importance.
I would like to tell you the history and status of the project.

The story began in 2010 after acquaintance with the members of Hemshil community in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Within our Association, the idea of repatriation of the Hemshils settled in Central Asia appeared. The idea, as it often happens, was based only on enthusiasm.

Summary: the Hemshils were found on the territory of former Soviet Union, by accident, during the border separation with Turkey. Some Hemshil villages in Adjaria region near the Black Sea became the part of the USSR. In 1944, Stalin deported them, like many other nations in Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). People had only 24 hours, and under the guise of "enemies», they were put into carriages and sent off. Along the way, many people died from starvation and disease. After several years people tried to return to their homeland, which at that time was already inhabited by Georgians, but the Georgian authorities declined. In the late '70s, members of the community went to Armenia to ask for repatriation. Armenian government approved the idea, but for some reasons Moscow rejected it for the second time. Since then the active part of our people, willing to come back, has remained in Central Asia until the present day.

After the dissolution of the USSR, some of the Hemshils moved to Russia, gradually helping those

who remained in Asia. The Hemshils are proud people and after many misfortunes, are accustomed to rely on themselves only. We became the first Armenian organization, who established a strong relationship with them.

While our relationship became stronger and more trusting, Kyrgyzstan started to get violent clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the region of the Hemshil residence. The situation became extremely dangerous both physically and ethically. At any time, people could be subject to collisions and massacres. The worst thing is that no one paid any attention at their fates. All our requests addressed to Armenian authorities were left unanswered. Only a miracle prevented extermination, and after these events, the community finally decided to leave Kyrgyzstan.

At this point, we got the idea of a special program of the Hemshil repatriation. We understand that under the current circumstances Russia will be the final destination for community. For us, it became strategically important that we, Armenians, once gained independence, liberating the land of Karabakh. We should make these people move to their historic homeland, which they have been separated with for several hundred years.

After the Armenian authorities refused to provide assistance to their fellow citizens from Kyrgyzstan, who were less than a thousand people - we have realized that the main difficulty in implementing this project will be Armenia itself and not the Hemshils. A number of officials including the Ministry of Diaspora made several loud promises. When the time to act started, all promises left to be only promises.

Cooperating at that time with the Hemshils we built a strong relationship with community leader, Ruslan Karabadzhakov. I note that he is a very brave and resolute man, who did much to convince people that Armenia should be a place where they should relocate. The more we turned out to establish sincere and trusting relationship with the Hemshils, the more antagonists appeared in Armenia, who were afraid of relocation of a few Armenian families because they were Muslim. We felt that unreasonable fear was born in self-doubt and resistance to change anything. The fear was because dozens or hundreds of Muslim Armenians would be able to Islamize the rest of Armenia, which wasn't true. We have realized how confident the Georgian people are now, and among them there are 400 000 Georgian Muslims (Ajarians) who have their own autonomy, and the whole republic. However, they are patriots of Georgia and its worthy citizens. Many of them voluntarily accepted Christianity and this process continues, we find that similar situation in Armenia is possible.

It was surprising and sad for us to watch the process, when people leave Armenia, particularly rural areas, not to mention Karabakh. At this time, there are people who had been willing not just to go to Yerevan and Stepanakert, but to Karabakh, the most important area.

I would like to write about the reasons why this project can be called unique, and why we must implement it.

1.The Hemshils (the homshets) is a unique ethnic group of Western Armenians who are informants of

the oldest forms of the Armenian language, of the oldest dialect *"homshetsma."*

2.The Hemshils are ready to relocate to the countryside, which is so important for Armenia and Karabakh. They have high fertility, so necessary for our people in this region.

3.For Turkey and Azerbaijan this would become a big blow in political terms, because all their plans to present Armenia in the Arab world as an enemy of the Muslims will be defeated. Moreover, they are discussing and taking actions. For example, while visiting Kyrgyzstan, Erdogan proposed the Hemshils to relocate to Turkey. Only thanks to Ruslan Karabadzhakov the Hemshils so far refused. Now it is the Armenians' turn.

4.It will be the most important period in history of Armenia. The Hemshils connect Western and Eastern Armenia. Historical justice will prevail, as this part of our nation experienced one of the hardest blows over the past 400 years: two massacres, Islamization, two relocations, and contemporary instability in Kyrgyzstan.

5.The Hemshils have high birth rates, they observe Armenian traditions while Armenians in Armenia or the Diaspora unfortunately do not observe any. They have strong traditional families and the Hemshils always try to live together.

6. If we are able to assist 10 families in the resettlement at the initial stage, and then surely we can say that over time, other people would join their communities and would be ready to move to Karabagh, even from Russia.

What we have now?

Now we are supported by the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh, who are ready to give lands in Mardakert district and assist in development of agriculture and animal husbandry.

Community leader Ruslan Karabadzhakov visited Nagorno-Karabakh, mentioned in the Armenian media. During the visit, Ruslan approved the project, personally evaluated all the pros and cons. The trip was organized by Levon Hayrapetyan, who fully prepared to take control over the project and finance it, even on a larger scale than we plan now. Unfortunately, at this time due to personal circumstances, Levon Hayrapetyan temporarily paused his participation in the Armenian projects, which is extremely unfavorable, because time is against us. The Hemshils in connection with the deteriorating financial situation move to Russia.

Levon Hayrapetyan worked out a project of livestock development in Karabakh, which is now booming. Levon Hayrapetyan was willing to allocate huge funds for it and had great hopes in the Hemshils' participation. He understands that it is long-term financial outlook. In addition, it is an extremely important segment of the economy in the future of Nagorno-Karabakh. We should take into account the fact that the Hemshils will have an opportunity to fulfill themselves. It is widely known that the population of Karabakh has extensive experience in the development of livestock, while during the Soviet reign the Hemshils in Southern Kyrgyzstan were the best experts in this field,

and now successfully continue their work in Russia.

Having evaluated all of the above, including a financial part, we understand that at this point an important goal of the project is the relocation of 10 families (40 people). After the successful relocation, the rest of community would follow them very fast.
After a visit to Kyrgyzstan and discussions with the community, as well as proceeding from a dialogue with the Karabakh side, we have developed the plan.

Our Association consists of mostly young people. Financially we can not support this strategically important for the Armenians project. It is important that such Armenian organization with experience of fulfilling major projects would engage in it. If you are interested, we will be happy to cooperate with you in this important project.

Sincerely, the project manager George Mkhitaryan

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