ONTARIO PROCLAIMS MAY “ARMENIAN HERITAGE MONTH”

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Category: Opinions

Toronto, March 29, 2020 – The Ontario Legislative Assembly unanimously approved a bill declaring May of each year as "*Armenian Heritage Month*".

Bill 105 was sponsored by Scarborough-Agincourt Member of the Provincial Parliament (MPP) Aris Babikian. The Ontario Legislative Assembly is the first legislature in Canada to adopt such a measure to honor and pay tribute to Canadian-Armenian contribution to Canadian society.

After the adoption of the Bill, Babikian said: "I am overwhelmed by the unanimous and unwavering support and solidarity of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly. I am humbled to be their colleague and represent the people of Scarborough-Agincourt in the Ontario house of democracy. My heartfelt gratitude to Ministers Paul Calandar (Markham-Stouffville, Stephen Lecce (King-Vaughan), Lisa Macleod (Nepean), and colleagues Robin Martin (Eglinton-Lawrence), Vincent Ke (Don Valley North), Effie Traintafilopoulos (Oakville-Burlington), Logan Kanapathi (Markham-Thornhill), Jennifer Stevens (St. Catharines), and Gurratan Singh (Brampton-Centre) for their camaraderie and heartfelt expressions. I am proud to sponsor this Bill and uphold the memory of our pioneers who sacrificed so much so that the community may thrive and make it a model for so many other groups."

Religious and civic leaders of the Toronto Armenian community were in attendance to witness the historic occasion. Among them were representatives of the Armenian Community Centre, the Armenian National Committee of Toronto, the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church, the St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church, and the St. Gregory Armenian Catholic Church.

The two-hour testimonials of the Legislative Assembly members from both sides of the aisle reaffirmed and re-emphasized the valuable contribution of Ontario Armenians to the province's social, cultural, educational, economic, and political institutions, as well as their contributions to the arts, sciences, literature, and business. Furthermore, the speakers referred to the impact of the Armenian Genocide on the Armenian people and Ontario, the Georgetown Boys humanitarian mission, the generosity of Canadians in support of the Armenian people during their darkest hour, the federal government's recognition of the Genocide of Armenians, the enduring characteristics and resilience of the Armenian people to overcome adversity, death, and destruction. Last but not least, the parliamentarians praised the contribution of the Armenian people to Ontario in making it a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

In his speech, MPP Babikian cited the history of the Armenians in Ontario, the establishment of various Armenian communities in the province, Canada's noble experiment in helping Armenian Genocide survivors and orphans, and why May was selected as the month to celebrate Ontario Armenians. In his speech, Babikian mentioned the names of some of the renowned Ontario Armenians who have left their indelible impact on Ontario daily life.

The adoption of Bill 105 has another significance. The Second and Third Reading of the Bill took place the same day and within the same legislative sitting. Usually, after the Second Reading is over,

a Bill is refereed to the House sub-committee for further study. After it is studied in the sub-committee, it comes back to the full sitting of the House for the Third Reading and vote. In Bill 105's case, after the passing of the Second Reading, the Progressive Conservative house leader called a rarely used parliamentary procedure to expedite the adoption of the Bill by referring it to the Committee of the Whole House. The last time this procedure was adopted was 20 years ago. Hence, the Bill went through Third Reading and adopted.

"I would like to thank the PC House Leader, Paul Calandra, for his wisdom and leadership in navigating this bill through the legislative process. Furthermore, I would like to thank Prof. Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, Mr. Jirair Jerry Tutunjian, and Ms. Hasmig Kurdian for their valuable assistance in helping me research the historical facts," concluded MPP Babikian.



MPP Aris Babikian's Speech

It is my honour to stand here today to sponsor Bill 105, An Act to proclaim the month of May as Armenian Heritage Month, and to initiate the second reading debate.

I am proud of my Armenian heritage and of my compatriots. I am also proud to be the first Ontario MPP of Armenian descent.

If Bill 105 is passed, it will be the first time a Canadian Legislative Assembly acknowledged the Canadian Armenian community's contribution to Ontario, Canada and, indeed, the world.

I am also proud of my predecessor compatriots who helped build this community and became integral members of our province and society. The efforts of the community pioneers made our community what it is today, as a model and envy to many newly established ethnic communities.

Mr. Speaker, the first recorded Armenian to have settled in Canada, in 1887, was Garabed Nergarian, from the village of Keghi in the province of Erzerum. He settled in Port Hope.

Most of the early settlers were casual workers who came to work on farms or in the factories of Brantford, St. Catharines and Hamilton. They were also construction workers on the Canadian Pacific Railway. They had not planned to settle here permanently; they came to Canada to help their

impoverished families in the Ottoman Empire. They saved money to go back and look after their kin.

By 1892, there were 37 Armenians in Ontario. After the Hamidian massacres of 1894 to 1896, Armenian families from the Ottoman Empire began settling in greater numbers in Ontario.

By the time of the 1915 genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, there were close to 2,000 Armenians living in Canada. In the aftermath of the genocide, some 1,500 survivors, mostly women and children, came to Canada as refugees.

The settlement of the survivors of the genocide was largely due to the groundswell of sympathy and support of Canadians who were eager to help the surviving victims of the genocide. The Anglican church, the Presbyterian church, the Methodist church, the Toronto Globe, the mayor of Toronto and many prominent people and organizations launched a fundraising campaign to help the survivors, particularly orphans who were scattered in the eastern Mediterranean countries. They raised $300,000 for their humanitarian campaign.

In 1922, the Armenian Relief Association of Canada, an ecumenical organization, was established to bring some orphans to Canada. The Governor General of Canada was the patron of the organization. Between 1922 and 1924, close to 120 orphan boys and girls ages 8 to 12, later known as the Georgetown Boys, were brought to Canada and settled in Georgetown, Ontario. The humanitarian mission, dubbed the "Noble Experiment," was considered one of the first Canadian humanitarian acts on an international scale. In 2010, the Georgetown farmhouse, now the Cedarvale Community Centre, was declared a historic and protected municipal site. I believe, Mr. Speaker, you know the farm very well, because it is in your riding, and we were there together at the 100th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian genocide.

In appreciation of Canada's generous support of Armenians and for providing them a new lease on life, many Canadian Armenians volunteered in the First World War and the Second World War. Quite a number of the Georgetown Boys volunteered to defend Canada during the Second World War. The Georgetown Boys served in our air force, navy and army. Many were killed in action, especially those in the air force.

Two of the Georgetown Boys had a tremendous effect on my life. Kirk Magarian was the first. He was a political mentor and father figure to me. Kirk had vast political experience and massive contacts within the three levels of government. When I landed at Toronto Pearson International Airport, I claimed refugee status. After two years of waiting, I approached Kirk for his assistance. He immediately made arrangements for me to see MPP Margaret Campbell. Kirk was a good friend of Margaret's. After I briefly told her my plight, she called Lloyd Axworthy, the Minister of Employment and Immigration at that time. She asked him why my application had been delayed. She demanded that he address the issue immediately. Within a week, I received my permanent resident status. Margaret was a feisty lady and earned the respect of everyone. What an ironic twist of fate—who would have believed that the refugee she helped would some day serve in the same institution she

had? Thank you, Margaret, and thank you, Kirk.

The second Georgetown Boy was Paul Adourian. Paul helped me secure my first mortgage. At a time when I did not even have money for a down payment, Paul helped me achieve my dream of owning my house. Years later, when I was manager of the Armenian Community Centre, I worked with his wife, Lily. On many occasions, when he came to visit Lily at the community centre, we had Armenian coffee together. He often recalled the challenges of the Georgetown Boys all those years ago, the early days of the establishment of the Armenian community and how the community had grown.

Since then, tens of thousands of Armenians from Iran, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, the Soviet Union, Egypt, Lebanon and many other places have migrated to Canada, mostly to flee political upheavals. Most recently, Syrian and Iraqi refugees who were sponsored by the Armenian community and churches became, within four short years, productive members of our community and the province. Many of them are now successful business owners and homeowners. They are model citizens who volunteer their time and support to many other causes.

Today, close to 100,000 Armenians call Ontario home. They live in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Windsor, Cambridge, St. Catharines, Mississauga, Ajax, Pickering, Oshawa, Richmond Hill, Kingston, Aurora, Brampton, Penetanguishene, Guelph, Kitchener, Oakville, Markham, and so many other places. The communities are well organized and self-sufficient. They have centres, churches, schools, cultural hubs, seniors' homes, youth and social services, and professional organizations.

Over the years, Armenians have made significant contributions to Ontario's economy, society, politics, academia, sport and culture, in addition to many other fields of endeavours. Among them are:

—world-celebrated photographer Yousuf Karsh, who was also the honorary president of the Canadian Armenian Congress, which was the first Armenian organization;
—equally renowned film director Atom Egoyan;
—nuclear physicist and executive vice-president for research and development at Atomic Energy of Canada, Dr. Ara Mooradian;
—former Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario Ann Cavoukian;
—children's singer Raffi;
—actress and comedian Andrea Martin of SCTV.

Some might wonder why an Armenian has the name Martin. A few years back, when I met Andrea, I asked her that same question. She said, "When we fled the genocide to the United States, we had an Armenian last name. We had difficulty finding jobs. We had difficulty getting integrated into the community. So my father was quite depressed. One day, a furniture truck passed by that said 'Martin's Furniture.'" So her father changed their name to Martin.

Other famous Armenians:

—Toronto Symphony Orchestra director Peter Oundjian;
—medical scientist and head of the department of anatomy at Queen's University, John Basmajian;
—Canada's leading rug importer, Aris Alexanian;
—star restaurateur Harry Barberian;
—Canadian women's chess champion Natalia Khoudgarian;
—Order of Canada recipient Vahan Kololian;
—developer and philanthropist Varoujan Van Lapoyan;
—historian Professor Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill;
—founder and president of the Zoryan Institute, Kourken Greg Sarkissian;
—chief of cardiovascular surgery at University Health Network, Dr. Maral Ouzounian;
—poet and author Keith Garebian;
—journalist and magazine editor Jerry Tutunjian;
—builder Garo Bostajian;
—former Waterloo police chief Matt Torigian;
—Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony conductor Raffi Armenian;
—Professor A. Edward Safarian of the University of Toronto—by the way, he was also the economic adviser to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and many world leaders around the world;
—opera singer Isabel Bayrakdarian;
—magazine publisher and art director Georges Haroutiun;
—painter and newspaper caricaturist Raffi Anderian;
—the founder of Can-Ar Coach, Vahe Tokmakjian;
—associate professor of music at the University of Oxford and violinist Gascia Ouzounian;
—famed news photographer/documentarian Roy Tash;
—painter Gérard Paraghamian;
—Royal Military College of Canada professor Alan Whitehorn;
—photographer Onnig Cavoukian;
—Miss Universe Canada Alice Panikian;
—actress Arsinée Khanjian;
—MP Sarkis Assadourian;
—poet and professor emeritus of literature Lorne Shirinian; and
—cellist Karen Ouzounian.

It is worth mentioning that Noubar Afeyan, a Canadian Armenian entrepreneur, inventor, philanthropist and co-founder of the biotechnology company Moderna, helped save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ontarians with his vaccine.

May 28, 1918, is celebrated by Armenians around the world as the day the Armenian people regained their sovereignty over their historical territory after 600 years of colonization, occupation, subjugation and genocide. The 1918 declaration to establish the Armenian republic is a symbol of

Armenians' aspiration for freedom, democracy and independence. This is one of the most important Armenian holidays, and many parades and festivities take place in May.

By proclaiming the month of May as Armenian Heritage Month, the province of Ontario recognizes the impact that Armenian Canadians have had on Ontario's history, culture, education, art, science, literature, economy and democratic institutions. Armenian Heritage Month is an opportunity to educate Ontarians of all ages about the hardships, struggles and achievements of Armenian Canadians in this free and democratic society that respects human rights and the rule of law. These core values have contributed to the strength and diversity of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the House leader, Minister Paul Calandra; Professor Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, Mr. Jirair Jerry Tutunjian and Ms. Hasmig Kurdian for their valuable assistance in helping me research the historical facts. Thank you very much.



Օնթարիոյի խորհրդարանը Մայիս ամիսը հռչակեց «Հայկական ժառանգութեան Ամիս»

29 Մարտ 2022-ին, Օնթարիոյի Օրէնսդիր Ժողովը միաձայնութեամբ հռչակեց

իւրաքանչիւր տարուան Մայիս ամիսը «Հայկական Ժառանգութեան Ամիս»:

105-րդ օրինագիծը, որ իւրաքանչիւր տարուան Մայիս ամիսը պիտի ճանչնայ որպէս «Հայկական Ժառանգութեան Ամիս», ներկայացուեցաւ Օնթարիօ նահանգի խորհրդարանի Սքարպորօ-Էյճինքորթ շրջանի երեսփոխան Արիս Պապիկեանի կողմէ: Օնթարիոյի Օրէնսդիր Ժողովը Գանատայի առաջին օրէնսդիր մարմինն է, որ ընդունեց նման օրէնք՝ յարգելու եւ յարգանքի տուրք մատուցանելու Օնթարիոյի մէջ բնակող հայերուն՝ իրենց գործուն ներդրումին եւ բարի աւանդին համար գանատական հասարակութեան մէջ:

Օրինագիծին ճանաչումէն ետք, Տիար Պապիկեան այսպէս արտայայտուեցաւ. «Ձգացուած եմ Օրէնսդիր Ժողովի գործընկերներուս միաձայն աջակցութեան ու օժանդակութեան համար: Բարձր կը գնահատեմ գործընկերներս եւ հպարտ եմ ընտրուելուս Օնթարիոյի Սքարպորօ-էյճինքորթ շրջանի ներկայացուցիչ: Այս առիթով կ’ուզեմ երախտապարտութիւնս յայտնել նախարարներ Փոլ Գալանտրային, Սթիվըն Լեչէին, Լիզա Մըքլաուտին եւ գործընկերներուս՝ Ռոպին Մարթինին, Վինսընթ Քըին, Էֆի Թրիանդաֆիլոբուլոսին, Լոկըն Գանաբաթիին, Ճենիֆեր Սթիվընզին եւ Կուրաթան Սինկին՝ իրենց սրտառուչ արտայայտութիւններուն համար: Հպարտ եմ հովանաւորելու այս օրինագիծը եւ ոգեկոչելու մեր գաղութի նախնիքներուն զոհողութիւնները համայնքին բարգաւաճման ի խնդիր»:

Սոյն պատմական իրադարձութեան ներկայ էին Թորոնթոյի հայ համայնքի կրօնական եւ քաղաքացիական առաջնորդներ եւ ներկայացուցիչներ ՝ Հայ Կեդրոն, Թորոնթոյի Հայ Դատի յանձնախումբ, Սուրբ Երրորդութիւն Հայց. Առաքելական Եկեղեցի, Սուրբ Աստուածածին Հայց. Առաքելական Եկեղեցի եւ Սուրբ Գրիգոր Լուսաւորիչ Հայ Կաթողիկէ Եկեղեցի:

Օրէնսդիր Ժողովի երկու ժամ տեւողութեան տրուած վկայութիւնները վերահաստատեցին եւ վերստին ընդգծեցին Օնթարիոյի հայերուն նշանակալի ներդրումը նահանգի ընկերային, մշակութային, կրթական, տնտեսական եւ քաղաքական հաստատութիւններուն մէջ, ինչպէս նաեւ իրենց ներդրումը արուեստի, գիտութիւններու եւ գրականութեան մարզերէն ներս: Բացի այդ, բանախօսները անդրադարձան Հայոց Ցեղասպանութեան ազդեցութեան օնթարիոցիներուն եւ Ճորճթաուն Պոյզ մարդասիրական առաքելութեան վրայ, աւելին՝ գանատացիներուն աջակցութեան հայ ժողովուրդին՝ անոր ամենամութ ժամերուն, դաշնային կառավարութեան կողմէ Հայոց Ցեղասպանութեան ճանաչման, հայ ժողովուրդի դժբախտութիւնները յաղթահարելու յարատեւ տոկունութեան:

Երեսփոխան Պապիկեան իր խօսքին մէջ ընդգծեց Օնթարիոյի հայերուն պատմութիւնը, նահանգի տարբեր հայկական համայնքներուն ստեղծումը, Հայոց Ցեղասպանութենէն վերապրածներուն եւ որբերուն օգնելու Գանատայի ազնիւ փորձը, եւ Մայիս ամիսը

հռչակելու որպէս Օնթարիոյի Հայկական Ժառանգութեան Ամիս: Պապիկեան իր խօսքին մէջ նաեւ նշեց Օնթարիոյի յայտնի հայերէն մի քանիին անունները, որոնք իրենց անջնջելի ազդեցութիւնը ունեցած են Օնթարիոյի առօրեայ կեանքին մէջ:

105 օրինագիծին հռչակումը մէկ այլ նշանակութիւն ունի: Սովորաբար երկրորդ ընթերցման աւարտին օրինագիծը կ'ուղարկուի պալատի ներկայացուցիչներու ենթայանձնաժողով՝ առաւել ուսումնասիրութեան համար: Ենթայանձնաժողովը ուսումնասիրելէ ետք, կ'անցնի երրորդ ընթերցումին: Օրինագիծին երկրորդ եւ երրորդ ընթերցումը տեղի ունեցաւ նոյն օրը եւ նոյն օրէնսդրական նիստի շրջանակներուն: 105-րդ օրինագիծին երկրորդ ընթերցումէն ետք, Պահպանողական պալատի ղեկավարը կոչ ըրաւ խորհրդարանականներուն օրինագիծին վաւերացումը արագացնելու՝ փոխանցելով ամբողջ խորհրդարանի յանձնաժողովին: Այսպիսով, օրինագիծը անցաւ երրորդ ընթերցման եւ ընդունուեցաւ: Վերջին անգամ այս ընթացակարգը ընդունուած է 20 տարի առաջ:

«Շնորհակալութիւն կը յայտնեմ Պահպանողական ներկայացուցիչներուն, Փոլ Գալանտրային՝ իր իմաստութեան եւ առաջնորդութեան համար այս օրինագիծը օրէնսդրական գործընթացին կողմնորոշուելուն համար: Աւելին, շնորհակալութիւն Փրոֆ. Իզապէլ Գաբրիէլեան-Չըրչիլին, ժիրայր Թիւթիւնճեանին եւ Յասմիկ Քիւրտեանին՝ իրենց արժէքաւոր աջակցութեան համար»,– եզրափակեց երեսփոխան Պապիկեան:

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Արքայական վաւերացումը (Royal Assent) տեղի ունեցաւ Հինգշաբթի, 31 Մարտին, Թագուհիին ներկայացուցիչին կողմէ:

There are no comments yet.