PREFACE TO KEGHART.COM VOLUME III

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By Dikran Abrahamian MD, publisher, Keghart.com, September 2016

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In the last few years traditional media has substantially abandoned its role as the *Fourth Estate.* The *Free Press* has been mostly eviscerated. The boundaries of fact, reality and truth have blurred. A variety of factors have contributed to this state of affairs. Probably the most glaring development was the intrusion of trans-national interests into the affairs of nations. This phenomenon is also acutely felt in Armenian life. The emergence of an oligarchic system in the homeland and its ascending influence in the Diaspora has been an additional detrimental element.

Fortunately advances in technology and the evolution of social networking have partially mitigated the effects of this development. Throughout the past nine years, utilizing the potentials of the internet Keghart.com tried to revive the traditions of independent, non-partisan journalism addressing myriad issues of grave import to the global Armenian community. Identity, existential issues, security, cultural decadence, governance, Genocide, human rights were all reflected in original articles penned by voluntary contributors. The inclusion of editorials in Keghart's second year shaped a much needed direction to which readers responded enthusiastically as evidenced by the comments and the hits.

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Readers from various backgrounds and parts of the world received Keghart on a bimonthly basis. They were appreciative of not only the analytic character of the articles but also of the information. This was true also for non-Armenian readers. Brydon Gombay, a Toronto- based retired community psychologist, activist for peace and social justice wrote, "Thank you for helping me to understand much I had previously known little about."

As Keghart.com progressed readers expressed the wish to have its content in book form. Thus the first volume ("Five Years of Keghart.com 2007-2012") was published in 2012 comprising editorials and articles written by board members. Towards the end of 2014 it was followed by the second volume. The present volume covers the editorials from January 2015 to August 2016 coinciding with the completion of the website's 9th anniversary.

The editorials are the product of a collaborative effort. They reflect Keghart collective's thinking, and are written in consultation with the board. However, they are exclusively penned by Keghart.com's English editor Jirair Tutunjian. His captivating style, analytic approach, unbiased stand and synthesis of opinions and views of board members and readers elevated the quality of the website to a level which is unparalleled in the Armenian Diaspora. We believe Keghart.com filled a void in the Diaspora media. The huge number of hits and the lively exchanges through the comment section are testimonies to this assertion.

Through its editorials Keghart.com praised whoever and whatever acknowledged the veracity of the Genocide of Armenians, promoted Armenian existential interests and adhered to the principles of Human Rights and democracy. In addition to fighting Genocide deniers, Keghart.com was relentless in exposing the madcap Erdogan, buffoon Aliyev, Turkey's warmongering establishment, Azerbaijan's dictatorship and their hired stooges. Keghart.com was outspoken, without being biased, in criticizing Serzh Sargsyan, Vladimir Putin, Catholicos of all Armenians Karekin II, Armenia's military,

and corruption at the highest levels of the RoA. The Diaspora political parties and Armenia electronic media were not spared.

With special pride I mention the names of Dr. Barouyr Aghbashian and Dr. Minas Kojayan, editors of the Armenian Section of the website. Graduates of the Yerevan State University, they are Armenologists, instructors of Armenian language and studies at various institutional levels. For decades they have occupied editorial positions in Armenian publications and have held positions of leadership. Their voluntary contribution to Keghart.com has been invaluable. Thank you, Barouyr. Thank you, Minas.

A long list of freelance contributors penned articles which enriched the website beyond my wildest dreams. Keghart also received solid support from friends who promoted the website by sharing its content with their circle of friends and acquaintances. The names of the contributors and known supporters are listed following the introduction penned by Doug Kalajian. Keghart board members join me in thanking them and wishing them the best during the upcoming festive season.

While we recognize the contributions of more than two-hundred talented, knowledgeable and committed writers, we would like to extend our special thanks to Vahe Apelian of Loveland, Ohio, Viken Attarian of Montreal, and Hamo Moskofian of Beirut. Apelian enriched our literature with his ethnographic work, especially about Kessab, and his translations into English of lost or relatively unknown but precious Armenian texts. In addition to contributing articles, Attarian was a silent helper who offered valuable guidance and information. Moskofian, a self-made “roving ambassador” with whom we have not always shared the same wavelength, since the days of his involvement in the “Armenian fighters”, has cultivated an impressive and expanding outreach within communities vital to Armenian interests. Progressive Turks, Kurds, Alevis, Zazas and others are under his radar screen. Through Hamo’s efforts many of their leading representatives received updates of Keghart.com and some contributed articles or news reports which were incorporated into articles by the editorial staff. Apart from journalistic endeavour, Moskofian’s unique knowledge of our potential allies’ who’s who led to meetings with leaders in various cities of Europe and Kurdistan.

Website publishers know how crucial the role of the webmaster and technical manager is. Throughout the past nine years, except a brief interval, Vako Nicolian oversaw the smooth operation of the website. Within a short period it developed from a blog-like appearance into a full-fledged well protected website. Without his vision, persistence and encouragement probably Keghart.com would not have emerged the way it did. Thank you, Vako.

I sought the advice of Keghart.com board members Michael Nahabet and Thomas Yeterian of Los Angeles who had served in *AIM*. Razmig Mardigian, also of Los Angeles, provided feedback to improve the look and quality of the website. Their help was much appreciated by the team and I join my thanks to them.

My daughters Anne, Sevan, Nayiri and Destiny were always there to help me keep records of

Keghart.com meetings, circulation, posting entries in "Did You Know" section and addressing technical glitches. My son Vartan provided valuable feedback and information while studying in Armenia. My wife Shirley's alert eyes were always there to keep me sane and healthy during the long nights while I updated the website. Words can't express my gratitude.

The reader is the most important component of a publication's success. Keghart.com was fortunate to have a wide base of readership reaching to 20,000 and garnering close to one million hits a year at its height. It consistently rated in the 10th percentile of the Armenian websites in the "Government & Organizations" category. In October 2010, Websitegrader, a well-known company which grades millions of websites stated the following, "The website www.keghart.com ranks 82,949 of the 3,826,202 websites that have been ranked so far. A website grade of 98/100 for www.keghart.com means that of the millions of websites that have been evaluated, our algorithm has calculated that this site scores higher than 98% of them in marketing effectiveness. The algorithm uses a proprietary blend of over 50 variables, including search engine data, website structure, approximate traffic, site performance, and others." Unfortunately, due to financial exigencies, we had to reduce the subscription base to 5,000. The readers deserve the largest slice of the "thank you" pie.

I have often been asked by new friends when I did become interested in publishing. Since this preface will probably be my swan song, I take the liberty to reply to the query.

It was 1956-57 when I first had a taste of publishing and writing. With a few classmates at the AGBU Hovagimian-Manougian Boys' Secondary School in Beirut we launched a hand-written internal newsletter which lasted about a year. The backyard of Azad Ardashessian's home served as the editorial office and print-house. We were adolescents. At high school, I contributed to the school's quarterly *Neviroum* (Dedication). My motto was a single Armenian word *Tchegeghdzel* (Not to deceive). Some of the articles appeared in a weekly. I used a pseudonym fearing expulsion from school. At the American University of Beirut (AUB) from 1962 to 1966 I wrote articles about social issues in the left-leaning *Haratch* (Onward) and an Arabic journal whose name escapes me.

In the early '70s I had the unique opportunity to get to know university students and graduates in Addis Ababa where I taught at the Armenian Community School Kevorkoff and served as the clerk of the National Council of Armenians. My extensive travels in the countryside provided insight, though imperfect, into the socio-economic problems Ethiopians faced. While students, teachers, and intellectuals opposed the regime there was no sign of unrest. After I expressed my "unorthodox" views about the poverty and the untenable feudalism to acquaintances I was invited to one of their clandestine groups. My contribution to the meetings was primarily studies devoted to socio-economic issues.

Mid '70s were most productive while I studied medicine in Yerevan. I was a member of the underground *Khempag* (Group) mentioned in Vartan Oskanian's *Angakhutyan Djanabarhov* (On the

Road to Independence). We wrote articles on contemporary issues and read them within the closed group. Having studied political science at AUB I wrote on politics and social matters.

In 1981 I came to Canada as a visitor. The upheaval in Lebanon and Israeli invasion in 1982 led to what was then called "Minister's Permit" which allowed Lebanese citizens to work and apply for landed immigrant status. My wife and first born had already joined me. Following my application, I was visited twice in my Edmonton apartment by people presenting themselves as immigration officers. Their questions were professional but I was left with the impression that they were on a fishing expedition. Why visits to my apartment instead of a government office? I had just started my internship in July and Col. Atilla Altıkat was assassinated in Ottawa that August. During that period I was receiving material from the Middle East about ASALA activities from a friend. Was I paranoid in linking these to the visits? I decided to stay away from community activities especially since I was in an intellectual stupor and depression having left Armenia in less than enthusiastic spirits. The subsequent years were complicated with residency, fellowship and family discord challenges. Thus the long period of silence. Some friends criticized my silence, especially for not participating in *AIM* (Armenian International Magazine) which was the brainchild of *Khempag* of which I was a charter member.

Keghart.com was launched in 2007. The circumstances of its birth are in the preface of the first volume. I wrote: "As publisher, my ambition was primarily to establish a medium which would become the *porte-parole* of Armenians in Canada *vis-à-vis* the non-Armenian Canadian **intellectual** community." … "A sharply-focused attention to non-Armenians--unfortunately and unintentionally--dissipated following the tragedy of March 1, 2008 in Armenia" and "Along with providing a platform for opinions on Armenia-related issues, Keghart.com offered an opportunity to people to express their views on the many problems Armenians face in the Diaspora."

In August ("Adieu") I outlined why Keghart.com ceased publication. The present volume's orange cover follows the tradition set by the previous two books which had red and blue covers representing the tricolor of Armenia. This volume can be obtained by writing to me at dikran.a@rogers.com or to the address on the back cover. Pledges of donations are welcome and they will be relayed to a new team determined to continue publishing Keghart.com.

The Armenian independent media has a tradition of more than two centuries. In 1794 *Aztarar* (The Bulletin) was published in Madras; *Hyusisapayl* (Polaris) in Moscow (1858), and *Mshag* (Cultivator) in Tbilisi (1872). The tradition of excellence in journalism continued in mid-20th century by Antranig Dzarougian's *Nayiri* published in Aleppo, then in Beirut, Simon Simonian's *Spyurk* (Diaspora), *Yeridasart Hay* (Young Armenian), both in Beirut, and *AIM* in Los Angeles two decades ago. The latter two were launched by students and individuals who had barely finished their studies. There is no reason to believe that the tradition of independent, non-partisan Armenian media will not persist. Armenians scattered all over the globe are eager for new voices that will guide the nation into the future. It's a sacred mission to encourage young, energetic and committed individuals to take

responsible positions in Armenian public life. The adage reminds us that a nation thrives by unleashing the energies of its youth.