UNITY ON INDIVIDUAL EFFORT HIGHLY DESIRABLE

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Keghart.com guest-editorial by Viken L. Attarian, Montréal, 9 November 2010

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As these calls for "unity" were being aired, some two scores of professionals and intellectuals discussed on-line and in 24April Forum the various aspects of the proposals and the counter-proposals, assessing the merits and shortfalls of such an initiative. Viken L. Attarian was one of the participants in the debate. His views are summarized and presented as guest-editorial of the week.

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Unity on many individual initiatives is however a highly desired state.

To achieve that, I believe that the approach should be project-based. Such projects should have very specific criteria for measurement and merit.

- They should make a difference in the daily lives of Armenians in Canada.
- They should not require massive financial input (at the megadollar level, but can be achieved at the six-figure dollar level).
- They should be completely non-discriminatory (i.e. non-denominational, non-political, non-social class related, non-identity related etc.), thus reaching everyone.
- They should have a strong participatory youth component.
- Their results should be shareable equally and its benefits should accrue to the Canadian-Armenian community at large, not to specific groups or subgroups thereof.

It is for these reasons that I have proposed several such projects on various occasions both in writing and in public appearances.
I personally believe that there are two such projects that can immensely benefit the Canadian Armenian community, which also satisfy the above criteria. While these projects are not the only meritorious ones, and others can come forward, there is some thought put behind these so I am sharing them.

Project 1.

- University education for all Canadian Armenian youth of the university attending age. (19-25, this is arbitrary and flexible). Regardless of field of choice. Basically the slogan being NO ONE LEFT BEHIND. To achieve this, all ASA (Armenian Student Associations) and youth organizations as well as traditional orgs can be mobilized. We need:
    - Organizing of paid tutoring in all subjects by youth for youth (donors target their money to pay the tutors and to the administration of this system).
    - Ongoing evaluation of the above tutoring to ensure quality.
    - Organizing of paired one-to-one mentoring between high school students, university attendees and young professionals.
    - Organizing of educational field related specialized events, to encourage kids to stay in school. E.g days for health care professionals, legal professionals, scientific professionals, business professionals, teaching professionals, media professionals etc.
    - Organizing to include children of new immigrants and specifically children who DO NOT attend Armenian schools in such programs.
    - Recognition events and prizes for the above.
    - Lobbying of governments to chip in financially and in other forms of assistance, to encourage such community-based broad initiatives.

Project 2

- A full demographic statistical database of the Canadian Armenian community. The purpose being to have a common tool to use for joint organizational policy initiatives. Such a database would have information about:
    - Number of families (Armenian-Armenian or of mixed lineage).
    - Their countries of origins and generational immigration data.
    - Gender distributions and roles (marital status, employment status etc.)
    - Education levels.
    - Age
    - Social status levels (e.g. welfare recipients, income supplement recipients etc.)
    - Professional and employment information.
    - Migration patterns (within the city, within the province, within the country, and to and from Canada).
    - Geographical distribution of place of living (province, city and district level).
    - Size of families
    - Other information as required

This is not about creating mailing lists, individual information is irrelevant. It is about creating census-type aggregate information on which we can base actions in terms of social policy, such as government lobbying, designing of community services, designing of our institutions and ensuring their future etc. For example, there have been several attempts in the past and even recently to create Armenian retirement homes or homes for the elderly, the argument being that our elderly do not speak English or French and prefer to be with other Armenians (services to include Armenian cooking, church services and Armenian traditional activities). While this might have been the case 30-40 years ago, there is no scientific evidence that suggests that this is true today, i.e. that 10 years from now we would actually have a group of retirees who would want, need and be ready to finance such an effort. We could be wasting a lot of resources raising the funds to build such an institution but it could be simply another enormous waste of our resources. I am not saying that such need does not exist, simply that we have no proof thereof. A statistical database would provide a strong impetus for such initiatives and it will help us uncover trends and needs which we do not even suspect today, for example on how to reach the children of numerous Armenians who have chosen to marry non-Armenians; how to welcome them and integrate them etc.
This project would require a scientific and professional approach to design the data collection mechanism, to maintain it on an ongoing basis and to share the results with our community organizations. In a sense, it would allow us to see the reality of our communities and remove our self-imposed “blindfolds”. One cannot drive any vehicle blindfolded, let alone steer the “ship”s of the Diaspora(s) to safe shores. Is it any wonder that we have had disastrous “collisions” and ran ourselves

into the proverbial walls and icebergs?
The question is, can all Canadian-Armenians and their organizations agree that they need to come together to implement these projects? What can they contribute (place, finances, administrative help, website development etc.)?

The benefits of such projects would be enormous, apart from their direct benefits related to their objectives.

- Canadian Armenians would be coming together to help themselves,
- Enormous trust can be earned between the traditional institutions and individuals.
- It would be a concrete demonstration that we can work together on something beyond Genocide-related or Armenia-helping issues (which are very laudable projects in of themselves).
- Lessons learnt from an ongoing cooperation and surely mistakes that we'll be making can become valuable tools.
- Processes and mechanisms of cooperation can be created and validated for bigger and greater projects.
- Working models to replicate within the Diaspora can be tested.
- A new generation will grow up taking pride in their identity and who they are seeing how being Armenian is actually BENEFICIAL not DIVISIVE and FUTILE.
- A source of pride in what we can achieve together

To repeat, the point is unity yes, but unity for a purpose. Specifically, for a purpose that is achievable, beneficial, whose benefits can be measureable relatively quickly and whose benefits accrue to everyone.
The Canadian Armenian community has an opportunity to act as a model. The Diaspora is changing and morphing much more rapidly than ever before. Can we truly harness this globalization of our people for something meaningful? Can we choose to become the masters of our own destiny? That is the question that every single one of us should ask ourselves.