

WINDS OF CHANGE II

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Dr. Zareh Ouzounian, Armenian Renaissance, Toronto, 15 July 2014

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Similarly, we can assume that it is every Armenian's *Dream* to have a country where the rule of law is equally applied to all with an independent judiciary system; a country where human rights take precedence over economic or political considerations, where government, civil society, academia and business all work together, towards a solid statehood.

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The Myth is where we may disagree. Some will argue it is a myth to even strive for such a society, that things are what they are, and that it is not possible to CHANGE the situation. This defeatist and fatalistic approach, along with the resignation to and acceptance of the *status quo* can be detrimental to any progress. It will also paralyze all initiatives. It denies hope. It casts CHANGE far into the myth-land of the inhuman and therefore is unreachable.

But make no mistake, CHANGE is not a *myth*. It is possible. It is needed. It is imperative.

It is already happening in our homeland. The rising voices of the burgeoning grass-root movements we are witnessing are a tribute to the courage and resolve of our people. In recent months and years we have witnessed a surge of civil rights activities in Armenia. These various groups, also known as "activists", or "civic rights movements" have been registering small victories, one small battle at a time.

Do not look at these various groups separately (each being too small and incapable of bringing change) but rather as multiple tributaries of a river that will flow when the time is right.

We shall encourage the cooperation among these various groups and the institutionalization of the creative thoughts and processes that will bring about a "New Armenia".

At a recent symposium held in Toronto "Corruption in Armenia : Solutions and the role of the Diaspora", we heard many experts dissect different aspects of corruption and its dire consequences on the everyday life of ordinary citizens. The speakers also offered a road map describing solutions

to this crippling phenomenon. The event was so successful that it was repeated the following week in Montreal.



Atom Egoyan, celebrated Canadian film-maker, chose our symposium to premiere his short film on the subject. Bronwyn Best, head of Transparency International, Canada, explained the global and local impact of corruption. Vladimir Shekoyan, founding member of the Washington-based think-tank Policy Forum Armenia, presented a detailed report based on facts and statistics. Dr. Artak Zeynalyan, lawyer, Karabagh War hero and human rights defender described the importance of having an independent judiciary system and the many victories already registered with European courts. Kamo Maylian, coordinator of the Kololian Foundation's study on depopulation in Armenia, explained that corruption is the most significant cause of *en masse* emigration from Armenia. Dr. Carolann Najarian, physician, author and philanthropist, shared with the audience her painful experience with the judiciary system in Armenia. Garegin Chukaszian, activist and a founding member of the Nakhakhorhrtaran (Pre-parliament), offered solutions based on a paradigm-shift in the perception of present Armenia internally and within the recent geopolitical developments in the region.

Our speakers also analyzed and assessed the role of the Diaspora and its potential influence on the course of CHANGE in Armenia.

While it is true that change can occur only from within (Armenia), it is also true that the Diaspora can play a crucial role in the search for a "New Armenia". Our traditional Diaspora has done an outstanding job in the past and continues to do so today by preserving "Armenianness" (Hayabahbanum) in our communities, with churches, schools, and various community centers around the globe and sparing no effort in defending the Armenian Cause (Hai Tad). Our traditional Diaspora has also heeded the call of the Motherland during crises such as the earthquake and the war in Karabagh. Every one of our Diaspora organizations is a jewel that needs to be protected. But today, in addition to these important missions, there is an additional and fundamental issue, as Armenia faces an EXISTENTIAL challenge due to the unsustainable rate of emigration. The Armenian Renaissance believes that Armenia's catastrophic depopulation and its underlying causes should become part of the Diaspora's agenda. Twenty- three years after independence, the Diaspora MUST actively participate in the effort towards building a stable State. The coming of age of Armenia AND the Diaspora are symbiotic and interdependent.

We are confident that our traditional Diaspora, with all its potential, its political parties, churches, cultural groups and other institutions. will not only join, but will be at the forefront of the search for good governance as a basis for nation-building and mature statehood.

The Armenian Renaissance will try to create the forum that will bring together every Armenian who believes in CHANGE and is ready to shelve fears and hesitations, and more importantly, ready to

engage in positive action. The *Armenian Renaissance* will try and create a global network of Armenians ready to ACT for change. Whether it is an important publication, press-conference, educational lecture, roundtable, petition-signing, public protests, whether these actions take place in Los Angeles, Montreal, Paris or Yerevan, this *Renaissance* network will be informed, engaged and ready to act.

Status quo individuals need not apply.

Together, hand-in-hand, let us join in getting rid of the existing myths.

We CAN do it.

