

GREETING SPEECH FOR BOOK PRESENTATION

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Քերաշնորհ Սրբազան Հայր, Արժանապատիւ Քահանայ Հայրեր, Honourable Mayor, Honourable Armenian Representative in the House, former Assistant Secretary-General of the UN, chairmen and representatives of the Diocesan and Administrative Councils of the Prelature, chairman and members of the School Committee, Headmistress of Նարեկ Armenian Schools, chairman and members of the management committee of the Գալսյաճեան Foundation, representatives of Armenian parties and organisations, former Nareg Headmaster, distinguished guests, սիրելի բարեկամներ/dear friends,

It is with great pleasure that I am tonight amongst you, and I am especially honoured by your presence here, once again proof to me of your factual love and your genuine interest for my work, and the importance you place on the History of this important community, whose roots are lost in the passing of the centuries.

Contrary to most communities of the Armenian Diaspora, the past of the Armenian-Cypriot community has depth in time. This amazing past was my initial impetus to study the Armenian-Cypriot community, as part of my co-operation with "Politis" newspaper, for the preparation of a CHRONICLE, at around the same period I was preparing corresponding tributes for the Maronite and the Latin community. Although there are indications that the history of the Armenian-Cypriot community may go back to the time of Տիգրան Մեծ (1st century B.C.) or even the 5th century B.C., it is certain that it starts on the year 578 A.D. Since then, and for at least 14 centuries, this community is constantly changing form and character, yet remaining an inextricable part of the mosaic called the Cypriote civilisation.

Armenians in Cyprus have been soldiers, knights and warriors, merchants, noblemen and feudal lords, professionals, craftsmen and entrepreneurs. For centuries, the hospitable land of Cyprus had been a refuge for Armenians: during the Frankish and Venetian Eras, Armenians from Cilicia and the Levant fled here to escape the Muslim attacks; during the Ottoman Era, Armenians from Cilicia and Asia Minor settled here for a better life, while between 1894-1923, as a result of the Hamidian massacres, the Adana massacre, the Armenian Genocide, the massive deportations and the horrific massacres, Cyprus widely opened its arms to welcome thousands of Armenians from Cilicia, Smyrna and Constantinople, who arrived from all its harbours, especially that of Larnaca, others by chance, some by intent.

Destitute, persecuted and ragamuffins, some of them eventually chose to remain in Cyprus, which they loved and made their homeland. Industrious, cultivated and progressive, they did not need long to find their feet in this beautiful island, and to become people of letters and arts, pioneering photographers, unsurpassed craftsmen, eminent physicians, able entrepreneurs, formidable merchants, multilingual translators, as well as diligent public servants and policemen. At the same time, the Armenian գաղթականներ brought new life into the old community of the տեղացի, not without frictions and controversies. Moreover, the Melkonian Educational Institute, built between 1924-1926 with the generous and benevolent donation of the Egyptian-Armenian tobacco trading brothers Գրիգոր and Կարապետ Մելգոնեան, offered shelter and education to thousands of orphans of the Genocide; over time, it became a world-

renowned secondary Armenian school and - until its unfair closure in 2005 - it was a beacon of hope and culture for Armenianism and Armenophony everywhere.

Later on, in the mid-20th century, Armenians from Egypt and Palestine arrived here as refugees. At about the same time, the Armenian-Cypriot community experience some form of decay, due to three factors: the Սերգաղթ, when during the 1940s-1960s many families emigrated to Soviet Armenia, the result of a series of promises and expectations, the Emergency of 1955-1959, which disrupted the restless peace that prevailed and led more Armenian-Cypriots to foreign lands, and the Troubles of 1963-1964, a result of which was the occupation of the Armenian quarter of Nicosia, with the mediaeval church of the Virgin Mary, the Prelature Building, the historical monument of the Genocide, the Մելիքեան-Ուղունեան School and the premises of Հայ Աղոււմբ, AYMA and Բարեգործական. 231 Armenian-Cypriot families, victims of the Turkish-Cypriot mutiny, became refugees and lost their businesses. Also Turkish-occupied since then is the mediaeval church of Virgin Mary of Կանչուր in walled Famagusta.

Yet, with the help and support of President and Archbishop Makarios III, as well as of the successive governments of Cyprus, the Armenian-Cypriot community managed to prosper and thrive. Besides, when it was recognised as a "*religious group*" with the 1960 Constitution, and with a relevant referendum it opted to belong to the co-religionist Greek-Cypriot community, it sealed its future and its historical course for generations to come. Since then, Armenian-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots have been steadily united in their struggle for vindication from the evils they suffered by the Turks and the Turkish-Cypriots, with the enslaved mountain ranges of Արարատ and Pentadhaktylos as a daily reminder. Besides, it is no coincidence that the first mention for the Armenian Genocide at an international forum was made in 1965 in the General Assembly of the UN by the then Cypriot Foreign Minister Spyros Kyprianou, and that Cyprus became the first European country (and the second worldwide), to recognise the Armenian Genocide, after resolution 36, submitted in the House in 1975 by the late Representative Տոթթ. Անդրանիկ Աշճեան. During his term, the also late Representative Արամ Գալալճեան submitted Resolutions 74/1982 and 103/1990 in the House, condemning the Armenian Genocide.

The savage and unlawful Turkish invasion of 1974 afflicted the Armenian-Cypriot community as well, as the entire community of Famagusta became refugees, as well as some families who lived in Kyrenia and Nicosia, the Melkonian boys' dormitory was bombed, an Armenian-Cypriot woman is missing since then and the historical monastery of Սուրբ Մակար was occupied, also known as Armenian Monastery or Մակարավանք. Despite its own problems, from the very next year of its own tragedy, Cyprus became the refuge, temporary for many, permanent for some, for Armenian political refugees who fled the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990), the insurgencies in Syria (1976-1982), the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq war (1978-1988). Also, after the fall of the Soviet Union (1991) and until today, hundreds of Armenians from Armenia, Georgia and Russia came to Cyprus as economic refugees, in search for a better life.

This tragic story, as well as the unwavering persistence and the incurable optimism of the Armenians was my initial impetus for further research. My research was originally based on a small number of Anglophone and Hellenophone books and articles that dealt, directly or indirectly, with the community. At the same time, based on the structure I set in the CHRONICLE for the Maronite community, I approached the Armenian-Cypriot community in a new light, a new perspective. I looked up the population censuses of the colonial period, I created pertinent demographic maps, and I attempted to see the

community not as something constant and permanent, but as a diachronic presence that is continuously changing. The assistance of the Representative, the Prelature and the various other bodies and individuals was indispensable to me.

The circulation of CHRONICLE with the "Politis" newspaper, on 14 September 2008, offered a Pancyprian coverage to the community and gave the opportunity to its readers to be informed about the history of the community, as well as various aspects of it, such as the origins and the Christian identity of the Armenians, the Armenian language, the places of education/worship/repose of the Armenian-Cypriots, as well as the various Armenian-Cypriot clubs and organisations. However, despite the CHRONICLE's originality and uniqueness, there was also an important drawback: the space limitation imposed by the newspaper.

At around the end of 2008, I was approached by the Καλαϊτζιάν Foundation, for the co-operation in the publication of the CHRONICLE in English, so that it can be read by the entire world. With the agreement of the management committee, we decided that this edition would include more historical and other data for the community. Thus, I embarked on a research lasting several months, in every book related to Cyprus, discovering and illuminating unknown aspects of history. At the same time, with the invaluable help of some Armenian-Cypriot friends, I managed to have access to Armenophone texts dealing with the community and, thus, a more complete picture.

After much work of laborious research and thanks to the sponsorship by the Καλαϊτζιάν Foundation, the English and enlarged edition, titled "*The Armenians of Cyprus*" became a reality in mid-May 2009, when the book was printed in Larnaca and was distributed gratis to Armenian-Cypriot homes and associations. Seeing the more detailed and overall coverage of the community through this book, it was proposed to me to translate it into Greek, so that there would be an equivalent coverage in the Greek language as well. Throughout the sizzling past summer, I translated, with considerable effort, the content of the book in the admittedly difficult Greek language. So, in the end of October 2009 the book was published under the title "*Οι Αρμένιοι της Κύπρου*", again with the kind donation of the Kalaydjian Foundation.

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Initially, I had stated that what attracted me was the extremely interesting history of the community. Over time, however, and what eventually kept me, was when my link started assuming a personal character, by getting to know more and more members of this amazing community. With each person and every family I met, a new window, a new door opened to this wonderful community and at the same time I felt myself into a second family, you. You, who embraced me and accepted me into the community, the church and the clubs; you, who befriended me and appreciated my work; you, who welcomed me in your homes and shared your stories with me; you, who opened up for me a new dimension in culture, history, communication and knowledge; you, with whom we have common struggles and protests, against the arbitrariness of Turkey, which insists in violating human rights and in denying the perpetration of the Armenian Genocide and the Turkish invasion, and against the arbitrariness of the foreign powers, who put their interests above the justice.

Finishing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for being here amongst us, as well as all those who - for various reasons - were unable to attend tonight; to thank you for the unflinching love you show me, for the constant strength you give me to continue through your praises and congratulations, and for the valuable assistance and

information you have and still provide me with in writing my book and my historical articles in the Արձագանգ newspaper. I would also like to thank the Prelature, the Representative, the Kalaydjian Foundation and various other organised bodies, for the continuous support in my work. I wish to personally thank his Eminence, Archbishop Վարդան for making this hall available and for his gentle kindness to place tonight's event under his patronage, as well as the Honourable Mayor of Strovolos, Mr Eliophotou, who accepted our invitation to honour us by placing tonight's event under his auspices. Finally, I would like to thank the Chairman and the members of the management committee of the Kalaydjian Foundation, for their financial and moral support and the publication of the labours of my work, as well as for organising this beautiful evening.

I only hope I have fulfilled your expectations, and that the example of my love, appreciation and offer for this wonderful community will be followed by others, so that the average Cypriot will now know the tumultuous history of the Armenians; know that Armenians are Orthodox Christians and not heretics or of another faith; know that Armenians speak Armenian, a very ancient, rich and beautiful language, not Turkish, as often presumed by many ignorant and verdant people in Cyprus. May my book give rise to further research and may it remain a legacy for the centuries of Armenian history in this long-suffering and agonising island. Finally, I will state once more that in the questions posed by many, I will continue to reply: Հայ չեմ, բայց հայասեր եմ!!! Thank you, շնորհակալութիւն: