

ANNUAL REPORT

2009-2010



ARMENIAN YOUTH FEDERATION
ARF YOUTH ORGANIZATION OF THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

MESSAGE FROM CENTRAL EXECUTIVE

Fiscal year 2009-2010 was a defining moment for the Armenian Youth Federation. In a time of national turmoil, the youth threw themselves directly into the fray to defend the Armenian people's collective rights.

The year began with the disclosure of the now infamous "Protocols for the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Armenia and Turkey." Consumed by the threat these agreements posed to the Armenian nation, AYF members mobilized on an unprecedented scale to voice the mass opposition to such a capitulation.

The AYF grew out of this struggle more committed and stronger than ever.

Outreach efforts were expanded to give youth more voice within the community; stronger emphasis was placed on strengthening programs geared toward Armenia; initiative was taken to address social injustices affecting Armenians in Southern California; coalitions were built with non-Armenian organizations and institutions; and public relations was excelled to have the youth's message reach a wider audience.

Throughout this process, it has been the interests of the community that have stood foremost on the agenda of the AYF. This commitment to serve our people is what compels us to not only thank the community for its longstanding support, but to remain directly accountable to the public.

It is in this spirit with which we present this summary of our key activities. We hope that this report will give greater insight into the annual work of the AYF and provide a means for greater input from the community.

Thank you for your faith in the youth and confidence in the continuing growth of the AYF.

KNOWLEDGE IS THE FOUNDATION

ANNUAL EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR

Every year the AYF holds its Annual Educational Seminar at AYF Camp, where members from all chapters have the opportunity to come together in a fraternal and social atmosphere to learn more about our history, political struggles, and current events.



This year, the Seminar gathered over 50 participants to discuss assimilation and repatriation through a series of lectures, discussions, debates, and hands-on activities. The three-day weekend was overseen by ANCA Communications Director Elizabeth Chouldjian. In addition to Ms. Chouldjian, speakers included Dr. Hagop Kouloujian, who spoke about the phenomenon of assimilation through the prism of language, and Ara Mgrdichian, who delved into notions of identity and youth activism.

The educational portion of the seminar was followed by an evening oath ceremony where 10 new members of the AYF were sworn into the organization.

QUIZ BOWL

Since 2006, the Crescenta Valley “Zartok” Chapter has hosted a special educational Quiz Bowl, pitting chapters against one another in a friendly competition over such topics as history, culture, and current events. Participants train for the competition months in advance in what is perhaps the most anticipated educational event on the AYF’s yearly calendar.

Past Quiz Bowl themes have included the February Rebellion of 1921, the rebirth of Armenian nationalism during the Soviet Era, the role of women in the Armenian revolutionary movement, and the Armenian Zartok (political/cultural awakening) of the 18th and 19th century.

This year’s Quiz Bowl, held on March 20 at the Crescenta Valley Armenia Center, focused on the history and legacy behind the names of each AYF chapter in the Western Region. The Hollywood “Musa Dagh” Chapter took first place in the competition.

NANOR KRIKORIAN SCHOLARSHIP

A series of scholarship awards of \$1000, \$500, and \$250 were distributed to six recipients as part of the AYF’s Annual “Nanor Krikorian” Memorial Scholarship. Administered by the AYF’s Central Educational Council, the scholarship has been helping graduating high school seniors and college students advance their education ever since its establishment in 2003. The program is named in memory of AYF member Nanor Krikorian, whose life was tragically cut short due to cancer.

CAMARADERIE & KINSHIP

AYF ANNIVERSARY DINNER DANCE

It has become a tradition for the AYF to celebrate its anniversary with an annual dinner dance. Alongside serving the goal of celebrating the organization's anniversary, the dinner dance is a medium the AYF uses to provide Armenian youth with a healthy social setting. The entertainment for this year, held for the first time at the Henry Fonda Theatre in Hollywood, was provided by Harout Pamboukjian and attracted over 700 youth and community members. The dinner dance also served as the AYF's largest fundraiser, generating over \$10,000 in net income.

AYF OLYMPICS

Nearly 150 AYF members turned-out on Thanksgiving weekend to compete in the AYF's 36th annual Olympic Games, hosted by the AYF's Glendale 'Roupen' chapter, at the majestic seaside Paradise Point Resort in San Diego. AYF chapters from all over California and Las Vegas attended the weekend tournament to compete in soccer, basketball and volleyball.

At the end of the tournament, the Fresno 'Kevork Chavoush' chapter came out on top in Soccer, winning the gold and taking the glory. The Burbank 'Varak' chapter came in first for Volleyball and the Hollywood 'Musa Dagh' chapter took the winning position in basketball.

ARTISTIC UPRISING

Over 100 Armenian youth gathered on Saturday, May 8, to enjoy the AYF's 'Artistic Uprising' Open Mic Night, a showcase of music, art, poetry, humor and dance.

Organized for the fourth year by the AYF La Crescenta "Zartonk" Chapter, Open Mic Night invited young people throughout Southern California to come and express themselves. The night has become a highly anticipated event for young people throughout the community to spotlight their talents.



ON THE FRONTLINES

LITTLE ARMENIA BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT

For the seventh consecutive year, hundreds of Armenian youth hit the streets of Little Armenia, in the densely populated district of East Hollywood, to clean up trash, remove graffiti and plant trees in the neighborhood. Working in conjunction with Councilmember Eric Garcetti's office, the AYF's Hollywood "Musa Dagh" Chapter planned, organized and executed the Beautification campaign from start to finish.

It is estimated that, to date, more than 30,000 pounds of trash have been removed as a result of the AYF's volunteer efforts. In addition to keeping Little Armenia clean and instilling pride in the neighborhood, the project seeks to unify local Armenian residents around the spirit of community and civic responsibility.

HAI TAHD ADVOCACY

The AYF delivered presentations on the Armenian Genocide to dozens of public high schools and universities throughout Southern California, educating hundreds of students about the atrocities committed at the hands of Turkey and its continued attempt to deny responsibility for this crime. A special workshop featuring Sara Cohan of the Genocide Education Project was also hosted as a way to offer activists the skills to educate others about genocide on their local campuses.

Working in conjunction with the ANC, phone banking sessions, forums, and advocacy initiatives were also organized in support of Armenian Genocide recognition. In addition, the AYF participated in public forums educating the community about California's 9th Circuit Court decision, which sought to deny Armenian Genocide victims the right to sue for life insurance claims. That decision was later successfully overturned by a federal appeals court.

ANNUAL APRIL 24 ACTIVISM

More than 10,000 community members joined the AYF for its annual April 24 demonstration in front of the Turkish Consulate this year, forcing the complete closure of Wilshire Boulevard. The crowd marched waving the Armenian tri-color and demanding an end to denial of this crime against humanity. On hand to offer his impassioned remarks to the demonstrators was newly elected LA City Councilman Paul Krikorian.

Dozens of major media outlets covered the protest in what has become the most vocal demonstration calling for proper recognition and reparations for this crime by the Turkish government. Following the demonstration, a capacity crowd filled the halls of the El Rey Theatre for a social justice concert sponsored by the AYF titled "Silence the Lies! Rock the Truth!" The concert was in commemoration of the 95th anniversary of the Genocide, with all proceeds from the event benefiting the Armenian Relief Society's Armenia-Artsakh Orphan Project and the Bird's Nest Orphanage in Lebanon.

'STOP THE PROTOCOLS' CAMPAIGN

In late August 2009, the Armenian nation was stunned to read the details of an ill-advised agreement negotiated behind closed doors between Ankara and Yerevan. The so-called "Protocols for the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Armenia and Turkey" sought to squeeze out of the Armenian people that which it for so long refused to surrender: justice, restitution and self-determination.

Here in Los Angeles, the AYF and countless Armenian youth took to the streets in a show of force against the Protocols. Members engaged in community lectures, meetings, demonstrations, hunger strikes, official delegations, leafleting, and social media outreach against the dangers of the agreement. When Armenian President Serj Sarkissian visited Los Angeles, it was the AYF which organized a mass protest sounding the collective NO of the community against the proposed measure. The unprecedented 'Stop the Protocols' campaign generated an avalanche of media attention, even reaching the pages of *The Economist* magazine.

Finally, in April 2010, the Armenian government officially froze ratification of the Protocols, citing Ankara's preconditions and stonewalling. We know that the unprecedented outcry of the Armenians worldwide influenced this step from Yerevan. The AYF continues to stand ready and vigilant against any similar attempts to sign away the collective rights of the Armenian nation.

PROTEST AGAINST AZERI CONSUL GENERAL

More than 150 members and supporters of the AYF gathered in front of the Pacific Club in Orange County on March 4, 2010, to protest a talk delivered by Azerbaijan's Consul General of Los Angeles to the World Affairs Council. The event was an attempt to paint Azerbaijan as a strategically vital ally to the US and other regional superpowers. The protestors educated guests on Azerbaijan's ongoing human rights violations and called for an end to Baku's war rhetoric against the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Several AYF members also went inside the event where they echoed similar sentiments during the question period of the event.



CRUSADING FOR JUSTICE

'INVISIBLE CHILDREN' FILM SCREENING

In December, the AYF's United Human Rights Council teamed up with Invisible Children, a nationwide organization dedicated to stopping the atrocities against innocent children taking place in Uganda, for a documentary film screening chronicling the efforts of activists fighting to end the abduction and forced militarization of children in Uganda.

Since 1986, over 30,000 children have been forced into Uganda's brutal civil war, forcing them from their families and into a life of mindless violence. The UHRC continues to work with Invisible Children and other human rights organizations to speak out against injustice and champion social change around the world.

GLENDALE HEALTH CENTER

The Glendale Health Center is one of LA County's most successful primary care clinics, with over 3,500 patients and 11,000 patient visits each year— the majority of whom are uninsured and medically-underserved Armenian elderly. A proposal to privatize the center was introduced in 2008 by the LA County Board of Supervisors, threatening to drive up costs and leave many of these patients without the adequate, affordable care they rely upon.

In response to the proposal, a campaign was launched by nurses and patients against privatization. The AYF soon joined in the effort, along with other community organizations, patients and elected officials. AYF members helped organize several forums, delegations to the offices of LA County Supervisor Michael Antonovich, letter writing campaigns, rallies and other actions to prevent the plan from being pushed through behind the back of the community.

Finally, in May 2010, Supervisor Antonovich's office announced that the privatization plan was being removed from consideration. This victory was an important achievement in ensuring access to reliable and culturally competent service for the community, at a time when people need affordable healthcare more than ever.

'THE OPPOSITE OF SILENCE'

The continued struggle for freedom of speech in Turkey was the theme of the second annual Opposite of Silence event organized by the United Human Rights Council on January 15. Spotlighting the work of several prominent activists who continue to fight the oppressive Turkish government was keynote speaker Kani Xulam from the American Kurdish Information Network. This tribute to Turkey's human rights advocates also marked the third anniversary of the assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.

The capacity crowd which turned out for the event also witnessed poetry recitations, testimonies of human rights activists, musical performances, displays of art, and a video revealing Turkish police brutality.

FREE BERIVAN PROTEST

The United Human Rights Council and ARF 'Shant' Student Association organized a protest in front of the Turkish Consulate demanding the release of 15-year old Berivan Sayaca, a young Kurdish girl sentenced to 8 years in prison on trumped-up charges of terrorism in Turkey.

The demonstration shined the spotlight on Turkey's abhorrent human rights abuses against its Kurdish population, particularly its arrest and abuse of children in Turkish jails. Ralph Fertig, a longtime human rights activist and professor of law at USC, was present at the event as the keynote speaker. He spoke out against Turkish inhumanity, which began with the Armenian Genocide and continues today with the oppression of the Kurds.

Due to the pressure generated by the international campaign, Berivan was released from Diyarbakir prison in July after spending nine months in jail.



FAIRNESS FOR ARMENIAN TAXI DRIVERS

The AYF and ANCA-WR joined Armenian American taxi drivers in Santa Monica fighting against a measure which would effectively wipeout all Armenian-owned or operated cab companies from the city—a city where the majority of drivers and companies are Armenian.

AYF members participated in rallies, delegations, and City Council meetings, raising the community's concern over latent discrimination in the selection of taxi franchises by city staff.

The AYF continues to stay diligent on the matter and stands with the over 300 Armenian working families which will be affected by the arbitrary city decision.



OUR HOMELAND IS HAYASTAN

YOUTH CORPS

The AYF Youth Corps program, established in 1994, gives dedicated individuals a unique opportunity to spend approximately six weeks in Armenia, working with people on the ground to make a tangible contribution to the homeland. Beginning in 2008, the AYF opened a free day-camp for underprivileged youth in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city. The 5-week long camp has touched the lives of hundreds of children and provided much needed assistance to many of Gyumri's families who have to grapple with socio-economic challenges that continue to linger 20 years after the earthquake.

This year saw an increase in the number of campers. In total, over 170 children attended, with 85 in the first session and 92 for the second session. A parallel camp modeled off of Youth Corps was also established in Sisian under the leadership of Lebanon's Youth Association (LEM). The AYF is currently exploring the possibility of expanding and opening up further camps in Armenia this summer.

FRESNO WINTER TOY DRIVE

The AYF's Fresno "KevorkChavoush" Chapter once again carried out its 4th annual toy drive during the Fall of 2009 to benefit troubled orphans in Armenia. The chapter collected several dozen boxes filled with toys and shipped them to Armenia in time for the Christmas holidays.

JAVAKHK PIGGY BANK DRIVE

AYF members volunteered with the Armenian Relief Society to prepare for a Christmas 2009 fundraiser dedicated to helping the children of Javakhk. The fundraiser, known as the "Javakhk Piggy Bank Drive", mobilizes students from local Armenian schools to raise money for the organization's various humanitarian and youth-oriented projects in Javakhk. AYF volunteers helped prepare the "Piggy Banks" and other materials needed for the launch of the drive.



JAVAKHK PHOTO EXHIBIT

A photo exhibition and sale, displaying the everyday life of Armenians in Javakhk, was held on March 19 at the Glendale "Karamanoukian" Youth Center. Professional photos taken by AYF Alumnus Tamar Yardemian in Javakhk were displayed and auctioned off to raise proceeds for the benefit of Armenian youth in the region. Over \$3500 was raised and went for the purchase of several computers for youth centers in Akhalkalak and Akhaltskha.



GIVING VOICE TO THE YOUTH

SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS

With a renewed focus on reaching out to the youth, the AYF visited over a dozen campuses speaking with both high school and college students about the programs offered by the AYF and the pressing issues confronting the Armenian nation. In addition, AYF members gave presentations to non-Armenian students at Lakewood High School and Cal State Fullerton about the Armenian Genocide and its ongoing denial by the Turkish government.

KAREKIN NJDEH FUTURE LEADERS PROGRAM

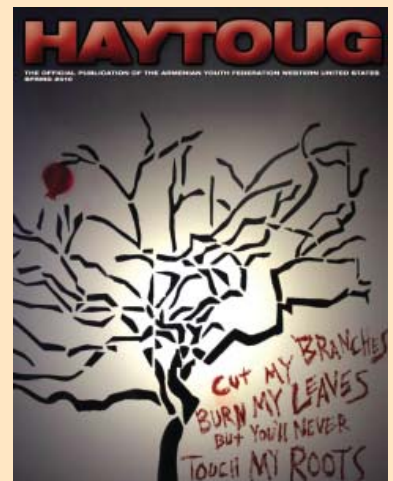
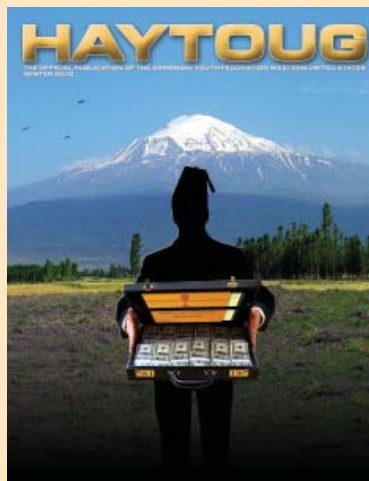
A new 12-week internship program was established this year under the auspices of the AYF Central Executive. Its main aim is to provide Armenian youth in Los Angeles an arena an inside look into the AYF and provide them with the skills necessary to be more effective activists.

Two participants were chosen this Spring to serve as the inaugural fellows in the program. They received a series of lectures on leadership, modern AYF history, grassroots activism, and the Armenian Cause. They also worked through the AYF Office on specifically tailored projects and participated various community events, outings, and organizational planning.

HAYTOUG

The 2009-2010 fiscal year built upon the success of the *Haytoug* and continued to produce quality issues of the magazine for its growing readership.

As in the past, each *Haytoug* covered a wide range of topics beyond simply the cover themes featured in each issue. The material was all original content written by AYF members and non-AYF Armenian youth. This year we had over 20 writers contribute to the publication. In addition, the Council continued its track record of having high-profile interviews with individuals such as Alexis Ohanian, Antranig Kzirian, Ara Soudjian, and Eric Nazarian. This level of coverage and quality added to the prestige of the *Haytoug* as a sought after commodity in the Armenian community.



MEDIA RELATIONS

This fiscal year saw a large volume of AYF articles published in the print media, including more than 100 press releases and feature articles published in the Asbarez English and Armenian editions. The organization's activities, particularly during the protocols movement and Genocide protest, were also covered in the Glendale News Press, LA Times, KPFC Pacifica Radio and the Economist.

In addition, AYF representatives and members appeared regularly on Horizon TV to discuss the organization's programs and activities. Television appearances were subsequently recorded and uploaded to the AYF's YouTube page and the Asbarez video gallery where they received added traction.

Armenia-based media outlets also reported on AYF activities, with H1 "Hayloor" running a TV news segment about a Javakhk photo print fundraiser, and Azatutyun Radio covering Youth Corps initiatives. Other Armenia based media outlets which covered Youth Corps extensively this summer included Yerkir Media, Gala TV, Tsayg TV, H1 Armenian Public Television, and Shant Radio.



PAST + PRESENT = FUTURE

We are confident that the coming year will be one of continued growth and development for the AYF. Our goal is to take the organization to the next level through greater expansion and large-scale activities.

Special emphasis will be given to equipping youth intellectually with the knowledge and experience necessary to address the most pressing challenges facing our community. In order to move our Cause forward, we will need to empower the youth with greater education and foster our grassroots, democratic movement directly within the community.

We plan on engaging all facets of the Armenian reality here in the western region of the United States and work locally with our eyes always focused on the establishment of a truly Free, Independent, and United Armenia.

As ARF youth, we understand the responsibility placed upon our shoulders. We remain committed to carrying forward the torch passed on to us from the **past**, nourishing that flame with the spirit of the **present**, and taking it to higher and higher heights for the **future**.

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*"If you want to predict and
see the future of a people,
look at its youth."*

-AYF Founder, General Karekin Njteh

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