

**SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE ARMENIAN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION**

*Armenian Women in Action:
Building Communities across the Globe*

October 9-12, 2014

In association with

Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia

&

American University of Armenia

A Message from the AIWA President
AIWA's 7th International Conference
Yerevan, October 2014

Welcome to Yerevan! How appropriate that AIWA has returned to Yerevan to hold our seventh international conference. Yerevan symbolizes not only the capital of the Armenian homeland, but for Armenian women, it symbolizes our driving belief in ourselves and in our future. This tremendous spirit is embodied here at our conference. In these few days in October, Armenian women will come together to envision a new world for themselves and one that will endure for future generations.

By your presence here, you are demonstrating your support for AIWA—a nonpolitical, nonreligious volunteer organization distinguished by its unique mission to strengthen the global community of Armenian women.

AIWA's 2014 Yerevan Conference builds on the groundbreaking success of our historic meetings in London, Paris, Yerevan, Geneva, Buenos Aires, and most recently, in San Francisco. Armenian women worldwide will share ideas and experiences to develop strategies to improve the lives of Armenian everywhere, while retaining the richness of our cultural heritage.

Since its inception in Boston, AIWA has:

- ❖ Launched the Women's Entrepreneurship Program (WEP) to educate women in Armenia to start and run their own businesses.
- ❖ Provided funds to the Yerevan's Women Support Center for their services that assist women struggling with domestic violence and their public advocacy work to challenge the many myths regarding violence against women.
- ❖ Served as an active NGO at the United Nations in New York City and Geneva.
- ❖ Supported women's health centers, programs, and literature highlighting women's cancer, reproductive, and pregnancy needs in Armenia and Karabagh.

- ❖ Provided scholarships for highly-deserving women from the diaspora and Armenia to attend college and graduate school in all fields, including the sciences.
- ❖ Issued numerous publications and established the Alice Kanlian Mirak Archives and Women's Information Center to document and promote the lives of Armenian women.

I want to express my deepest appreciation especially to all of the women across the globe who ensured the success of this conference. Let us not forget that our greatest resource is each other.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Moranian, Ph.D.

Armenian International Women's Association

Our Mission—To promote and enrich the social, economic and personal advancement of Armenian women worldwide through educational and other community activities that unite Armenian women, promote gender equity, and emphasize our Armenian cultural heritage.

Goals

1. To establish contacts with women's organizations, both Armenian and non-Armenian, in the United States, in Armenia, and around the world.
2. To provide a forum for dialogue and discussion on issues of interest to Armenian women in the fields of education, social welfare, culture, and business.
3. To gather information about the changing role of women in the world, to monitor the activities of Armenian women, and to establish an Armenian women's archive.
4. To increase the visibility of Armenian women and to promote their equal role in the community.
5. To develop a liaison with world news agencies to provide accurate information in the media on Armenia and Armenians.
6. To sponsor programs and issue publications to further these purposes.

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SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ARMENIAN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Armenian Women in Action: Building Communities across the Globe

AGENDA

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2014

- 18:30 – 21:00** **Opening Gala Reception**
Sponsored by RA Ministry of Diaspora
Valensia Hotel & Restaurant Complex, Yerevan
- Welcome** The Honorable Hranush Hakobyan, RA Minister of
Diaspora
Artistic Program

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2014 — ELITE PLAZA BUSINESS CENTER

- 9:30 – 10:00** **Registration**
Conference Hall, Elite Plaza Business Center
15 Khorenatsi
- 10:00 – 11:00** **Opening Plenum**
- Welcome:** The Honorable Hranush Hakobyan
- Addresses:** RA President Serzh Sargsyan
Catholics Karekin II
Carolyn Atinizian, Vice President, AIWA
International
Silva Katchiguian, AIWA Conference Planning
Committee
U.S. Ambassador John A. Heffern
Ambassador of the French Republic, Henri Reynaud
Ambassador of the Argentine Republic, Diego
- Key note:** The Honorable Valerie Boyer, Deputy, National
Assembly of the French Republic
- 11:00 – 12:00** **Presentations**
- Moderator:**

- Speakers:** **Fethiye Çetin & Ayşe Gül Altınay**
Women's Memories: Uncovering the Silence about Islamized Armenians
- Speaker:** **Antonia Arslan**, *The Cross of Mush*
- 12:00 – 13:15** Lunch
- 13:15 – 14:30** **Panel I: The Roles of Women During and After the Armenian Genocide**
- Moderator:** Barbara Merguerian
- Panelists:** Doris Melkonian, *The Armenian Genocide: Women Resisting Cultural Erasure*
 Arda Melkonian, *Resourcefulness of Armenian Women during the Genocide*
 Rubina Peroomian, *A Journey through the Armenian Genocide Literature*
 Anaide Nahikian, *Continuing Effects of Genocide: Syrian Armenians Today*
- 14:30 – 16:30** **Departure to Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial**
 Placing of the Wreath
- Speaker:** Hayk Demoyan, *New Perspectives on Women and the Armenian Genocide*
 Tsitsernakaberd Armenian Genocide Museum
- 17:00** Free evening

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2014 — A U A

- 9:00** **Registration**
 American University of Armenia, Manoogian Hall
- 9:30 – 10:15** **Opening Plenum**
- Speakers:** **Armen Der Kiureghian**, AUA President
Alexandra Pitman, *How NGOs in Armenia Advance Women's Rights*
Sarah Leah Whitson, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa*
- 10:15 – 10:45** **Opening of the AUA Student Lounge**
- Ribbon-cutting:** Alice Navasargian
- Toast:** Armen Der Kiureghian
- Address:** Elizabeth Agbabian
- 10:45 – 11:45** **Panel II: The Role of Armenian Women in a**

Globalized World

Moderator: Arpie Balian

Panelists: **Alvina Gyulumyan**, *Women in Policy Making*
Gayane Ghandilyan, *Gyumri Reconfigured*
Hrachuhi Barseghyan, *The Challenges of Entrepreneurship for Women in Armenia*

11:45 – 13:00 Panel III: Meeting Challenges in Women’s Health for Women in Armenia

Moderator: Judy Norsigian

Panelists: **Khachanoush Hakobyan**, *Best Practices in Women’s Reproductive Health*
Karine Saribekyan, *Armenia’s Fertility Problems*
Neli Abrahamyan, *Selected Attitudes Towards Sexual and Reproductive Health in Armenia*
Lara Aharonian & Nina Roma Agvanian, *From Denial to Action: Violence Against Women in Armenia*

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch, AUA Cafeteria

Speaker: Vahan Zanoian, *A Place Far Away*

14:00 – 14:45 Panel IV: NGOs in Action in Armenia

Moderator: Silva Katchiguan

Panelists: **Armenia Tree Project**, *Dedicated to Environmental Protection and Tree Planting*
Fuller Center, *Building Homes, Communities and a Homeland*
Gohar Palyan
Hanganak NGO, *Medical & Social Support for the Elderly in Stepanakert*
Gohar Hovhannisyan
Homeland Development Initiative Foundation, *Creation of Jobs for Women in the Regions of Armenia*
Timothy Straight
Mer Hoops, *Full-time Residential Educational Center for Young Women from Underprivileged Backgrounds*
Noune Geghamyan
Near East Foundation, *Women’s Economic Empowerment & Advocacy Project*
Arpine Baghdoyan
Women’s Entrepreneurship Promotion &

Empowerment Center, Empowering Women
Entrepreneurs
Anahit Ghazaryan

14:45 – 15:45 Panel V: Women in Literature

Moderator: Joy Renjilian-Burgy

Panelists: Jennifer Manoukian, *Zabel Yessayan as Mother and Activist*

Samvel Muratyan, *Armenian Writers since the Genocide*

Naira Hambardzumyan, *Contemporary Armenian Women Writers*

15:45 – 17:45 Reading of *Women of Ararat*, AUA faculty and students

Discussion with Judith Boyajian, author, *Women of Ararat*

17:45 – 18:45 Dinner at AUA

Film: Suzanne Khardalian, *Grandma's Tattoos (47:22)*

19:30 – 21:00 Free evening

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2014 — A U A

9:15 – 12:00 Departure to Etchmiadzin

10:00 – 10:30 Meeting with the H.H. Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians

**12:30 – 14:30 Lunch & Conference Wrap-up
AIWA Organizational Meeting (open to non-members as well)**

Report from affiliates

18:30 – 24:00 Closing Banquet

Latar Restaurant & Hotel Complex

Fourth Street, Building #58

Silikyan District (Yerord Gyugh)

CONFERENCE OPTIONAL EVENTS

Wednesday, October 8, 2014 [reservations handled by AMAA]

Opening Reception of the Avedissian School

Advance reservation is required

Thursdat, October 9, 2014, 9:45 – 16:00

- 9:45 AM departure by bus from Ani Hotel
- 10:00 AM second pick up of the bus at Marriott hotel (should there be guests at the Royal Tulip Yerevan Hotel on Abovyan street a pick-up can be done on the way to the Marriott). All other hotel guests please walk up to the Marriott or Ani Hotel
- 11:00 AM arrival at Tierras de Armenia lands in Armavir marz
- 11.00 AM to 12:00 noon tour of the vineyards and winery where Karas wine is produced and bottled
- 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM lunch hosted by Tierras de Armenia (including a voshkar barbecue)
- 2:00 PM departure
- 3:00 PM drop off in Yerevan

Thursday, October 9, 2014, 16:00 – 17:00

Guided tour of the Armenian-American Wellness Center, 5 Mekhitar Heratsi Street, Yerevan

Thursday, October 9, 2014, 17:00 – 18:00

Peace of Art Exhibition by Daniel Varoujan Hejinian, National Art Museum, Republic Square, Yerevan

Friday, October 10, 2014, 17:00 – 18:30 PM

The Dawn of the Sea of Van [Վանա ծովու արշալույսը] Movie (1:20), Moscow Theater

Advance reservation is required

Friday, October 10, 2014, 18:00 – 20:00

Cocktail reception hosted by ArtBridge, Abovyan 20, Yerevan

Advance reservation is required

Saturday, October 11, 2014, all day

An Exhibit of Products by Syrian Armenian Women. AUA Manoogian Hall Foyer

Monday, October 13, 2014, 13:00 – 19:00

Guided Bustrip to two COAF Villages (1:00 – 4:00 PM)
Tierras de Armenia (4:00 – 7:00 PM) Wine tasting and dinner
Advance reservation is required

Monday, October 13, 2014, ????

Bustrip and guided tour of the Armenia Tree Project nursery
Advance reservation is required

Tuesday, October 14, 2014, 11:00

Visit to Mer Hoos, Nakashian Children's Support Center, Yerevan

Tuesday, October 14, 2014, 16:00

Visit Tumo

Tuesday, October 14, 2014, 11:00

Mihran Aghababian and Vartan Grigorian Open Talk

Friday, October 17, 2014, 6:00 PM, AUA Manoogian Hall

Public lecture sponsored by AIWA San Francisco

Kohar Der Simonian, MD; Hasmik Arzumanyan, MD; and Ani Tejirian,
MD

Topic: Prevention in Healthcare through Knowledge Advancement

ABSTRACTS FOR POSTING ON WEBSITE

Rubina Peroomian, *A Journey through the Armenian Genocide Literature*

The presentation demonstrates how the first generation of Genocide survivors tried to capture their own traumatic experience and the ghastly accounts of fellow survivors into their narratives of the Event while trying to find an explanation and meaning so that survival could become possible. Depicting the psychic vulnerability of the survivors in dealing with the trauma and the memory of it, and how they willingly or unwillingly transmitted that psychology to the next generation, the presentation lays out the recent outpouring of memoirs of ordinary men and women, who in their old age, with the encouragement of their children and grandchildren, penned down their life story with such accuracy as if the stories were alive and the moments and images were encoded in their mind never to fade. The presentation also touches upon the literature produced by the orphan generation to show that although the genocide is never the leitmotif, but the impact is there and finds expression in various psychological reactions in their everyday life. To complete the brief survey of the collective psyche of survivor generations, the talk covers the case of those who continued living in Turkey where constant harassment and censorship prohibited Turkish-Armenian writers to express the pain and suffering of the recent past.

Sarah Leah Whitson, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa*

While some countries in the Middle East have made important reforms to promote women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), every country in the region retains a spectrum of discriminatory laws and policies that deny women equal treatment under the laws, most prominently in the sphere of "personal status laws". These laws, which regulate all areas of family law, including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody, among other areas, are defined by religious courts and have jurisdiction over citizens depending on their religion (Christian, Muslim or Jew) or religious

sect (Shia, Sunni, Alawite, etc.). In addition, many countries in MENA enforce a loosely-defined set of “guardianship” regulations, effectively treating women as legal minors for their whole life, and requiring them to obtain permission from a male legal guardian in all significant areas of life decisions, including education, work, purchasing property or opening a bank account, employment, travel, and even medical care. The absence of domestic violence laws, the restrictions on definitions of rape, permissive prosecutions of rapists and “honor killers” also contribute to an atmosphere where violence against women and girls remains unacknowledged and under-punished. While there have been small reforms among the worst abusers, the promotion of women’s rights remains stalled, and in some cases, such as Iraq, it has seriously regressed.

Gayane Ghandilyan, *Gyumri Reconfigured*

In the past decade, the technology industry grew to become the fastest growing sector of the Armenian economy and it now represents 20% of the economy. Armenia and its tech talents have attracted some of the world's largest tech companies including: Microsoft, Synopsys, VMware, Mentor Graphic, GFI Software and Atos Origin. But the real growth in the technology sector has been in local entrepreneurial startups. Almost all of this activity has taken place in Yerevan and is highly male dominated. As the capital city of one million is bustling with growth and activity, Gyumri, the second largest city is struggling to reinvent itself even 25 years after a destructive earthquake of 1988. This presentation depicts how Gyumri is rebuilding itself. It also presents how women-led initiatives, such as the Digital Pomegranate is contributing to Gyumri’s reconfiguration to technology-centered city. The goal of the Digital Pomegranate is to serve as a bridge between Gyumri and businesses around the globe; this portrays the vision of its founder with respect to the development of the city in the aftermath of the 1988 earthquake. The presentation covers the scheme of projects that will give Gyumri women, especially homemakers, (that are considered to be Gyumri's most important assets) the opportunity to work and develop their professional skills in fields, such as Graphic

Design, Animation, Web Development and App/Game development for mobile devices such as the iPhone and iPad.

Hrachuhy Barseghyan, *The Challenges of Entrepreneurship for Women Armenia*

It is obvious that women are gradually becoming more influential in all aspects of life in Armenia. This is a significant change. From a legal standpoint, it makes no difference who is starting the business. The process of registering a business is automated and does not segregate between male and female ownership. Even local banks are not discriminating when providing loans to women entrepreneurs. Also, the Government runs different programs through which women entrepreneurs are encouraged and can get privileged loans. However, not every woman is taking the risk of a startup. Why? This issue is clearly associated social norms. Historically, women were considered the “internal wall” of the family. Even though almost 70 percent of the female population was employed during Soviet times, they were considered to be the principal bread-winner or viewed as equals in the family unit. Now, things have changed, and women play key role providing for the family. This, however, does not mean that starting and running a business for a woman is a smooth journey and requires no additional skills. Most importantly, women in Armenia need to overcome internal psychological barriers; find an appropriate niche of activity for themselves; and pursue individual career goals with determination.

Khachanoush Hakobyan, *Best Practices in Women’s Reproductive Health*

When Armenia declared its independence from Soviet rule in 1991, breast cancer was one of the leading causes of death. The methods and procedures of early detection of cancer were non-existent, as was the concept of preventive healthcare and annual check-ups. Additionally, cultural barriers and mistrust of doctors led to large numbers of deaths from undetected breast and cervical cancer in women. In 1997, AACA, responded to this crisis by establishing a mammography clinic in Yerevan to promote early detection of breast

cancer, followed by preventive healthcare for the detection of cervical cancer. To date, the Center has screened over 347,000 women totally or partly without charge and actually saved 4,800 lives through early detection of breast and cervical cancer. AACA also offers public education and awareness campaigns focusing on preventive medicine; the Center organizes health walks and disseminates literature on healthy lifestyle indicating the importance of early detection through annual mammograms, Pap smears, check-ups and monthly breast self examinations. Additionally, monthly medical Outreach Missions are realized covering about 1,500 rural women per year.

Vahan Zanoian, *A Place Far Away*

Human Trafficking, including sex trafficking of under-age girls, is a global phenomenon. One of the unintended consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union was the proliferation of Human Trafficking from the former states of the Union. As the old social and law-enforcement structures collapsed, crime took over. Armenia was not exempt. In fact, because of many broken families and extreme poverty, both prostitution and *forced* prostitution increased disproportionately to the size of the population of the country. This talk will be based on the research done for two novels: *A Place Far Away* and *The Doves of Ohanavank*, which tell the story of a young victim of the sex trade from a poor village in Armenia. The author does not claim to be an expert on Human Trafficking, but will convey some of his findings and impressions formed during the extensive research for the two novels. The importance of raising public awareness and active public discourse on the issue, which is the main objective of writing the two novels, will be stressed as a way of combating the phenomenon.

Doris K. Melkonian, *The Armenian Genocide: Women Resisting Cultural Erasure*

Various strategies were employed by women during the Armenian Genocide to resist attempts at Turkification, and to empower their children to maintain their Armenian and Christian identities.

Motivated by a keen awareness of their ethnic and religious identities, these women engaged in processes to retain their definitions of self, rejecting attempts at cultural reprogramming. Genocide survivor testimonies in the UCLA Armenian Oral History Collection provide accounts of women and children who defied pressures to relinquish their cultural identity, often risking their lives. Through daring and defiant acts, they sought to preserve their language, religion, and ethnic traditions, determined to resist attempts at cultural erasure.

In many instances, women emboldened their children to maintain their ethnic and religious identities. Children who found themselves within Muslim homes, used various strategies to affirm their identity, drawing on rituals and customs they had learned from their mothers. Some children recall the pleas of a dying mother who instructed them to cherish their mother tongue and their Christian faith. Others were inspired by the courageous acts of a parent who refused to renounce Christianity, choosing instead to forfeit his/her life. In a context where their options were limited, women sought to exercise control over their identity. They empowered their children to retain their ethnic identity and resist cultural erasure.

Arda J. Melkonian, *Resourcefulness of Armenian Women during the Genocide*

During the Armenian Genocide, women demonstrated resourcefulness in their attempts to annul the death sentence handed down for them and their families. These ordinary women behaved in extraordinary ways to ensure the survival of their families, and the survival of the Armenian race. In circumstances that may have seemed hopeless, women manipulated resources available to them in order to preserve their lives. Survivor narratives in the UCLA Armenian Oral History Collection catalog women's responses and portray women's agency in the midst of the Genocide. These accounts describe ways that women drew on their past experiences and socialization to survive. First, survivors share stories of women using marriage as a form of protection, marrying Muslim men to save their lives or the lives of family members. Second, women used their

skills of nurturing and caring to form bonds with others, helping each other as they endured harsh conditions. Third, women sacrificed themselves for the sake of their children, refusing to abandon their children even if it meant saving themselves. Other mothers made the difficult decision to protect the lives of their children by leaving them behind in the care of strangers, Turkish neighbors, or missionaries. Lastly, when the men were unable to fulfill their traditional gender roles of providing for their families, women relied on skills they possessed, acquired in their gender-specific roles within the home, to support their families.

Jennifer Manoukian, *Zabel Yessayan as Mother and Activist*

Zabel Yessayan is widely considered one of the most prominent writers in the Western Armenian literary tradition. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, Yessayan made a name for herself as a novelist, exploring the experiences of women in a way never before seen in Armenian literature. The themes explored in her writing were reflected in her own life, where she was intimately involved in activist work on behalf of Armenian women and girls. In this presentation, I will delve into Yessayan's roles as mother and activist, and discuss how and where those roles intersected over the course of her life. Traveling through each phase of her life, from her idyllic childhood in Constantinople of the 1880s to her mysterious death in the Soviet Union of the 1940s, I will draw on largely untranslated autobiographical texts, personal letters, and accounts of close relatives to uncover the woman and mother behind the legendary writer.

Alexandra Pittman, *How NGOs in Armenia Advance Women's Rights*

This talk highlights the roles of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in advancing women's rights, globally and as contextualized in Armenia. Drawing from interviews in 2012 and 2013 with women's rights and human rights NGOs, journalists, lawyers, key issues related to women's rights and feminist movement building are explored.

Lara Aharonian and Nina Roma Agyanlian, *From Denial to Action: Violence Against Women in Armenia*

Violence against women, mainly domestic violence, although still very much taboo in society, is prevalent in the Armenian society. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) the data on violence against women indicates that this phenomenon is a common occurrence in Armenia and that intimate partner violence ranges from physical and psychological violence to controlling behavior and sexual violence. In my talk, I will be focusing on the present situation in Armenia regarding the prevalence of DV (cases, statistics). I will introduce the key obstacles to combating it efficiently (challenges both on the individual/cultural and institutional level) Finally I will focus on the actions initiated by women's groups and the coalition to stop violence against women to break the silence on the issue and advocate for a better response (lobbying for the law, inter-sectoral mechanisms, etc). The presentation will describe current Domestic Violence response methodology of the Women's Support Center and highlight some success stories in Armenia.