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CONFERENCE**

The December 1998 decree by President Robert Kocharian to convene an Armenia-Diaspora Conference became reality on September 22-23, 1999, as more than 1200 people from nearly 70 countries, including Armenia and Artsakh, gathered in Yerevan.

Over 800 Diasporans joined local Armenian intellectuals, government officials, political and social leaders for the first-ever assembly of international Armenian communities. The huge Concert and Sports Complex (Hamalir) was the site of four plenary sessions held over two days.

Vartan Oskanian, Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who chaired the Conference Steering Committee, summed up the general feeling. "For the first time ever, under one roof, representatives of Armenia and Diaspora organizations came together, heard each other's concerns, and agreed to look for ways to continue to work together on matters of mutual benefit. Everyone seemed to agree with the basic premise that, now, more than ever, Armenia and Diaspora need each other, albeit in different ways, to secure their own survival and prosperity."

Around a large round table in an auditorium usually reserved for hockey games or concerts, Armenia's leadership sat together with the representatives of all major Diasporan organizations (churches, political parties and charities) as well as heads of all country delegations. The round center table was surrounded by rows of chairs where delegations sat, following the various presentations.

*Please See p.18*

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During the Armenian genocide curriculum development process, Arme-

Rouben Adalian, Armenian Assem-

# ARMENIA DIASPORA CONFERENCE

*Continued from p.17*

The first plenary session was chaired by National Assembly Chairman Karen Demirjian. The keynote address by President Robert Kocharian focused on the need to honestly come to know each other in order to find ways to work together for the common good. Kocharian stressed a familiar theme throughout the conference: the need to remove the constitutional barrier to dual citizenship. At the same time, Kocharian bluntly stated that the time for the Diaspora to participate in Armenia's state-building process is now. The President called on the Diaspora and Armenia to cooperate in two key programs which Armenia has already begun, but which can be expanded with Diaspora help. The first is international Armenian television, broadcast by satellite. The value of such a service for better mutual understanding, for more effective information transfer, for political and social bonding was stressed by the President. Mr. Kocharian also spoke about the need to expand existing youth exchange programs, as a clear, inarguable means of bonding Armenian youth to their land and their peers.

Addresses by the heads of the Armenian Apostolic, Evangelical and Catholic communities were followed by presentations by the three largest international organizations: the Armenia Fund, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and the Armenian Relief Society, each of which participated at the conference with its own delegation.

The first session concluded with summary presentations of four of the six special working papers which had been requested by the Committee, and prepared by various groups of professionals.

The first paper, entitled *Communication and Linkages Between Diaspora Institutions and the Republic of Armenia* was presented by Professor Khachig Tololyan of Wesleyan University. It examined the nature of Diaspora, the issues of representation inherent in the life of a dispersed, decentralized community, models of relationships and cooperation between homeland and diaspora. This paper also listed some expectations of this and future conferences.

The second paper, entitled *Diaspora Humanitarian Assistance to Armenia in the Last Decade* was prepared and presented by Hratch Tchilingirian, Managing Editor of AIM. Based on figures submitted by 14 major international Armenia Diaspora organizations, Mr. Tchilingirian studied emerging patterns in the kinds and quantities of humanitarian assistance provided since Armenia's independence.

Professor Kevork Bardakjian of the University of Michigan spoke about *Culture, Identity and Relations between Armenia and the Dispersion*, and concentrated on the ways in which Eastern and Western Armenians had developed apart over the centuries. Bardakjian addressed the linguistic, cultural and identity questions which have emerged as a natural result of the independent evolution of the two halves of the Armenian nation.

Daron Der Khachadourian presented a report on *Information Technology and Communication*, in which the need for a common information field among Armenians, as well as more effective commu-

*Please See p. 23*