

## Tribute To John Evans Former US Ambassador Honored By Canadian-Armenian Community

TORONTO -- Mr. John Evans, the former US Ambassador to Armenia, was honoured in Toronto at a dinner gathering, which took place on Friday, April 18, 2008, starting at 7:00pm and lasted until midnight. The Manoogian Hall of the Armenian General Benevolent Union Community Centre, 930 Progress Ave, Scarborough, was packed with over 200 individuals, among them Federal MPs Alan Tonks and Gurbax Malhi, Provincial MP Amrit Mangat, Toronto District School Board Trustee Mary Rutka, Primate of the Armenian Church of Canada Bishop Bagrat Galstianian, Pastors and representatives of the Holy Trinity Armenian Church, St Gregory Armenian Catholic Church, and St Vartan Church of Mississauga. Also present were the chairmen and representatives of the Armenian Evangelical Church, AGBU, Armenian World Alliance, Zoryan Institute, The International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, Nor Serount Armenian Cultural Association, Hayasdan All-Armenian Fund, and the Knights and Daughters of Vartan.

Mr. John Evans was honoured primarily because of his principled stand with respect to the Genocide of the Armenians. In fact, Mr. Evans had researched the events circa 1915 involving the Ottoman Empire and its Armenian minority subjects and had independently concluded that the atrocities to which Armenians were subjected to from 1915 to 1923 indeed constituted Genocide. This personal assessment was in conflict with the formal position of the US State Department, yet Mr. Evans chose to sacrifice his otherwise flourishing professional career instead of recanting his views.

During a 45 minute reception the guests and participants had the opportunity to meet Ambassador Evans. At 7:45pm, Ambassador Evans and Primate Bagrat Galstianian led the progression composed of the members of the Canadian Government, the dignitaries and the attendees, and placed a wreath at the Genocide Memorial. At 8:00 pm, Mrs. Calabrina Boyajian, the MC of the evening, invited pianist Raffi Bedrosyan to play the national anthems of Canada, the United States, and Armenia, followed by a minute of silence in respect to the 1.5 million martyrs, victims of the 1<sup>st</sup> genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mrs. Boyajian then welcomed the guests, recognized the dignitaries in the room, and read a message from The Honourable Jason Kenney, Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity) in part stating: "In 2005, John Evans described the Armenian genocide as the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly affirmed Canada's recognition of the Armenian genocide."

In her opening remarks, Mrs. Boyajian personified Ambassador Evans as a man of integrity, a man of truth, and a man of courage. Then, she introduced the guest of honour and the key-note speaker, Ambassador John Evans, outlining his educational accomplishments at Yale and Columbia universities; proficiency in various foreign languages, including Russian, French, Czech, some Farsi and some Eastern Armenian; in-



volvements as a career diplomat in political missions at NATO and elsewhere; humanitarian endeavours, such as his role in coordinating the American response to the Armenian earthquake of 1988; various diplomatic appointments in capitals of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, the last of which was the position of US Ambassador to Armenia from August 11, 2004 until September 4, 2006. Mrs. Boyajian completed her remarks by quoting 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Voltaire: "It is dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong".

Next, Mr. John Evans took the podium and addressed the audience, his words echoing the utter kindness of his heart. He briefly explained the background of his involvement with the Armenians; his experiences in Armenia and its neighbouring states; the Genocide of the Armenians; and narrated in detail the circumstances that led him to his resignation from the US State Department. Based on his continued interest on developments in the South Caucasus, he described a scenario for a viable and just solution of the Nagorno-Kharapakh problem, which can create the ambience for a lasting and peaceful coexistence of Armenia with its neighbours, and which takes into consideration a combination of the two major principles of conflict resolution: territorial integrity and self-determination. He also congratulated Prime Minister Harper of Canada for his courageous move asserting the veracity of the Genocide of Armenians.

This was followed by brief closing remarks by Primate Bagrat Galstianian, who stressed the importance of the moral stand taken by Ambassador Evans, and thanked everyone for the support and heartfelt appreciation they demonstrated towards Ambassador Evans.

The "Tribute to John Evans" was concluded by the Honorary Chair of the evening, Citizenship Judge Mr. Sarkis Assadourian, a former Canadian MP for several terms, who thanked everyone for attending the event and congratulated the organizing committee for successfully organizing this gathering. He then presented Mr. John & Mrs. Donna Evans a painting of Armenian national emblems by Toronto artist Gerrard Paraghmanian.

Saturday morning, Ambassador Evans and his wife Donna had a breakfast meeting with the representatives of the Toronto community and the sponsors of the event, during which they discussed issues related to Armenia.

## U.S. Helsinki Commission Holds Hearings On Armenian Elections

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lawfully. The U.S. has also urged the authorities to release individuals that have been arrested for political reasons.

The hearing also focused on the ongoing Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) negotiations on Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia's qualifications for assistance from the Millennium Challenge Account.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Bryza, speaking in his capacity as OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair, said the most important step toward bolstering peace and prosperity in Armenia and Azerbaijan would be a peaceful, just and lasting settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. At the same time, Bryza's dual roles have raised questions of potential conflict of interest.

During a question and answer session following his testimony, Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ), a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, grilled Bryza on Washington's response to Azerbaijan's ongoing threats to resume hostilities, saying "the war drums are beating." Smith referenced several troubling statements made by Azeri government officials, including the country's defense minister who in November 2007, said the chance of war is close to 100 percent.

"Belligerent military threats are something nobody wants to hear," Bryza responded. "We complain about them, and we urge President Aliyev to reduce tension to make it easier for there to be a solution." He said the only way to reduce the risk of war is to finalize the Basic Principles, that have been negotiated by the parties, and that are currently on the table.

Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission Rep. Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL), noted that a substantial effort has been made, and will continue to be made, to assist Armenia in democracy-building and full economic development.

Others who testified before the Commission included Giorgi Gogia, Caucasus Researcher for Human Rights Watch, Arman Grigorian, Spokesman for former President Levon Ter-Petrosian and Vigen Sargsian, Assistant to Serzh Sarkissian.

Gogia told the Commission that Human Rights Watch has conducted more than 80 interviews in Armenia with victims, government officials, witnesses, representatives of international organizations and local non-governmental organizations and others, during and after the state of emergency. He said the way in which the Armenian government responds to the crisis will test the integrity of its democratic institutions and its commitment to human rights. He added that the U.S. should "constructively engage" to resolve the crisis by setting clear benchmarks for Armenia's qualification for MCC assistance.

Grigorian, in his testimony, countered claims by the Sarkissian government that the opposition bears the responsibility for the violence that erupted on March 1. He discussed the root of the political crisis, and its implications for regional security and specifically, the prospects of a peaceful settlement to the NK conflict.

Grigorian noted large-scale intimidation of voters and opposition's representatives, violations of vote counting procedures and ballot stuffing had been recorded. According to him, in seventeen constituencies, which is more than 15 percent, counting was assessed to be bad or very bad.

## Thousands Rally In Yerevan

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held since the deadly March 1 clashes between security forces and Ter-Petrosian supporters and the resulting declaration of a 20-day state of emergency in the Armenian capital. The authorities effectively banned anti-government demonstrations after the end of emergency rule with legal amendments strongly criticized by the West.

The Yerevan municipality unexpectedly sanctioned Saturday's protest but made sure that it is held not in Liberty Square, the scene of Ter-Petrosian's massive post-election demonstrations, but a small public park located elsewhere in the city center.

The rally proceeded peacefully, with participants chanting "Levon!" and "Freedom!" and demanding the release of more than 100 opposition activists arrested as part of the ongoing government crackdown on the opposition. Ter-Petrosian did not join the protest officially organized by a pro-opposition women's group. But his wife Lyudmila was in attendance.

Most of the speakers were the wives of some of the jailed oppositionists. "We will rally here, on Northern Avenue and Liberty Square until our husbands, brothers, fathers, sons and

friends are freed, until our country is freed," said Melissa Brown, the wife of Aleksandr Arzumanian, Ter-Petrosian's election campaign chief accused of plotting a coup d'etat and organizing "mass riots."

The calls were echoed by Suren Surenians, a senior member of the opposition Hanrapetutyun (Republic) party who was arrested on February 25 and released from jail pending trial last week. "I want all of us to demand freedom for our comrades," Surenians said in his speech.

Also addressing the boisterous crowd was the wife of Nikol Pashinian, an outspoken newspaper editor and Ter-Petrosian associate who has been in hiding since March 2. "I want to tell you on behalf of my husband Nikol Pashinian that our struggle is continuing," said Anna Hakobian. "Serzh Sarkissian must understand that with [the use of force on] March 1 not only did the authorities fail to intimidate the people but actually took fear out of them."

The rally came to an abrupt end after a senior police officer told organizers that the two hours requested by them for the protest have expired. The latter asked for an extra 30 minutes only to have electricity powering their loudspeakers cut off moments later.