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# Community News

## Portantino Urges White House to Halt Military Assistance to Azerbaijan and Deliver Humanitarian Aid to Artsakh

SACRAMENTO — Stae Sen. Anthony J. Portantino (D – Burbank) led efforts this week to submit a letter to the White House urging President Biden to take action against Azerbaijan by immediately ending military assistance and requesting that emergency humanitarian aid be delivered to the people of Artsakh who have been devastated by Azerbaijan's blockade since December 12, 2022.

"The 25th Senate District has home to a vibrant Armenian American community deeply troubled by events threatening the well-being of family and friends in Artsakh. I am pleased to work with the ANCA Western Region to lead efforts calling on the White House to take immediate action on the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Artsakh," stated Senator Portantino. "It is critical that we move beyond words and take meaningful action to put an end to the inhumane blockade and demand the re-opening of the Lachin Corridor. I strongly condemn Azerbaijan's violent campaign against the Armenian people of Artsakh, who were recently subjected to war and now have been left without food, medical supplies and the right to free movement."

In a letter to President Biden, Sen-



State Sen. Anthony J. Portantino

ator Portantino and his colleagues highlighted that "since the unprovoked military attack by Azerbaijan in 2020 against the indigenous Armenian people of Artsakh, no direct U.S. humanitarian assistance has been provided to the Armenian population." The letter calls on President Biden, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, NSC Chair Jake Sullivan, and USAID Administrator Samantha Power, to take concrete action against Azerbaijan and bring immediate humanitarian relief to the people of Artsakh.

"We are grateful for Senator Portantino taking the lead to send a letter on behalf of California State legislators to President Biden. We must continue to make our voices heard to urge the White House to take immediate tangible steps to address the humanitarian crisis, end Azerbaijan's inhumane blockade of Artsakh, and hold the Aliyev regime accountable," said Nora Hovsepian, Esq., Chair of the Armenian National Committee of America - Western Region. "The support of our elected representatives at every level of government is invaluable toward achieving this goal."



## AAHPO Fourth Annual 5K Raises Funds for Artsakh Healthcare

By Stephan S. Nigohosian

LEONIA, N.J. — Overpeck County Park is a world away from Artsakh, but that distance became inconsequential recently when upwards of 100 people participated in the Armenian American Health Professionals Organization (AAHPO) Fourth Annual 5K Run/Walk event.

This year's activity, held to raise desperately needed funds to support healthcare and medical services for the Armenian population of Artsakh and Armenia, was even more significant in light of the humanitarian crisis caused by Azerbaijan's unlawful blockade of the Lachin Corridor. Armenian citizens in Artsakh are deprived of



food, heating fuel and medical attention caused by the closure of the sole route that connects Artsakh to Armenia and the outside world. For this reason, AAHPO continues to focus its efforts toward alleviating the lack of critical resources and medical care facing indigenous Armenians in Artsakh. Examples of this are the training of doctors in the rural areas of Artsakh in innovative approaches, methods, and technologies in medicine, as well as underwriting the cost of curating and sending medical equipment and medicine to the region.

"The continued growth of our 5K Run/Walk Event is a testament to the dedication and compassion of Armenian-Americans in NY, NJ and CT," said AAHPO President Larry Najarian. "The situation in Artsakh has been very difficult for quite some time now, but the most recent repercussions caused by the Azeri blockade has made our mission of providing assistance to our brethren in the region all the more critical."

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## Mutafian Delivers History Lesson On Armenian Connection to Jerusalem

By Harry A. Kezelian III  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Research and Studies (NAASR) hosted an online webinar lecture on the history of the Armenian connection with Jerusalem on January 13 with Prof. Claude Mutafian of Paris, the noted French mathematician turned history scholar.

Mutafian taught mathematics in French universities as well as around the world for more than 40 years; but always with a passion for history, he has conducted a significant amount of research and writing in this field



Professor Claude Mutafian, mathematician and historian

as well, obtaining a PhD from the Sorbonne in 2002 with a thesis on the "Armenian Diplomacy in the Levant During the Crusades." The period of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and its relation with the Crusaders is his area of specialty, and the role of Armenians in Jerusalem forms a major part of the history of that era.

The lecture, titled "Jerusalem and the Armenians: Until the Ottoman Conquest (1516)," was co-sponsored by NAASR (Belmont, MA), the Ararat-Eskijian Museum (Los Angeles) and the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute. Marc Mamigonian of NAASR and Maggie Goschin of the Ararat-Eskijian Museum introduced Mutafian, who spoke via Zoom from France.

### Early Armenian Connections to Jerusalem

Mutafian stated that the Armenian people seem to have been "obsessed" with the holy city of Jerusalem since the nation's conversion to Christianity in the 4th century. As an example of this, he explained that almost every important figure in the history of Armenia, until the late Middle Ages, seems to have had a desire to make the trip to Jerusalem. St. Gregory the Illuminator, after converting Armenia to Christianity; Mesrob Mashtots, after inventing the Armenian alphabet; and Movses Khorenatsi, after writing one of the first complete histories of Armenia all travelled to Jerusalem, Mutafian stated.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

## AAHPO Fourth Annual 5K Raises Funds for Artsakh Healthcare

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The 5K course, equal to 3.1 miles, offers scenic views of the Manhattan skyline and picturesque, waterfowl-populated ponds and marshes. But the beauty of the course did not distract the event's participants, consisting of both seasoned and novice runners, from the gravity of the situation. Groups of walkers and runners from many different backgrounds and vocations converged as one team to help those in need.



Among the participants was champion racewalker Sherry Brosnahan, who holds one world masters record and eight US masters records in racewalking at distances from 20 to 50 kilometers.

Her presence underscored the recognition, regardless of one's ethnic background, of the inhumanity of the Azeri blockade. "I am here to have fun with the group and to exercise for my health," she said, "but most importantly, to raise funds that will help those faced with a very dire situation."

Representatives from organizations

which have partnered with AAHPO in previous events also showed their solidarity by participating, including Aram Setian, former president of the Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA). "It is incumbent upon us as diasporans to do what we can to help our brothers and sisters in Artsakh and Armenia," he said.

One of the additional benefits the event provided runners was the opportunity to boost their competitive racing statistics, as race results were officially recorded and certified by USA Track & Field, the United States national governing body for track and field, cross country running, road running and racewalking. In addition, all registrants received a commemorative T-shirt and a pair of wireless earphones donated by Phillips Corporation.

AAHPO is greatly appreciative of the sponsors whose generosity made this year's event possible: Armand P. Asarian, MD; Alma Janet Olivos-Asarian, MD; William G. Basralian Funeral Service; Bedminster Eye and Laser Center; Englewood (NJ) Pediatrics; Dr. Tro's Medical Weight Loss & Direct Promary Care; Harco Incentives; Paul Miller Auto Group; Peapack Private Wealth Management; Northern Jersey Obstetrics & Gynecology; Toufayan Bakeries and USA Track & Field.

To donate to the cause, visit <https://aahpo.org/>.



## Armenian Connection to Jerusalem

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had conquered a vast Empire under Genghis Khan, began to conquer the areas of the Middle East under the successors of Genghis. They conquered most of the territories of the region, up to Asia Minor. At first the Mongols were strongly anti-Muslim. Therefore, in the regional power struggle between the Mongols and the Mamluks, King Hetoum decided to ally himself with the Mongols. Mutfian showed the audience an image from an historic illuminated manuscript of the Nativity of Christ including the visit of the Three Kings. A note written beside the image states that "the Tatars just arrived," referring to the Mongols, and depicting them as protectors of the Armenians.

Hetoum made the remarkable journey all the way to the Mongol capital, Karakorum, in present-day Mongolia, in order to seal the alliance. This political move allowed the Kingdom of Armenia to survive in Cilicia for another century. Mutfian commented that Cilician Armenia had a few political geniuses, such as Hetoum I and his father-in-law Levon I, and unfortunately Armenia cannot say the same today. Hetoum also patronized the Christian sites in the Holy Land; the wooden doors to the Basilica of Bethlehem were gifted by him, which had inscriptions in Armenian and Arabic stating them to be the gift of King Hetoum.

Unfortunately, the alliance with the Mongols was not too stable because Arme-

nia was far from the Mongol homeland. In the end, the Mamluks won out and in 1375 put an end to the Kingdom of Armenia, incorporating Cilicia into the lands of the Mamluk Sultanate. Despite that, Armenians continued to be important players in the region. With Armenians neutralized as a political force, they were no longer dangerous to the Mamluk Empire as were the Latin (Western European) and Greek powers; therefore the Mamluks decided to protect the Armenians as a Christian minority. There is an inscription left by the Mamluks at the door to the St. James Armenian Monastery compound in Jerusalem, stating "Everyone who would do harm to the Armenians will be punished."

Under the rule of the Mamluks, the region became stabilized and was again safe for pilgrims. The number of Western travelers making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem grew, and many pilgrims wrote memoirs of their journey. According to Mutfian "everyone had a chapter in their manuscript dedicated to the Armenians," showing that they continued to have a noticeable presence in the area. One European called the Armenians "our principal allies," as well as noting that the Armenian community included the most beautiful women in Jerusalem! But Mutfian showed that there was also animosity toward Armenians by other Christian nations, displaying a chapter from a book entitled "About the Armenians and Their Errors." Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the Armenians refused to recognize the Council of Chalcedon, they have been considered heretics by the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. Especially between Armenians and Greeks in that era, said Mutfian, there was a terrible hatred.

As for the royal dynasty of Armenia, by the time of the fall of Cilicia, it had been inherited by a branch of the Lusignan family (of French Crusader origin), who also reigned as Kings of Cyprus. The last king of Armenia, Levon V, was a Lusignan; he was crowned in 1374 and the Mamluks destroyed his kingdom the following year. Levon V was imprisoned in Cairo, along with Queen Marioun, the wife of the last king that had ruled before Levon V. Mutfian showed his audience an image of an illuminated Gospel miniature by renowned artist of the time Sarkis Bidzag, which depicted the queen, and has a text which reads "This is Marioun, Queen of the Armenians."

Queen Marioun, when taken prisoner, was treated kindly by the Mamluk Sultan. He asked her if she desired anything, and she responded "I wish to end my life in Jerusalem." Mutfian noted the symbolism of the close connection between Jerusalem and the Armenian people by pointing out that the last Queen of Armenia decided to finish her life in Jerusalem. For this reason, Mutfian chose her image for the cover of his new book.

As for Levon V, he was freed by the Sultan and came to Paris, where he died without an heir. He is buried in the same chapel that contains the cenotaphs of all the Kings of France. The title "King of Armenia" was then inherited by his closest relative, James I, King of Cyprus. James was also "King of Jerusalem," in name only of course. As the Kingdom of Cyprus fell, the great-grandson of James was married to a Venetian noblewoman who tried to hand the crown of "Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Armenia" to the Doge of Venice. But instead, her husband's sister took the title and married a prince from the

House of Savoy, which later came to rule Italy after its unification in 1861. Apparently, the title was still used by the Kings of Italy until all extraneous titles were abandoned by King Victor Emmanuel III at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### A Labor of Love

Mutfian noted that Jerusalem has been a center of Armenian culture and especially manuscript production. The oldest Armenian manuscript copied in Jerusalem was from 1215 and is kept by the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarist Brotherhood in Venice. There are also many manuscript treasures which did not originate in Jerusalem but are kept there; one of the outstanding examples is the Gospel of Queen Keran, created in 1272 at the order of the Queen. The manuscript includes one of the most famous images created by artist Toros Roslin, a depiction of King Levon II and Queen Keran (Guerane) with their five oldest children. Mutfian pointed out to the audience that the royal couple had 16 children in all.

Mutfian noted that although the book is not yet available in English, is a 500 page book which includes 1000 pictures. He suggested that those who don't read French would be able to greatly appreciate the images contained in the book, which is available for delivery in the US via Amazon and other online sources. Mutfian suggested that those who are interested purchase the book direct from the publisher, Les Belles Lettres, here: <https://www.lesbelleslettres.com/livre/9782251452968/jerusalem-et-les-armeniens>

Mutfian is also planning to come to the US to speak in more detail about his book in person later this year.