



The Youth Newsletter

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The Fearless Pursuit to Activism: AYF Senior Seminar 2016

By Dickran Khodanian

FRANKLIN, Mass. «Միացե՛ք Հայեր, Արցախն է մեզ կանչում»/ "Miyatsek Hayer, Artsakh-neh mez ganchoom"/ Come together Armenians, Artsakh is calling us. The Armenian Youth Federation held its annual senior seminar on the weekend of September 30-October 2 with over 80 attendees at Camp Haiastan. Due to the senior seminar last year and given the circumstances of Artsakh, the central theme of the weekend was based around Artsakh. After being present at the lectures and witnessing the dialogue discussed, the theme of the weekend could not have been more appropriate.

Following the Four Day War that took the lives of over a hundred soldiers, the entire global community of Armenians were united in support of Artsakh and were ready to be of any type of assistance to their brothers and sisters in the homeland. This senior seminar became an opportunity for the AYF to inform and educate its membership on the current issues Artsakh and Armenia face in order to stimulate the conversation of how we as young Armenian diasporans could be of service to our homeland.

The seminar began with a lecture by a great mentor and Editor of Asbarez News Ara Khachatourian on the historical perspective of Artsakh as well as its relevance to our various fights for justice. Khachatourian began his lecture by mentioning the current situation in Syria and Turkish PM, Garo Paylan's visit to Los Angeles in the previous week. He informed us on how in the last week, there were 5 deaths in the Armenian community of Syria and that the current situation due to the Syrian Civil War has only been escalating and effecting the Armenian community severely. When discussing Paylan, he explained the issues that the Armenians living in Turkey experience as they struggle for their rights. He added how during his visit, Paylan brought the challenges that people face in Turkey to reality and demonstrated his courage and leadership as he openly spoke about what needed to be done to address the problems in Turkey.

By bringing up these two examples, Khachatourian tied them into the Artsakh conflict and how these were all different fights for justice that the Armenian community must face without any fear. He then delved into the First Karabakh War, the process of Artsakh declaring self-determination, and winning a war against all odds. This initial war already set the precedent that the people of Artsakh were going to fight for their holy lands at all costs and certainly nothing had changed in 2016.

The lecture then forwarded to the current geopolitical situation following the Four Day War. Artsakh had lost land, was unprepared for this last war, and had experienced over a 100 casualties. Khachatourian explained the mediation process that's been taking place by the OSCE Minsk Group and how Artsakh is being put in a difficult situation, especially when they have no voice in this group.

The AYF members in the room easily came to the consensus that Artsakh was not going to give up any land and would not agree to any other terms. And now as diasporans, it is our role to be ready for anything that will take place with the situation of Artsakh and to not have any fear when fighting for justice. Being fearless became a common theme in Khachatourian's lecture because when he mentioned Paylan, he referred to a statement made by Paylan that stuck with him, "in the fight for justice, there is no place for fear." Without a doubt, these words immediately were implanted into the minds of all those in the room. We cannot question our missions. There is no room to fear the problems we face when fighting for justice and we must address all of our fights for justice with the same type of valor as our brothers and sisters worldwide.

The next lecturer was current PhD student in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton, Varak Ketsemanian. Ketsemanian's lecture focused on the political unrest in Armenia and the events that had taken place in July revolving "Sasna Tsrer." He provided a very thorough presentation beginning with background information on "Sasna Tsrer," and then including the motives behind their actions and what it ultimately resulted to. Initially, Ketsemanian informed the membership of several potential factors that could have contributed to the actions of the "Sasna Tsrer," including the Four Day War, the failure of foreign policy, the arrest of Jirayr Sefilian, and even the coup in Turkey.

He then went into detail on the police station takeover, the demands of the "Sasna Tsrer," and the protests and demonstrations that their actions led to. The initial absence of media coverage, political brutality, and the ARF's stance in support of the government were also key components of the lecture.

Ketsemanian concluded that due to protests having no leadership, conflicting resolutions, and the leaders of the “Sasna Tsrer” realizing it was in their best interests to surrender, this movement did not instigate great change. Instead, it even put a greater spotlight on some of the serious issues Armenia faces including police brutality, human rights violations, and the overall discontent and lack of unity among Armenian people. In the end, he proposed several questions ranging from “what should the diaspora’s role be” to “were the actions of the “Sasna Tsrer” justifiable in any case” that sparked a productive discussion among attendees.

The third group of lecturers were members of the Armenian National Committee Eastern Region Board. Members including Board Chairman Steve Mesrobian, Executive Director Armen Sahakyan, and Dikran Khaligian all spoke about the ANCA’s current role in the Artsakh conflict, their overall work, and what we could be doing as AYF members to work with the ANCA.

Mesrobian touched upon the impact of the ANCA with U.S. Foreign Policy and brought into perspective what type of work the ANCA does with the Congress. He urged local AYF members to become active citizens in their communities by voicing their concerns about Armenian issues to their congressman and getting out to vote. The action alerts of the ANCA and the overall effectiveness of campaigns like the #StopAliyev were also highlighted.

Adding to Mesrobian, Sahakyan explained how in the recent months the ANCA has been traveling across the Eastern United States to various states and communities where the Armenian community is not so active, in an attempt to motivate community members to become active. This work has led to the establishment of multiple ANCAs, thus giving more contacts to the ANCA and contributing to active community members in regions where the Armenian voice in politics is lacking.

Throughout ANCA’s presentation, the entire board emphasized the important role that AYF members can have within the ANCA and how productive the work of these two forces can truly be. The political pillar of the AYF is one of its key components that can lead to great strides in the advancement of the Armenian cause especially with the help of the ANCA. This lecture only added fuel to the conversation of how AYF members in the diaspora could further their role of providing assistance to Artsakh and Armenia.

The final speaker of the weekend was ARF Bureau member Dr. Khatchig Mouradian. Dr. Mouradian’s lecture began with pointing out the problems that the Republic of Armenia currently faced, ranging from gender roles, corruption, and unemployment and how it could be viewed in the context of different perspectives. His lecture was more discussion based, and the conversation transitioned into the role of women and their role within the ARF. He stressed the lack of women in leadership positions within the ARF and how this is something that we as an organization need to tackle.

He brought up multiple scenarios to problems and described what needs to be done in order to address them and find solutions. In doing so, he constantly emphasized that the AYF and ARF have to be the ones to make a presence and be ready to work at all times. Providing insight from his personal experiences, Dr. Mouradian said, “I joined the ARF because I realized it’s the only organization that can cause the greatest change to the Armenian nation when the members rise to the occasion.” It is not an option to sit around and wait for change to take place. The AYF needs to mobilize when necessary whether it’s for Artsakh, Syrian Armenians, or their local communities.

Dr. Mouradian explained some of the current policies of the ARF in Armenia, as well as the recent coalition with the government and their statement during the actions of “Sasna Tsrer.” He later opened it up to discussion for the membership to inquire more about the policies and gave everyone the opportunity to ask any questions they had about the ARF’s role in modern day Armenia. Through this dialogue, the attendees were able to receive very insightful and concrete answers about the ARF’s positions.

The lectures of this weekend seemed to fit together like pieces of a puzzle. We listened to the history of the Artsakh movement, the modern circumstances, and learned that there is absolutely nothing to fear in our righteous pursuit for justice. We learned about a pivotal case of political unrest that Armenia faced in the recent months following the Four Day War as well as the causes and effects surrounding it. The ANCA showed us how as diasporans we could be involved and provided example solutions to combat the conflict in Artsakh and issues in Armenia. And ultimately, Dr. Mouradian simply inspired us to get up, take what you learned from all of these experiences as the AYF, and utilize them in order to be the change you want to see. Together, we will move mountains.



Who is Garo Paylan?

Garo Paylan was born in Istanbul, Turkey in October of 1972 and his family originated from Malatya. As a child, he was required to hide his Armenian heritage in public. His mother would not call him Garo but rather "Kaya", a Turkish name, to avoid being treated differently by doctors or teachers. Growing up in Turkey wasn't easy for Garo and his family.

Once he got older, he was able to attend the Istanbul University of School of Business. After completing school, Garo became the director of various Armenian schools in Istanbul and then followed that up with leading a project that promoted multilingual education.



In 2007, an unfortunate event occurred for all Armenians that was a turning point in Paylan's life. Hrant Dink was assassinated in Turkey. At the time Paylan was serving as the principal to an Armenian school and decided that he needed to take action. He said, *"I realized that something needed to change in this country and I dedicated my life to find those responsible for Hrant Dink's murder"*. This led Paylan to get into politics.



In 2011, he joined the Peace and Democracy Party (PDP) as a campaign supporter, and eventually the PDP transformed into the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in 2014. Paylan was a founding member along with other activists and served on the party's central committee. The HDP is a pro-Kurdish and pro-minority party that pushes for a new constitution to ensure the rights to all minorities in Turkey. The party stands for gender/marriage equality, LGBT rights, open borders with Armenia and was the first political party in Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide. In 2015, Paylan was elected into the Grand National Assembly as a representative of Istanbul's 3rd electoral district. He became the first Armenian member of the Assembly in decades alongside Selina Ozuzun Dogan of the Republican People's Party and Markar Esayan of the Justice and Development Party.

When getting into office, Paylan vowed to fight against Armenian Genocide Denial and demanded for Armenian Genocide recognition in Turkey. He stated, *"The Armenian Genocide took place here and coming to terms with the genocide should also take place here"*. Very powerful and courageous words from Paylan, especially in a country like Turkey that tramples free speech.

Paylan is an advocate to standing up for all minorities in Turkey. As mentioned earlier, HDP is a pro-Kurdish party. So why is Paylan in a Pro-Kurdish political party? Well, right now the situation is worse for Kurds than Armenians in Turkey. There is a cycle of violence in Turkey that started over 100 years ago with the Armenians, and now has gotten to the Kurds. Armenians and Kurds need to support each other because if the cycle continues, Armenians could be the victims again in the future. According to Paylan, non-Armenians actually have been more beneficial to the Armenian cause than Armenians themselves have in Turkey. Also, even though Turkey claims to be "democracy", the government does not believe in real democracy and in Paylan's Peoples' Democratic Party, democracy reigns without any



exception. Paylan believes that the only way to bring about real change in Turkey is by having a real democracy and his political party is trying to bring this change.

Paylan has made significant headlines since being voted to the Assembly. In April 2016 during a speech in parliament, he focused on the Armenian Genocide. Paylan counted the names of ethnic Armenian politicians who were deported then killed during the genocide. He named them off one-by-one and showed a picture of each with the district they represented. A few days after his courageous act, a brawl broke out in the Parliament where Paylan was targeted by members of other political parties. The story was covered by various international news outlets and put a negative spotlight on Turkey. His actions raised awareness about real issues going on in Turkey where minorities are constantly suppressed. The Minister of Justice, Bekir Bozdog, blamed Paylan for the incident even though it was obvious that it was instigated by others. The HDP condemned the violence and stood beside Paylan.

Recently, in September and October 2016, Paylan made a visit to the United States. He gave presentations focused on the recent developments in Turkey, the situation of Armenian communities and the pursuit of justice in Turkey. Paylan said Turkey is having some of its "darkest times in history" and explained how the current situation is not too different than how our ancestors were treated under the Ottoman Empire. Minorities are still oppressed, people are facing constant injustice, and there is still a lack of democracy. Paylan is calling on the diaspora to play a more active role in the struggle for rights for the Armenians in Turkey. We have roots and ties to that land, and it's time for us to be more active. Garo Paylan is risking his own life to create a better future. Thank you Garo, you are a real hero.

Artur Petrosyan Named Coach



Artur Petrosyan has been selected as the next head coach for the Armenia National soccer team after replacing Varuzhan Sukiasyan. Sukiasyan recently resigned after Armenia lost their first three games of European qualifiers. Petrosyan is a name that fans can get excited about. In the 90's he was one of the country's best players scoring 11 goals in 69 international matches for his homeland. Petrosyan started his club career with Shirak Gyumri and then also played on club teams in Israel, Switzerland and Russia. In 1996 and 2000, he was voted Armenia's Player of the Year.

Most recently, Petrosyan had been managing FC Zurich's second team in Switzerland and had served as an assistant to former Armenia coach, Bernard Challandes, during the 2016 European Cup Qualifying cycle. Armenia has a big hole to climb out of to have a chance to qualify for the next World Cup. Fans understand the expectations and just hope to see better quality from the national team. Petrosyan needs to get going right away as Armenia plays their first competitive match under the new regime in November against Montenegro. Petrosyan has said since taking over, "I am happy to have been entrusted with leading the national side". Now, let's get to work.



2016 Midwest Junior Conference Takes Place in Racine

By Areknaz Khaligian

Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) junior members from Chicago and Racine gathered in Racine on Nov. 5, for the annual Midwest Junior Conference. Their day began at 10 a.m. with a *lahmajun* cooking educational; almost 100 delicious *lahmajuns* were made from scratch and eaten for lunch.

In the afternoon, the juniors began the conference by discussing three pertinent topics: chapter meetings, chapter events, and regional events. Both chapters found that meeting attendance was roughly two-thirds of the total membership and that meetings usually lasted under an hour. Attendees considered both meeting attendance and length to be acceptable, but identified a significant issue of members failing to remember what was discussed at meetings.

First, the chapters described their local AYF events, which gave good insight into how other chapters operate. Then, working together, the juniors discussed the positive and negative aspects of the various regional events that take place throughout the year. AYF Junior Seminar was a favorite event, with mostly positive aspects: seeing/making friends and learning from interesting lectures. Some suggestions members had for improvement included having better food and focusing on making lectures as interactive as possible.

Junior Summer Olympics also received mostly positive feedback—juniors enjoyed seeing their friends from other chapters and competing in events. Not only did they like competing in events, but it was also noted that there is always excellent sportsmanship displayed, as athletes are not judged by their level of performance. There were mixed feelings regarding track practices leading up to the event, with some attendees suggesting that track practices should begin earlier and others calling for less track practices. Furthermore, it was suggested that additional sporting events be incorporated into the weekend, such as tennis, soccer, or baseball. One

negative aspect that everyone agreed on was diminished attendance by chapters who are not hosting.



To give some background, the Midwest Junior Summer Olympics event usually takes place in July, and is hosted by a different Midwest chapter each year. Attendees of the conference concluded that two main factors of the decrease in attendance for non-host chapters is primarily due to traveling distance as well as reluctance to attend if close friends are not attending. While attendees acknowledged that traveling distance is sometimes difficult to address, they concluded that being a member of the AYF should be sufficient motivation to attend AYF events and that seeing friends is an added bonus, not a determining factor.

The final two events that were discussed, the Junior Winter Olympics and Junior Conferences, received similar feedback. Both events have the positive aspects of seeing friends and participating in the weekend's activities. One suggestion they had for Junior Winter Olympics was to incorporate more chapter competitions similar to Junior Summer Olympics in addition to the inter-chapter games that are usually organized. The main negative aspect of these two events was also attendance. In addition to traveling distance and reluctance to attend based on other friends attending, conference attendees identified another major factor. They concluded that since both Junior Conferences and Junior Winter Olympics are smaller events, it is less of a priority for Midwest juniors. Furthermore, events taking place in local communities often take priority over these two events. Conference attendees concluded that it is difficult to solve these types of issues, but since the events are rewarding for those who do attend, it is important to continue to organize them.

After these discussions, attendees learned more about procedures and components of the official AYF Convention, which is attended by seniors in their local chapters. First, they went over different types of votes and the general protocol for resolutions. To practice these procedures, they read through resolutions, which were written based on their previous discussions and voted on them. Though none of the resolutions were passed, attendees learned the importance of asking questions and making informed voting decisions, practiced using different types of votes, and realized the benefit of discussing positive and negative aspects of a resolution and whether they actually solve the problem that is being addressed.



At the end of the conference, the members were able to see the Family History books that they created. At last year's Junior Conferences, it was decided that the Midwest juniors would submit their family stories to be compiled in a book, and this year they were able to see the final product.

After a hard day of work, attendees were able to enjoy the beautiful fall day with outdoor games. The event concluded with a toasty bonfire and s'mores.

Homenetmen Beirut wins Houssam Eddine Hariri Basketball Tournament



For the first time in the team's history, Homenetmen of Beirut won the Houssam Eddine Hariri Basketball Tournament after defeating Najim Essahili from Tunis in the finals. Prior to this season, the furthest the team had gone before in this tournament was only to the quarterfinals.

Mike Taylor on the Homenetmen side, who played college basketball at Iowa State and was drafted in the NBA in 2008, won the award for tournament's best scorer. He dominated throughout the tournament and had his best performance in the finals where he scored 39 points. Ater Mojok, who played his college basketball at the University of Connecticut, also added 32 points in the finals to lead Homenetmen's dual attack. Team Captain, Sevag Ketenjian, iced the game with late free throws for the winning side.

The team showed passion, dedication and teamwork to win the championship and had great support from the orange wall. The team's fan base, often referred to as the orange wall, took up the entire stadium to support the team. Congratulations to the Homenetmen of Beirut's men's basketball team on the win and hope for continued success in the upcoming season!



Quiz Questions:

- **What was the theme of AYF Senior Seminar?**
- **Ara Khachatourian is the editor of what newspaper?**
- **Which ANCA Eastern Region Board members spoke at AYF Senior Seminar?**
- **Why did Dr. Khatchig Mouradian join the ARF?**
- **Where was Garo Paylan born?**
- **What event did Garo Paylan call a turning point in his life?**
- **How many Armenians got voted into the Grand National Assembly in Turkey in 2015?**
- **Who is the next head coach for the Armenian National soccer team?**
- **Where did the Midwest Junior Conference take place?**
- **Who was the Houssam Eddine Hariri Basketball tournament's Best Scorer?**
- **Who is the team captain for the Homenetmen Beirut men's basketball team?**

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