

JUNE 12, 2013

## Toronto Armenians Celebrate 95th Anniversary of First Republic over Four Days

---

TORONTO, Canada—More than 1,500 Toronto-Armenian community members came together to celebrate the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of the first Republic of Armenia during several events held at the Armenian Community Center and Armenian Youth Center of Toronto between May 30 and June 2. The events were organized by the ARF “Soghomon Tehlirian” Chapter and co-sponsored by all of the organizations that work under the auspices of the Armenian Community Center of Toronto.



A scene from the celebrations

The celebratory weekend began with an art exhibition entitled “Independence,” featuring the works of renowned artist Meruzhan Khatchatryan, which opened on May 30 and ran through Sun., June 2. The exhibition, sponsored by the Hamazkayin “Klatsor” Chapter and the “Arshile Gorky” Art Gallery, was dedicated to the heroes of the first republic and featured several of their portraits. Master of ceremonies Rupen Janbazian welcomed guests and announced the opening of the events dedicated to the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Khatchatryan, who was invited from Armenia, addressed the crowd and expressed his gratitude to the greater Toronto-Armenian community. Very Rev. Meghrig Parikian, pastor of St. Mary’s Armenian Apostolic Church of Toronto, blessed the exhibition and the events that would follow.

On Fri., May 31, more than 300 community members were treated to a theatrical monologue by celebrated actress Marie-Rose Abousefian, entitled “Tigran Medz.” Her two-hour individual performance at the Hamazkayin Theatre of Toronto mesmerized and captivated the audience, and brought to life one of the most glorious time-periods of Armenian history. After her monologue, master of ceremonies Sevag Haroutunian invited the chair of the anniversary committee, Hagop Janbazian, to the stage. Janbazian presented Abousefian with a congratulatory citation from the community of Toronto, thanking her for her years of dedication to Armenian literature and culture.



A scene from the celebrations

On the evening of June 2, more than 600 Toronto-Armenians came together at the Community Center of Toronto for a performance featuring Nersik, Aghasi, and Arapo Ispirians, who were exclusively invited from Armenia for the event, and the Hamazkayin Toronto "Erebuni" Dance Ensemble. Master of ceremonies Sevan Hajjartinian opened the evening by inviting 95 members of the ARF Junior Organization of Canada (*Badanegan*) Toronto Chapter to sing the Armenian national anthem. The enthusiastic crowd then enjoyed traditional, popular, and patriotic Armenian songs until the early hours of the morning.

The traditional blessing of the Armenian tricolor and flag-raising ceremony took place on Sunday afternoon, after Holy Mass. Very Rev. Meghrig Parikian and Father Gomidas Panossian conducted the blessing of the flag, which was raised by the Homenetmen Toronto Chapter Scouts group and accompanied by the Homenetmen Fanfare marching band. The unveiling of a statue of ARF co-founder Stepan Zorian (Rosdom) in the Armenian Community Center took place on Sunday evening. The statue, located at entrance of the Hamazkayin "H. Manougian" Library, is the work of Toronto-Armenian sculptor Taline Iskedjian.

Immediately after the unveiling, the official commemoration of the anniversary of the first Armenian Republic took place at the Armenian Community Center. Master of Ceremonies Daron Keskinian welcomed guests to the concluding event and thanked them for being a part of the weekend's commemorative events. The Hamazkayin Toronto "Klatsor" Chapter children's choir performed three Armenian songs, while members of the Hamazkayin literary committee recited parts from Antranig Dzarougian's "Thought ar Yerevan." AYF Canada Toronto "Simon Zavarian" Chapter members Ara Ghukasyan and Garen Hasserjian performed a duet of a song written and dedicated to the heroes of 1918. Then Armenian Ambassador, H.E. Armen Yeganian, who sponsored the official commemoration, addressed the crowd and congratulated those in attendance on behalf of the Republic of Armenia. The evening's keynote speaker was long-time Armenian activist and intellectual Mihran Kurdoghlian, who was invited to speak from Athens, Greece. In his speech, Kurdoghlian noted the importance of the first Republic of Armenia and its significance in Armenian history, as well as the role the diaspora must have in ensuring a prosperous future for Armenia. After his keynote address, Kurdoghlian was given the Armenian Community Center of Toronto commemorative medallion by the center's president, Varant Barsamian. Famed Armenian singer Nersik Ispirian then sang two patriotic Armenian songs, after which Daron Keskinian concluded the event with his closing remarks.

In anticipation of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Republic of Armenia, the Toronto-Armenian community renewed its oath to the heroes of Sardarabad, Kharakilisa, and Bash-Abaran, promising that their legacies will live on for generations to come.