

U.S. Government Assistance to Armenia News

U.S. Embassy - Yerevan, Armenia

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER U.S. LAUNCHES PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN ON EYECARE



Dr. Alex Malayan, Chief Ophthalmologist at the Malayan Ophthalmology Center, calls the hand-outs the critical first step in the public education program. "The key objective for us is to deliver the material to the recipient," he says. "The message about blindness prevention should be everywhere. Everyone should be aware."

The handouts are just one component of a major countrywide public education campaign designed to give people information that will empower them to make positive, informed decisions about their health. The project also uses public service announcements on television to inform Armenians of the arrival of the AECP Mobile Eye Hospital in their area. The television spots show the 48-foot "hospital on wheels" arriving in a village like theirs and opening its doors to provide eyecare. A voiceover informs viewers that cataracts are the leading cause of blindness in Armenia, but with early detection and treatment, blindness due to cataracts can be avoided. Viewers are invited to visit the Mobile Eye Hospital and bring their friends and family to receive free eye screenings, thanks to USAID efforts.

World Health Organization Officer Elizabeth Danielyan sees public education as the "foundation of success" in eliminating preventable blindness. Likewise, Haik Darbinyan, Deputy Minister of Health, considers the projects efforts as "essential in combating eye diseases, building up competencies and contributing to an informed and healthy society."

The U.S. Government considers this an important part of its healthcare assistance to the Armenian people and its cooperation with experts in the Armenian-American community.

*"The message about blindness prevention should be everywhere. Everyone should be aware."
-Dr. Alex Malayan*

As part of a three-year collaboration with USAID, the Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP) will distribute 600,000 public education brochures on eyecare throughout Armenia. This is just one part of a country-wide campaign to eliminate preventable blindness through prevention and early intervention. The public education campaign is part of a Global Development Alliance project that focuses on direct patient care, public education, medical education and training. Twelve informational handouts (in Armenian and English) address a variety of topics related to the eye and eyecare. All of these colorful and informative brochures are tailored to the needs and interests of different audiences. Handouts for adults include Cataract, Glaucoma, Macular Degeneration and Occupational Safety. There is a three-part series for parents that encourages early detection of infant eye disease, provides information on eye movement disorders, and teaches parents about common childhood eye diseases.

In this Issue

U.S. FULBRIGHTERS
SHARE THEIR
KNOWLEDGE AND
EXPERIENCE IN ARMENIA **2**

DEMOCRACY
COMMISSION SMALL
GRANTS HELP BUILD
CIVIL SOCIETY

3 U.S. HELPS MAKE
BUSINESS
REGISTRATION
SIMPLER WHILE
FIGHTING CORRUPTION

HELPING ARMENIAN LAW
ENFORCEMENT
PERSONNEL SERVE
WITH PRIDE **4**

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER
MAKES A DIFFERENCE
IN MARTUNI

5 FORMING
ALLIANCES FOR
BETTER LIVING —
ONE BUILDING AT A TIME

FINDING HOPE IN
"LITTLE PARADISE" **6**

INTERNAL AUDIT
ROUNDTABLE:
HELPING INCREASE
TRANSPARENCY

7 U.S. GOVERNMENT
HELPS BRING
RELIEF TO
REFUGEE FAMILIES

USDA & CARD SUPPORT
ARMPRODEXPO-2005

8 BEEKEEPERS
BUZZING WITH ACTIVITY



The estimated \$84.4 million budgeted by all U.S. Government agencies for assistance programs in Armenia in Fiscal Year 2005 is allocated roughly as follows (based on information available):

Democracy Programs	\$11.4 million
Economic & Social Reform	\$43.5 million
Security & Law Enforcement	\$19.1 million
Humanitarian Assistance	\$1.5 million
Cross Sectoral Initiatives	\$8.9 million

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U.S. FULBRIGHTERS SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE IN ARMENIA

The U.S. Government's Fulbright Program provides grants for scholars, professionals, and research students to lecture and/or conduct research in host institutions in Armenia. It offers U.S. scholars a unique opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with their professional colleagues in other countries. Established in 1946 by former Senator J. William Fulbright the program is designed to "increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries..."

This year, six U.S. scholars, specialists, and students have been involved in teaching, consulting, and research activities in Armenia. They covered a wide range of fields including Public Economy and Taxation, Social Work, Domestic Violence and Child Abuse, American Studies, Film, Public Speaking, and Arts Management. As a result, Armenian students have been exposed to new content and teaching methodology. U.S. program

participants have contributed by strengthening the curricula and sharing their knowledge and experience through teaching and partnering with local professors. The local academic community considers the U.S. Fulbright Program an important part of U.S.-Armenian cooperation in the field of higher education.



Scholars share their expertise with Armenian students and teachers

DEMOCRACY COMMISSION SMALL GRANTS HELP BUILD CIVIL SOCIETY

The Democracy Commission Small Grants program began in 1994 as a flexible mechanism to enable embassies to support local democratic initiatives in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. Grants are aimed primarily at local NGO's.

Through the U.S. Embassy's Democracy Commission Grants, the Journalists' Club "Asparez" was established in 2000 with a mission to protect journalists' professional rights and interests and to support the advancement of freedom of speech in Armenia. One goal of the project was the dissemination of information

about proposed constitutional amendments among the population of Shirak and Lori regions through interactive debates, roundtable discussions, press conferences, and interviews.

Another example successful democracy commission grants is the "The Future is Yours" NGO. It promotes children's education and integration of orphans and children with special needs into society. The organization encourages volunteerism and involves volunteers in its projects and activities. The volunteers organized and conducted educational and cultural activities for orphans throughout Armenia.

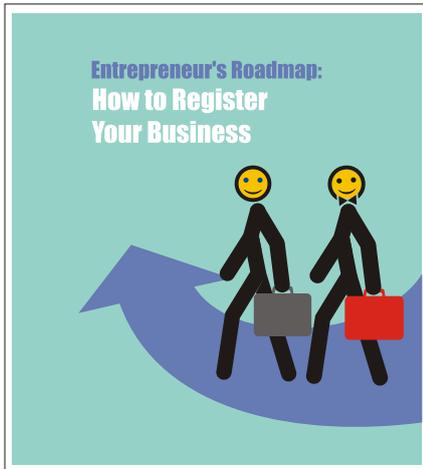


The "Asparez" Journalists' Club



Children with special needs participate in educational and cultural activities.

U.S. HELPS MAKE BUSINESS REGISTRATION SIMPLER WHILE FIGHTING CORRUPTION



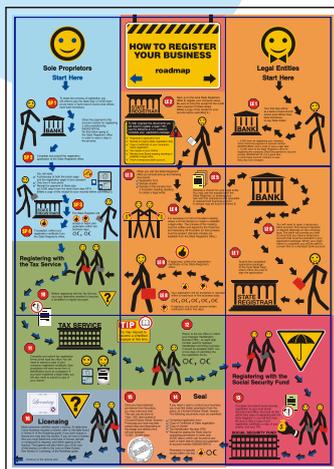
Sylvia Elaryan holding her business registration certificate.

The Entrepreneurs Roadmap was developed after research revealed that a lack of information on business registration procedures and costs was one of the major issues facing entrepreneurs.

As Silva Elaryan, owner and director of Aniroz enterprise explains: "It has always been difficult for businesses to register in Armenia." Without adequate information, Armenian citizens are vulnerable to corruption by minor officials. As a results, they often pay hundreds of dollars to register their businesses when, in fact, the costs should be quite modest.

Without knowing the rules and procedures, Sylvia was afraid to register her consulting business in her hometown of Ijevan, a small town in northern Armenian. Then she purchased a copy of the business registration guide "Entrepreneurs Roadmap: How to Register Your Business" from the Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Center (SME DNC). With the information in the Roadmap, she gained the confidence and knowledge she needed to register her business.

USAID's Micro Enterprise Development Initiative (MEDI) developed the Entrepreneurs Roadmap after its research revealed that a lack of information on business registration procedures and costs was one of the major issues facing entrepreneurs, particularly in the regions outside of Yerevan. Improving the business environment by developing tools like the Roadmap, as well as strengthening the institutional capacity of organizations like SME



DNC, is one of three areas of focus for MEDI. The other two areas are increasing access to finance and improving access to markets for micro and small enterprises.

"The Roadmap became the solution to my problem," Sylvia says. The Roadmap is a simple and colorful document that is increasing business registration by demonstrating the ease of, and clarifying the costs associated with, registering a business. The 70-page, user-friendly guide with an easy-to-follow map includes information on up-to-date policies and procedures, steps, forms and costs associated with registering.

Sylvia purchased the Roadmap for 500 Armenian drams (about \$1) and used it to help her through the business registration process. Not only did it save her a great deal of time, but it also empowered her to resist several requests to pay "special fees" that were not listed in the Roadmap as official registration costs. As a result, the total amount Sylvia paid to register her business was roughly \$60 -- significantly less that the approximately \$200 she would have paid if she had not been aware of what the official registration costs actually were.

USAID is working to ensure that the Roadmap is distributed widely to entrepreneurs throughout Armenia. And Sylvia is doing her part to spread the message: "I suggest that everyone use the Roadmap for registration." As more and more entrepreneurs use the Roadmap to fight corruption, its impact will grow and contribute to the development of a vibrant small business sector in Armenia.





HELPING ARMENIAN LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL SERVE WITH PRIDE



The U.S. Government helps to renovate training facilities for Armenian Law Enforcement Officers.

When the U.S. Narcotics and Law Enforcement Officer arrived in Yerevan in 2003 to help improve law enforcement training in Armenia, he found, among other things, that training facilities were in total disrepair. Students sat in classrooms with very dim lighting, heated inadequately by wood-burning stoves (forcing them to wear heavy coats to class in the winter) being shown Soviet-era evidence collection and analysis equipment that was no longer up-to-date. Also, martial arts were practiced on misshapen mats that resembled flop house mattresses.

Although the ultimate goal for the U.S. Government is to improve the law enforcement training curriculum, infrastructure improvements needed to come first. The

first step was to provide basic classroom equipment and furniture for some of the existing classrooms to be used for both Government of Armenia and U.S. Government training programs. The Police Academy, the Police Induction Training Center and the Procuracy Training Center were equipped with televisions, VCRs, projectors, white boards and interpretation systems among other items for classrooms. All three facilities were also equipped with computer classrooms to begin computer training.

The U.S. Government also funded an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) proposal to renovate all the buildings at the Police Induction Training Center. Those renovations are currently underway. For both police training facilities the U.S. Government has provided complete sets of mats to cover the floors of the gyms which have been undergoing renovation in part by the Government of Armenia. The U.S. Government has provided sample evidence collection equipment to be used in the Criminalistics Training classrooms. U.S. Government funding is also being used to completely renovate the Border Guard Training Center in Yerevan and to develop regional training facilities upcountry for border law enforcement.

The U.S. Government expects that these improvements, and further curricula and training program development, will positively impact the professional pride and competence of Armenian Law Enforcement personnel.

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN MARTUNI



Nicole Hendrix is a Peace Corps Volunteer assigned to the Gor & Tigran Civic Activities NGO (G&T NGO) in the town of Martuni. She helps her counterpart create a civil society that helps people to improve public life through developing and educating people in the areas of health, education, ecology, human rights, social issues, and cultural issues. As Nicole stated in a recent newspaper interview, her goal is to help her counterpart NGO become more sustainable through outreach activities with local NGOs and businesses in the community. Recently, Nicole helped the Municipality of Martuni receive a US Peace Corps Small Project Assistance grant to renovate the local park in the town, which services the town of Martuni and the 17 surrounding villages. The Grand Re-Opening of the Park took place on September 2, 2005.



Children now enjoy a safe place to play in Martuni.

As Nicole said, "I think it was all worth it because the smiles on the faces of the little kids, big kids, parents and

grandparents are priceless. The park is never empty, so I can say that the Peace Corps is getting its money's worth."

FORMING ALLIANCES FOR BETTER LIVING — ONE BUILDING AT A TIME

The U.S. Government understands that good neighbors build a strong society. Perhaps nowhere is this truer in Armenia than with apartment management. To address this issue, USAID has helped bring improvements to the quality of life in the newly-built and restored residential buildings of the Shirak region of Armenia the area most affected by the 1988 earthquake.

Prior to USAID's work with the Third Nature NGO, few Shirak residents understood their rights and obligations as apartment dwellers. There was also a serious lack of awareness regarding the real estate privatization process that the government undertook following Armenia's independence in 1991. Third Nature began addressing these issues by helping to organize condominium associations as well as by educating the public and promoting grass-roots collaboration.



"Our goal is to empower citizens to have an active part in larger democracy-building efforts in Shirak and elsewhere," Mkhitarian says. "The formation and maintenance of good condominiums has a bearing on all aspects of social and economic life."

"Condominiums are crucial for the maintenance and management of multi-apartment buildings," says Rafael Mkhitarian, Third Nature's project manager. "In Armenia especially, where such buildings were once directly administered by local authorities, it is essential for apartment residents to have control over how their buildings are run. This requires an awareness of rights and responsibilities and good management at the condominium association level."

Through its grant, Third Nature also published a manual for condominium formation encompassing all the logistical, social, economic and legal aspects of managing multi-apartment buildings. The booklet was distributed widely throughout Armenia a grassroots "how to" manual for all interested in forming their own condominium association.

Third Nature was awarded a grant through USAID's work with the Eurasia Foundation to establish the Shirak Region Condominium Support Center, which fast became a focal point for support to condominium proliferation in the city of Gyumri and throughout Shirak. The project has produced impressive results: it helped establish or improve 17 multi-apartment condominiums, representing 610 buildings with over 17,000 apartments.

In addition, the Shirak Region Condominium Support Center offers technical assistance, including guidance on the day-to-day management of multi-apartment buildings, collaborating with local government departments such as fire and utilities, forming budgets and internal regulations, holding condominium meetings and keeping records, and writing official letters.

While the work focused on apartment buildings and condominium associations, the project manager sees the effort as fostering broader aims of civic participation and democracy.



Given the amount of community-wide enthusiasm for strengthening condominiums, Shirak region serves as a model for optimal apartment management throughout Armenia.



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FINDING HOPE IN "LITTLE PARADISE"

Twelve years ago Drakhtik Village welcomed a number of refugee families, who were attracted by the promising name of the village: Drakhtik means Little Paradise. Arusyak's family was one of them. They hoped to find prosperity at their new destination, but village life was harder than expected. The quality of the soil in the area was poor and irrigation water was not available. Although they worked hard, the land yielded not much more than the money for their daily bread. The village was more than 80 kilometers away from the regional center and lacked the essential services they had become used to in the city. Arusyak's only hope in her life was the birth of her grandson some 14 months ago.

After the initial excitement of little Qajik's birth, other problems arose. Qajik's mother did not have enough milk to breastfeed the child throughout his first year and they had to feed him with cow milk instead. Suddenly, the child's growth slowed and then stalled. Qajik fell behind his peers in all stages of development. With borrowed money, they visited a pediatrician who concluded that the child suffered from a severe vitamin deficiency. The doctor suggested a diet and prescribed a regular intake of multivitamins for four months. The doctor did not know that both the diet and the multivitamins were unaffordable for the parents.

The parents then learned that the local health post was stocked by United Methodist Committee on Relief



Arusyak collects badly needed vitamins at the UMCOR dispensary

(UMCOR) with the financial assistance of the U.S. Government. They rushed over and found out that they could get Qajik's complete multivitamin course at the health post for free. These medicines came all the way from America and the U.S. Government supported the transportation and distribution of these drugs through the Department of State.

When spring arrived in Drakhtik, Arusyak was able to sit on the bench in front of her house and watch Qajik run around in the garden. She felt gratitude for the donated medicines that helped her grandson Qajik. The village proved true to its name -- in part thanks to the U.S. Government and UMCOR.

INTERNAL AUDIT ROUNDTABLE: HELPING INCREASE TRANSPARENCY



On Tuesday, November 15, 2005, the U.S. Treasury Resident Advisor for Internal Audit hosted a roundtable discussion among all internal auditors, members of the Ministry of Finance and Economy and other associated parties to discuss the primary issues related to internal audit in the public sector. The forum not only provided an opportunity for all the internal auditors to meet and exchange ideas for the first time in Armenia, but also allowed to present the findings of his assessment of internal audit in the public sector and for everyone to express their views in an open forum.

The roundtable discussion is only the first step in an ongoing project to improve the internal audit environment in the public sector. The Resident Advisor Ara Oghoorian - is showing the Republic of Armenia, through the Ministry of Finance and



Economy, how to shift from a centralized to a decentralized internal audit function, in addition to helping develop internal audit standards and policies and an auditor training/certification program. This is an important part of the U.S. Government's goals for greater transparency in government and the fight against corruption at all levels in Armenia.

U.S. GOVERNMENT HELPS BRING RELIEF TO REFUGEE FAMILIES

The Save the Children Collective Centers Renovation Project for Refugee Families (implemented in partnership with Mission Armenia NGO) is one of the humanitarian programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. The goal of the project is to improve the life of refugee children, women and their families through shelter quality improvements.

Since late 1980, the collective center #40 in the Masis town of Ararat marz has been densely populated by refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs). The building was in a completely deteriorated state with a leaking roof, no doors and windows in the corridors and no basic sanitary conditions. The four-story building has 46 apartments and 180 residents. One of the refugees, Vera Galstyan, told us, "In 1989, together with six members of my family, I migrated from Baku to Yerevan. During the emigration, I lost two of my children. We were settled at this collective center, in a room of just 18 square meters."



U.S. Department of State programs help alleviate unsafe living conditions for vulnerable populations such as refugees.

In early June 2005 the project provided 46 households with individual toilets. The state of the building was significantly improved. The roof was reconstructed, the entrance, staircases and corridors were renovated, doors and windows were repaired or replaced, and drinking water and sewage pipes were replaced.



"My son got married in 1991 and now he has two children. The room is very small, but the worst thing was that with a little baby we had no access to water or our own toilet. Due to poor sanitary conditions and swarms of insects, a few years ago my grandson and many

children of his age caught malaria and laid in the infection department of the hospital for months. We did not believe that there could be people or organizations that could help us out of this situation."

Through this project, Save the Children and Mission Armenia renovated nine Collective Centers improving the living conditions of 1,965 residents including 1,138 refugees. More than 370 people, of which 37% are refugee residents, participated in the reconstruction effort and were provided with short-term employment receiving disposable income for their families.

Vera Galstyan summed up the feelings of many residents by saying, "Now we have regained our faith. We have no raindrops in our room, no toilet smell and no worry for our children's health. On behalf of my family and the residents I thank all the organizations for ensuring safe and pleasant conditions for our children and us, and for recovering our faith and dignity."



CENTER FOR AGRIBUSINESS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT (CARD) SUPPORTS ARMPRODEXPO-2005



The Fifth International ARMPRODEXPO-2005 Exhibition took place in Yerevan from November 2-5. The exhibition



was organized by the Agribusiness Development Center (ADC). This year, sixty-four companies exhibited their products. Over fifteen thousand visitors attended the exhibition. These figures indicate that interest in the Expo is growing each year.

During the exhibition, useful business contacts were established with various packaging, printing, designing, advertising, business development companies, as well as potential clients. The U.S. Government, through CARD, supported the exhibition by providing financial and technical assistance.

BEEKEEPERS BUZZING WITH ACTIVITY

USAID WORKS WITH ARMENIAN BEEKEEPERS TO IMPROVE HONEY PRODUCTION



USAID helped Armenian beekeepers travel to Ireland for the international honey exhibition (Apimondia). Participation in these kinds of events holds the promise of increased exports of Armenian agribusiness products.

During the past three years, USAID has sponsored international honey experts Ed Levi and Bill Lord to assist regional Armenian beekeepers to improve their beekeeping skills. As a result of technical assistance and field trips to Slovenia and Bulgaria, regional beekeeping associations have been formed to support their local beekeepers advance their practices.

In October 2004, with the support from USAID's Armenian Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME) Project, and Ed Levi, those associations established the Armenian National Federation of Beekeepers (ANFB), representing all 11 regions of Armenia. The mission of the Federation is to promote and support the Armenian beekeeping industry by (1) providing training programs on improved production/processing technologies, integrated pest management, organic honey production, (2) improving

genetic stock throughout the country, and (3) developing new markets for Armenian honey and related products.

In March 2005, ANFB held its first annual conference at the Armenian Agricultural Academy. The event attracted more than 400 beekeepers from all marzes of Armenia, as well as the Minister of Agriculture and other representatives from governmental ministries and NGOs. During the conference, the Federation introduced a list of prioritized goals and objectives with an expedited time-line for implementation. Priority objectives included promoting Armenian honey on domestic and global markets, developing new markets for Armenian honey products, and improving genetic stock through a national queen breeding station.

In August 2005, four Armenian beekeepers from ANFB participated in the 39th bi-annual International Apimondia 2005 Congress and ApiExpo'05 in Ireland. The Congress included more than 200 technical lectures and presentation as well as exhibitions representing some 100 leading honey production and equipment companies worldwide. This was the first time Armenian honey was presented at such an event.

Participation in the Congress exposed Federation leaders to new beekeeping technologies, and world market trends in the beekeeping industry. It also provided participants with up-to-date information about current beekeeping industry practices. Armenian beekeepers returned with a better understanding of their industry and will share their new knowledge and enthusiasm with their regional unions and play a key role in moving the Armenian beekeeping industry into the modern age.



The U.S. Embassy website includes a searchable database of ongoing assistance projects – in English and Armenian.

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