

COMMUNIQUE
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THE CENTENIAL OF AGBU IN EGYPT
AND
THE ARMENIAN CEMETERY IN CAIRO

In accordance with the wishes of its Central Board of Directors, the centennial celebration of the founding of AGBU will take place in Egypt, where AGBU, the largest Armenian philanthropic foundation, was born.

In the ensuing one hundred years much has changed in the demographic and political map of the Armenian Diaspora, as well as in its outlook, opinions and needs. In response to these changes, various approaches have been proposed to insure the continuation of the Armenian entity in changing times. Incredibly, the present Central Board of Directors (CBD) of AGBU has chosen the closing of Armenian schools as a strategy for preserving the Armenian entity. Even a school such as the Melkonian Educational Institute (MEI), which belongs neither to AGBU nor to its CBD, is subject to this ill-conceived strategy. It should not matter how much money is donated by the members, the directors and their families to AGBU; their generosity does not bestow on them ownership rights to MEI. Does the biggest tax payer or donor to the treasury of New York become the owner of the State or the City to dictate laws and regulations to the inhabitants of the State??! There is no precedent to the AGBU's action in the laws and regulations of the countries where Western Armenians live.

The AGBU was founded on the initiative of progressive individuals, whose creed was transparency and accountability in all transactions of the organization. In contrast the present administration of AGBU has been anything but transparent in its management responsibilities regarding MEI. Financial disclosures in and by themselves are not sufficient to discharge the responsibility they assumed regarding MEI. The CBD and its followers have the amazing belief that closing the Armenian schools of a region, and forcing the students against their and their parents will, to attend non-Armenian schools, promotes the preservation of the Armenian identity. Pursuing such bizarre theories may satisfy their ego for the moment, but if implemented it will sooner or later doom them to failure with the tragic consequence of the disappearance of the Armenian Diaspora. Furthermore, the action of CBD constitutes a violation of Human Rights making AGBU liable for punitive fines.

It is ironic that AGBU meets in Egypt to celebrate the centennial of its founding, the country where the Melkonian brothers lived and donated the funds to establish and endow MEI, which AGBU is now intent on liquidating. What do the members of the Egyptian branch of AGBU think of the CBD whose legitimacy is questionable? Will they financially contribute to this event? Will they be a party to the celebrations and share in the guilt of CBD in the destruction of Armenian schools?

It would have been more proper to celebrate the centennial of AGBU worldwide by all Armenians without any distinction of religious, social and political affiliation...but without the participation of a CBD and its followers who dare to undertake the destruction of the Armenian Diaspora by eradicating its Armenian schools. For the Egyptian branch of AGBU it is preferable by far that its monetary contributions be directed to the essential and laudable operations of AGBU as in the saving of the comprehensive collection from the Egyptian-Armenian Press in the recent past with their timely intervention, safeguarding a cultural landmark for the benefit of future Armenians.

Unfortunately, the situation of the Armenian Cemetery in Cairo does not permit similar praise. The condition of the graves in which the bones of benefactors and intellectuals are buried is deplorable. On the occasion of the centennial the representatives of the Egyptian branch of AGBU will do well to visit that cemetery in order to correct a reprehensible situation. Of course there are bound to be some people in Cairo who will say "they do not deal with the dead". Such people and the leaders of AGBU should be reminded that the magnificent civilization of Egypt finds its expression in part in the graves of the Pharaohs. Is it not the case that Yervant Odian is a Pharaoh of the mind for the Armenians, who having lived "Cursed Years", went to Cairo to die? His partially ruined grave and those of others lead one to believe that the bones of many illustrious people lie in that cemetery.

How can one celebrate a 100th, a 1600th or 1700th anniversary when to these dates inevitably and irrevocably are attached names of those whose neglected and ruined graves lie in an Armenian cemetery? In contrast, the Armenian cemetery in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, represents a worthy example to emulate. Where, at places which have become impossible to care for a grave properly, the remains have been moved to the Armenian cemetery at the end of Niferilor Street. If the Egyptian Branch of AGBU, despite its financial strength, is unable to maintain graves in a dignified manner, then at least it should arrange to have the remains of Yervant Odian transported to Istanbul, the place of his birth, where it can take its honored place in one of the many well maintained Armenian cemeteries. Similarly, on appropriate occasions, it is fit to be mindful of the remains and graves of others such as Arpiarian and Tekeyan, and do for them what is necessary and proper.

Another type of transfer is called for in the case of the Melkonian Educational Institute and the Melkonian Will of which AGBU is solely its administrator. If AGBU does not wish to continue its management function, then it should transfer its responsibility to another legal caretaker in order that the vital mission of MEI to the Armenian Diaspora can continue on its present land and campus. In celebrating the centennial of AGBU it is important that the fundamental principles of its founding are kept in mind. Otherwise this venerable Union instead of being General becomes the Private Partnership of a group of people regardless of what name this group uses in Cairo or elsewhere.

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* The **PRO EDVCATIO** is a Worldwide International **FORVM** which deals with educational matters – taking into consideration social, economic and political dimensions of the cultural dynamics – together with geopolitical realities and related strategies for the development of human resources, respectful to legitimacy and legal conditions. The **PRO EDVCATIO's GRASSE** is a panel – constituted by ad hoc Armenians of Diaspora and non-Armenians – which deals with Armenian educational issues.