

“Ayb” Foundation Drafts Plan to Reopen Melkonian; Urges AGBU Not to Sell (2009/12/10)



At a discussion group organized yesterday by the “Ayb” Educational Foundation, Father Mesrop Aramian, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, declared that the organization had drafted a business plan to reopen the Melkonian Education Institute in Nicosia Cyprus. Established in 1926 by the Melkonian Brothers, it was the only remaining boarding school servicing students from the Armenian diaspora until the AGBU decided to cut funding in 2005.

Father Aramian stated that the draft proposal has been sent to the AGBU in the hope that it will re-examine its decision to sell the school’s real estate. The Board Chairman noted that the plan wasn’t merely to reopen the school but to create a modern and highly developed education facility for Armenians the world over, using the old school as a basis. He said the location of Melkonian, in Cyprus, was geographically convenient from Armenia, Europe and Lebanon and enjoyed an ideal climate.

Another member of yesterday’s panel, Raffi Mekhjian, Director of the Raffael Contini Trading Company, a Lebanese-Armenian venture based in the RoA, stated that, “The diaspora lacks an educational academy. It once had Melkonian but now it’s closed. The situation if the diaspora is terrible. The crisis has affected all and the school issue is at the forefront.”

Commenting on the Melkonian legacy and its cultural importance, Father Aramian noted that he had recently visited Melkonian and was amazed at its size and scope. Reflecting on the school and its past glory, Father Aramian made reference to Krikor and Garabed Melkonian, prominent tobacco traders from Egypt, who liquidated their assets, established the Melkonian Fund and entrusted the management, not the ownership of the school to the AGBU. Both brothers are buried at the School grounds, at the open space between the two main buildings.

“The brothers built two small buildings for themselves and a huge educational institution. They are buried there. What will become of their graves? By closing the school, we have dealt a

serious blow to a very important concept; that of bequeathing one's inheritance to the nation. These men bequeathed a large fortune so that the school would never want financially. Now, they have taken the decision to close the school and have spoon-fed the people on the idea of selling it off. They have convinced many that by selling the school there'll be money to open five new ones," Father Aramian lamented.

He said that it was unethical to build new schools rather than to save and reopen Melkonian with a rich 85 year-old tradition of educating some of the finest minds in the diaspora and Armenia.

Of particular interest were his comments regarding the government of Cyprus' project in defense of endangered languages and that the program includes western Armenian. This he stated signified that the European Union was ready to also invest in the operation of Melkonian in order that it continue teaching students western Armenian.