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The Armenia Fund



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Rural Development Program

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IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE
SUBJECT: MINISTER OSKANIAN'S SPEECH

Minister Oskanian Speaks About Rural Development at Armenia Fund Gala in New York

Dear Friends,

I have come here to this building every year for the last 10 years to address my colleagues from around the world as we explore ways for the United Nations to achieve peace and prosperity for all our countries.

So, it is especially gratifying to be here this evening, in this same building, to talk to my fellow Armenians, about the Armenia Fund and our shared vision for peace and prosperity for our country, Armenia.

Last week, in my speech downstairs in the General Assembly hall, I said I wanted to break the unspoken rule and although the representative of a small country, I wanted to talk about what the big powers always talk about: the global, complex challenges of the 21st century – disarmament, arms control, climate change, tensions between powers, and even the price of oil – and how the disorder in the world, the new fragmentation, and new dangers affect us, the small countries, even more than they affect the great powers.

Here today, with you, I am going to break another unspoken rule, and do outright fundraising for the Republic of Armenia.

I am not a fundraiser. I am the foreign minister of a country that has managed to overcome obstacles, compete successfully and ensure our rightful place in our region. We are respected in international organizations as a capable partner. Today, we have the strong foundation required to build a secure and prosperous country, of which all Armenians around the world will be proud. We have an open economy and solid legislation. We have better social and educational conditions than any of our neighbors. Don't



take my word for it, it's what the United Nations and the Heritage Foundation and the World Bank say.

But my message to the Diaspora always, and to you today, is, don't take this for granted. Don't take Armenia and Karabakh for granted, don't take our ability to survive and prosper for granted.

We have worked hard to keep the peace in Karabakh, we have worked hard to come out ahead of our neighbors in almost every important economic index, we have worked hard to relieve emigration and even achieve a modest level of in-migration. We have worked hard to reach this day. We must work hard to consolidate what we have and harder still to go forward.

But there are two problems. One is time, and the other is money.

First, the problem of time: If over these 16 years our neighbors were searching for ways to uncover and utilize their potential, today they have begun to reap the benefits of their resources. It will be harder now for us to compete. We must strive to strengthen Armenia's geostrategic and economic security. We must work to assure comprehensive and even development for our country. The urban areas are growing. The rural areas are not. Our growth is based on such a low starting point that even with our great improvements, more than one third of our population lives in poverty and half of Armenia's poor live in rural communities and have not benefited from Armenia's overall growth.

Don't get me wrong. Armenia will grow and prosper. Don't doubt that. Governments come and go, but the people of Armenia, those who have withstood difficulties that cannot be imagined, have and will survive and flourish. We always have.

But do we do this in two generations, or three generations, or five generations? Or do we capitalize on today's fast growing economy?

Do we have the luxury of waiting generations for hope to reach our villages? Or do we empower the villagers protecting our frontiers, make them feel protected, give them a hand up, help them build homes, earn an income, and live a life of dignity?

The answer is obvious. We don't have time to waste, and to jumpstart rural growth, we need to talk about money.

Look, I remember when Armenia's national budget was \$350 million a year. Ten years later, it's over a \$2.5 billion. That's amazing growth for us. But, by international standards, it's nothing. Even as we've done away with the earthquake zone, rebuilt Yerevan, financed rebuilding in Karabakh, begun



paying our civil servants regularly, and invested heavily in our rural areas, Armenia's resources are not enough. That is why the Armenia Fund was created – to build on the resources of Armenians everywhere to provide basic infrastructure and development support that the Government can't afford.

In the 21st century, Armenians are not orphans and survivors looking for kindness and sympathy. Today, we are looking for philanthropy, not charity. The Armenia Fund is more than charity, it is more than helping people, it is building a country.

The Armenia Fund will utilize the generosity of the Diaspora to spur strategic growth in Armenia, starting from the villages.

Those of you here remember that the Armenia Fund's first years were focused on securing emergency assistance and fuel.

By 1996, the Armenia Fund began to take on strategic projects – first, the road that linked Karabakh to Armenia, then later, the road that linked Karabakh's different regions to each other directly, for the first time without dependence on Azerbaijani roads. That was the second phase of the Armenia Fund's development.

Armenia Fund's 15 years of accomplishments have been possible because the Armenian people around the world have understood their responsibility to support state building in Armenia and Karabakh.

Today, Armenia Fund is entering its third phase – away from emergency assistance, and toward complex, comprehensive development assistance. The next 15 years of good work will be possible because the Armenian people around the world will seize the opportunity to actually participate in nation building and state building.

This is the year, this is the decade when we must demonstrate that people are more valuable than oil. Oil in our region will peak in half a decade and wane in two decades. But systematic economic growth and our people's commitment and strength will sustain us for far longer.

That is why the Armenia Fund has adopted the Rural Development Program for Armenia and Karabakh. Our villages will have decent roads, drinking water, irrigation water, gas and electricity, access to schools, to health centers, to telephone service, television and the internet. So that they can afford these services, we will work with the villagers to advance sustainable economic development.



This is nation building – one village at a time. Give tonight, give to the telethon on November 22, give generously.

Give so that the villagers, who wake up in the village of Azatmut and stare across the trenches at soldiers pointing in their direction, know that their back is covered.

Give so that the residents of Jrapı village are too busy to be intimidated by the imposing Turkish flag laid out in stone on the hillside right across their border.

Give so that grandfathers and grandsons are no longer alone in our villages, and they can call their sons and fathers to come home.

Give, because your children's and grandchildren's identity is tied inextricably to a democratic and prosperous Armenia.

Give, because the children of those who prospered and thrived in other countries now want to come home.

Give, because for the first time in history, we have entered a new millennium successful militarily, politically and economically, secure in independent statehood.

Give, because Karabakh is ours and even as we work around the negotiating table to formalize the historic, legal, moral fact that Karabakh is Armenian, we must continuously demonstrate that Karabakh is a secure, democratic political entity and that it is viable.

Give, because our resources are not under the earth, but around the earth. You who inhabit lands beyond our borders are our limitless, self-perpetuating, resource. You are Armenia. You must participate in its creation, and do this wholeheartedly and completely - not with conditional or partial use of your potential, but rallying all your resources, realizing that you are doing so for your own survival as well as Armenia's.