

2023 SUMMER MAGAZINE



AACP
Sight

A PUBLICATION OF THE ARMENIAN EYECARE PROJECT

ARMENIAN EYECARE PROJECT

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are tax-deductable.

AECP Mission Statement:
To eliminate preventable
blindness in Armenia and to
make quality eye care
accessible to every child and
adult in the country.



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LOOKING FORWARD: A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER

As we embark on the fourth decade of the Armenian EyeCare Project, it's clear to me that in order for our work in Armenia to continue to make an impact and truly thrive, our organization must look onward, to the future. The AECp is an organization that embraces evolution and one that has consistently responded to the needs of Armenia's people in the moment.

Recently we noticed a need for more services in the regions of Armenia. Now we are developing diagnostic clinics in more towns across the country. We also noticed a greater demand for care among Armenia's soldiers. Now we prioritize treatment like prosthetic surgery and provide protective gear to prevent soldiers from sustaining serious eye injuries or going blind. We also continue to lead Armenia's eye care sector with innovative technologies and top-of-the-line medical education, training and care.

Our goal is to continue to be a shining light for the people of Armenia. Thank you to our supporters who continue to invest in these life-changing and sight-saving initiatives. Thank you for being a part of Armenia's future.

Roger V. Ohanesian
AECp Founder and President

Founder and President

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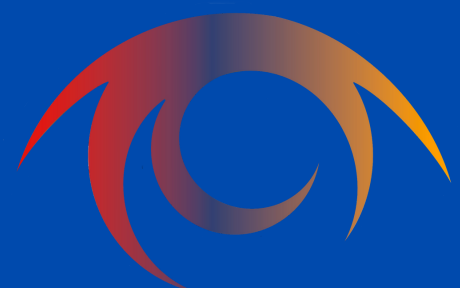
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**CELEBRATING THE EXPANSION OF
REGIONAL EYE CARE IN ARMENIA**



Making quality eye care accessible to every resident in Armenia is the AECP's mission. By offering access to eye care in more regions of Armenia, we continue to expand our reach and provide care for Armenia's most vulnerable population who often live in these regions. With this effort, thousands of additional patients across Armenia will have access to vital, sight-saving eye care services literally at their doorsteps.

Building on the momentous success of our Regional Eye Centers initiative launched in 2015 -- in which we developed five full-service eye centers in the provinces of Tavush, Lori, Syunik, Shirak and Vayots Dzor -- the AECP continues to pave the way for new diagnostic clinics to be established in the remaining regions of Armenia.

TALIN—

On April 25, 2023 the Talin Regional Eye Diagnostic Clinic officially opened its doors to welcome its first patients! The clinic was established with the generous support of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is equipped with cutting-edge medical equipment and tools. Thanks to the generous donation, residents of this region will be able to receive detailed eye examinations and ambulatory treatment free of charge. Our partnership with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints dates to 2018, when two pieces of laser equipment were donated to AECP to provide laser surgeries to thousands of patients in Armenia.

The establishment of these Diagnostic Eye Clinics allows our organization to conduct comprehensive eye exams and offer treatment solutions, train local ophthalmologists and ensure the transfer of international best practices and knowledge throughout Armenia. It also contributes directly to the development of primary healthcare services in the regions of Armenia.

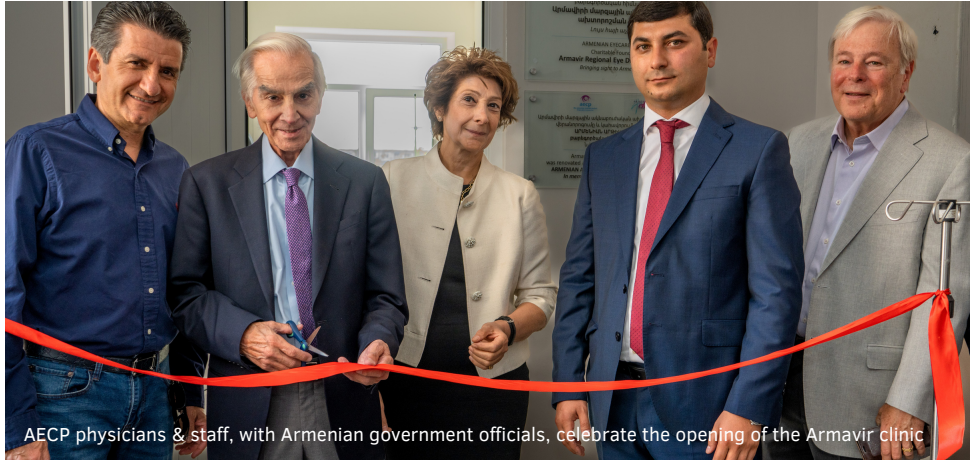
With the generous support of our donors, the AECP has secured funding for three Diagnostic Eye Clinics -- located in the towns of Talin, Armavir and Martuni -- just in the past year! We are thrilled to bring you an update on the progress of these facilities. We also have sponsorship opportunities for two additional Diagnostic Eye Clinics to be established in the provinces of Ararat and Kotayk.

MEET THE DONOR: THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been actively involved in humanitarian relief and development activities throughout the world for many years. These include emergency relief assistance in times of disaster and humanitarian programs that strengthen the self-reliance of individuals, families, and communities. Humanitarian projects are primarily funded by donations from Church members.

One of the main areas supported by The Church is funding for programs focused on improving the quality of eye care treatment. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provides training, equipment, and supplies to assist local eye care professionals and programs to help avoid blindness and visual impairment around the world.



AECP physicians & staff, with Armenian government officials, celebrate the opening of the Armavir clinic

The Don H. and Vardi Vanitzian Diagnostic Eye Clinic was established in the city of Armavir, the capital of the Armavir province, in September 2022 thanks to a very generous donation from the Vanitzian family. The clinic is fully furnished with advanced eye care equipment that is unique to the entire region of Armavir, allowing physicians to offer comprehensive eye care to the population of 265,770 residents in this densely populated region. Over 29% of the province's population are senior citizens and more vulnerable to eye diseases and disorders. In fact, the Armavir region notoriously outstands other regions of the country for its high rate of people with diabetes.

Because of this, special diabetes-related services were envisioned in the development of this clinic, including the Continuum of Care model with the establishment of a Diabetes school; pilot programs that focus on providing regular checkups and prevention of complications among diabetics; provision of HbA1c blood analyzers and strips and other initiatives that will help detect and treat eye diseases early and prevent complications locally without the need to travel for care. As always, AECP works hand-in-hand with local ophthalmologists by training them in the use of these state-of-the-art pieces of equipment and the most up-to-date eye care techniques to provide comprehensive eye exams, treatments and referrals.

The establishment of The Don H. and Vardi Vanitzian Diagnostic Eye Clinic in Armavir offers a sustainable, long-term solution that solves the issue of accessibility and affordability of eye care for the entire population of the province and surrounding areas and contributes to the ongoing process of decentralization of quality eye care by building the capacity of regional doctors. The impact directly contributes to the elimination of preventable blindness in Armenia and making a significant improvement in the lives of people with diabetes.

MEET THE DONOR: THE VANITZIAN FAMILY

Don H. and Vardi Vanitzian always cared deeply about eye health for themselves and their family. They had regular vision exams and ensured their three daughters did as well -- a habit their daughters continued as adults. The family learned firsthand the importance of eye health when Vardi's father, Sarkis Mnatzaganian, suffered from glaucoma, and later in life Don was diagnosed with diabetes-induced glaucoma, resulting in blindness. The Vanitzian family hopes its donation can help others receive the vision care needed to avoid the conditions and diseases affecting their ability to see. "We are honored to be able to partner with AECP to assist the residents of Armavir," the family said.



Don H. and Vardi Vanitzian

MARTUNI—

The Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Diagnostic Eye Clinic, located in the Martuni Regional Medical Center of the Gegharkunik province, is in its final stages of development thanks to a very generous donation from the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Family Foundation. The decision to establish and equip a Diagnostic Eye Clinic within the Regional Medical Center in Martuni was made because the region has been significantly impacted by border incidents following the war provoked by Azerbaijan in September 2020, resulting in many wounded and displaced people requiring eye care services.

The Gegharkunik province now has a longer border with Azerbaijan and its population is under constant threat of attacks. Since Martuni connects the remote areas of Gegharkunik province with its capital (Gavar), the establishment of an eye exam clinic in Martuni is vital to acquire a more central role in serving people and providing support in case of resumed military hostility. The AECP is collaborating with Armenia's Ministry of Health, the World Bank Program Implementation Unit and local healthcare providers to ensure that residents have access to modern ophthalmic equipment and skilled specialists. As well, AECP continues to train local ophthalmologists in the use of new technologies, ensuring the transfer of international best practices and knowledge. With the establishment of the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Diagnostic Eye Clinic in Martuni, the AECP will be able to meet the growing healthcare needs of the province's population of about 230,000 people.

MEET THE DONOR: JIRAIR S. & ELIZABETH HOVNANIAN FAMILY FOUNDATION

The Jirair S. & Elizabeth Hovnanian Family Foundation was created with a focus on providing funding to assist Armenian communities worldwide by gifts, grants, contributions and program-related investments.

Established in 2000, the Foundation is run by brothers Stephen and Peter Hovnanian and pays homage to their father and mother, Jirair and Elizabeth, who passed on in 2007 and 2010, respectively. In 1964, Jirair founded the building firm J.S. Hovnanian & Sons in New Jersey. Now his two sons operate the business, dedicating their lives to building excellence through their company and the foundation they founded to honor their parents.



Left: Stephen and Peter with their father, Jirair; Right: Stephen and Peter Hovnanian

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITY

The AECP's ambitious undertaking to organize a more comprehensive eye care delivery system that eventually covers all regions of Armenia has been gaining momentum and bringing impressive results! In order to continue making a meaningful difference for the population of the remaining regions of the country, we are currently in need of sponsorships to develop two supplemental eye care facilities in the regions of Ararat and Kotayk. Sponsorships come with naming opportunities, with either exam clinics or polyclinics being named after a person or entity of your choice!

Will you join us in our exciting initiative to develop Diagnostic Eye Clinics in the regions of Armenia? This is your opportunity to help children, women, men and the elderly living in the regions of Armenia have access to fully equipped diagnostic clinics along with the surgical suites that are available through our Regional Eye Centers and have proven successful in providing comprehensive eye care.

To make a meaningful impact, you can:

- **Provide basic polyclinic support for \$30,000**
- **Sponsor a Diagnostic Eye Clinic for \$100,000**
- **Sponsor a Diagnostic Eye Clinic with diabetes tier for \$150,000**

If you are interested in supporting one of these initiatives, please reach out by email at info@eyecareproject.org or call us at 949.933.4069



AECP PARTNERS WITH CHLA TO BRING FIRST NEONATAL NURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURE TRAINING TO ARMENIA



The Armenian EyeCare Project together with Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) and the Armenian Association of Neonatal Medicine hosted the first Neonatal Nurse Policies and Procedure Training in Armenia in June of this year. Every year since 2010, due to AECP's and CHLA's partnership, ophthalmologists, neonatologists, endocrinologists, healthcare policy designers and nurses from the U.S., Europe and CIS have gathered in Armenia to exchange new research and best practices in ophthalmology and affiliated areas.

The Neonatal Nurse Training in Armenia is aimed at introducing international policies and procedures and establishing clear-cut guidelines to regulate the work of nurses in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs.) The recent, two-week training course gathered over 100 medical professionals from the third-level hospitals of Armenia and offered both theoretical and practical sessions by highly skilled professionals from the U.S. who shared their valuable experience and practice. Training was conducted by CHLA program experts Erin Mounger (DNP, NNP-BC, RNC-NIC) and her colleague Maxine Ogbaa (BSN, RNC-NIC, CLC.)



"It has been my pleasure to return to Armenia to share nursing practice knowledge with my nursing colleagues in this beautiful country!"



MOTHER OF FALLEN SOLDIER SEES GRANDSON FOR FIRST TIME FOLLOWING CATARACT SURGERY

Silvard Sarksyian is a resident of Avshar village in the Ararat province of Armenia. Located on the slopes of the biblical Mount Ararat, the region prides itself for its delicious fruit: sun-kissed apricots, peaches, pears and apples. Harvesting these fruits from their orchard and selling them is Silvard's family's primary source of income.

A few years ago, Silvard started to feel her vision getting progressively worse, and as a result, she couldn't see images or text clearly anymore. Soon, her sight completely diminished to the point where she couldn't work in the orchard anymore. "I was in complete darkness," Silvard shared. "I couldn't even leave the house as I was afraid of getting hit by a car." She was diagnosed with a cataract at the local village clinic but the doctors were unable to help her due to lack of proper equipment. They advised Silvard to travel to Yerevan, Armenia's capital, to get the needed surgery.

Silvard's youngest son Artyom was making arrangements to take his mom to the hospital, but his plans were cut short. Azerbaijan has started an unprovoked and deadly aggression against the Republic of Artsakh – an integral part of historic Armenia which is home to hundreds of thousands of Armenians. Like many Armenian men, Artyom went to protect his homeland. "When I sent my son off to the war, I wasn't able to see his face clearly," Silvard recalls with tears in her eyes.





Silvard stayed behind, waiting for her son to return when the war was over, but tragically, Artyom was killed protecting his homeland.

Several months after Artyom's passing, his wife gave birth to their son, who she named Artyom after the baby's father. Devastated by her son's death, Silvard was also overcome with a great sadness because she could not see her new grandson's face.

"Thank you for helping me see my grandson!"

When the AECP's Mobile Eye Hospital arrived in Ararat, Silvard was able to receive cataract surgery free of charge. "We successfully performed cataract surgery for Silvard, the mother of a fallen soldier," said AECP Chief Surgeon Asatour Hovsepyan. When the bandages came off after surgery, Silvard was elated to regain her vision! She was anxiously waiting to get home to see her grandson's face for the first time. She was shocked to see how similar the baby looked to her son Artyom. "It felt like it was my son..." Silvard said through happy tears. "Like the second Artyom was born!"

Thanks to the surgery provided by AECP, Silvard was able to come out of her hopeless devastation. Although her son is no longer with her, she is now able to help take care of his child, which brings light and hope into her everyday life.

"Words are not enough to describe my happiness," Silvard says. "Thank you for helping me see again."





WOUNDED ARMENIAN SOLDIER RECEIVES PROSTHETIC EYE SURGERY

Since 2020, the people of Armenia and Artsakh have been going through an unbearably difficult time. The 44-day-long, second Nagorno-Karabakh War in September 2020 and the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes in September 2022 shook what relative peace there was in the region. The war resulted in the death of thousands of Armenian soldiers and some civilians as well as severe injuries in thousands more. A large amount of injuries in soldiers were caused by pieces of shrapnel being lodged in the eyes, resulting in severe eye damage, loss of vision and loss of the eye.

These tragic injuries have also caused psychological stress in Armenia's soldiers, leading them to self-isolate and lose interest in their everyday lives. Prosthetic eyes and eye procedures that the AECP provides has helped these young, injured soldiers overcome these troubles and begin re-entering society with newfound hope. Since 2011, thanks to our devoted donors, the AECP has been providing prosthetic eye replacements for adults and children in need all over Armenia. Since the second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, nine wounded soldiers were able to receive prosthetic eye surgery.

Haykaz Grigoryan was one of those soldiers. Haykaz, 23, is from the Noratus village in Armenia's Gegharkunik province and loves to read. He was modest while speaking of his heroism on the battlefield but the reality is that Haykaz is a true patriot of his country. Spending 912 days in service, Haykaz was one of just six Armenian soldiers fighting against 70 Azeris. After a piece of shrapnel got lodged in his eye, Haykaz continued to fight for 15 minutes with a bleeding wound on his face. He spent 29 days in the hospital, where doctors removed 20 pieces of shrapnel from his body.



AECP physicians with Haykaz and two other injured Armenian soldiers we have treated

Though it was not possible to save Haykaz's eye, the AECP was able to provide this brave soldier with a prosthetic eye replacement. Undergoing treatment at the Malayan Eye Hospital in Yerevan, Haykaz was seen by AECP Volunteer Physicians who were in Armenia for our 2022 Medical Mission. Haykaz's physician, Dr. Georgi Griogorian discussed this complicated case with AECP Founder Dr. Roger Ohanesian and his colleagues Dr. John Hovanesian and Dr. Richard Hill.

After a detailed eye exam, Haykaz was able to receive his prosthetic eye surgery with a custom prosthetic that AECP provided. Haykaz's courage and dedication to his country is something we should all be grateful for, but on this day, it was Haykaz who expressed gratitude for the aid he received. "I am very impressed with what you do for people in our country," Haykaz said. "I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and to feel that I am not alone."



"I am very impressed with what AECP does for people in our country!"



VAHE'S DREAM OF BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL SINGER CAN COME TRUE WITH AECP'S SUPPORT

Vahe Poghosyan has dreamt of becoming a professional singer his entire life. Singing is Vahe's passion and a way of expressing his emotions. His powerful voice is captivating to hear as he sings “Krounk” by Komitas. After getting married and welcoming his daughter, Vahe decided it was time to take serious steps toward becoming a professional singer so he started taking vocal lessons. However, his plans were cut short by the war that broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020.

Like many of his friends, Vahe volunteered to join the Armenian army to protect his homeland. He was sent to the border, an area that was constantly under heavy attacks by Azerbaijan. During one of these attacks, a rocket hit the truck Vahe was riding in along with his fellow soldiers. Fourteen Armenian fighters were killed that day and only three survived. Vahe was one of the survivors. “I was covered in blood,” remembers Vahe. “I couldn’t see anything... there was shrapnel in both of my eyes.”

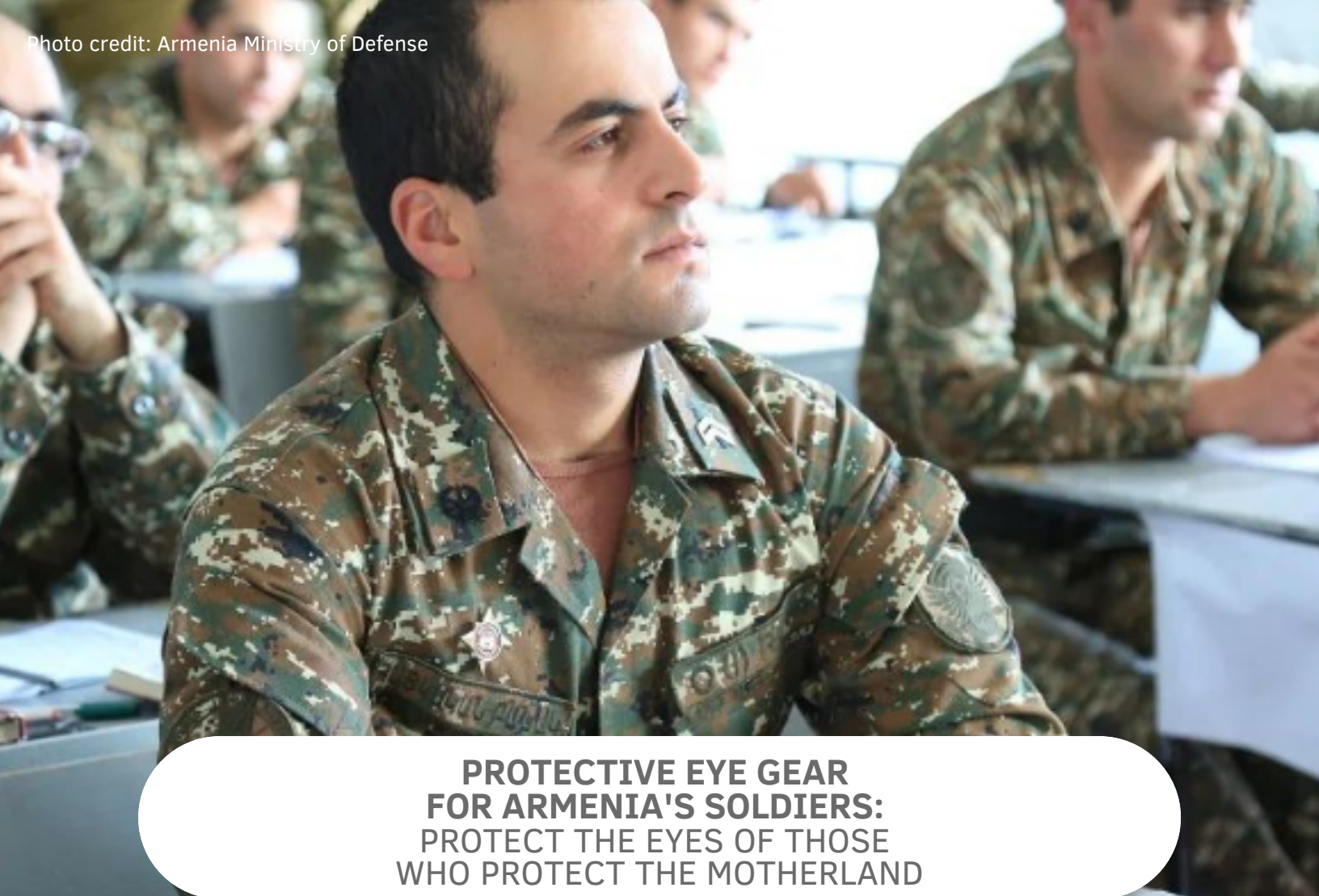
Vahe spent the next eight-and-a-half terrifying hours lying on the battlefield, bleeding and unable to see. With only a few minutes left to live, Vahe was rescued and rushed to a hospital in Yerevan, where he was treated for one month. His eyesight was gone; all he could see was a bit of light. Vahe thought he was going to be blind for the rest of his life. After experiencing the trauma of war and losing his friends, Vahe was confronted with another ordeal: the idea of never being able to see again. Thoughts of his singing career vanished quickly.



“I remember so vividly the effects of the first Karabakh War in Armenia,” recalls Dr. Roger Ohanesian, Founder and President of AECP. “It was the unrest during that time that led to the beginning of the Armenian EyeCare Project. Now, 30 years later, I’m happy to say that because of the AECP’s emphasis on medical education & training, doctors in Armenia are capable of performing complex surgeries and offering top-of-the-line eye care to their countrymen.”

Dr. Georgi Grigoryan, an ophthalmologist in Armenia and one of AECP’s first-ever fellows, successfully performed two complex surgeries on Vahe’s eye, removing the shrapnel and replacing the lens, which allowed Vahe to see again. “I can see my daughter’s beautiful smile now,” says Vahe with immense gratitude. After regaining his sight, life has drastically improved for Vahe as he is now able to work, drive a car, earn his living and enjoy life to the fullest.

“I am deeply grateful to all the donors of the AECP for saving my sight and allowing me to see again, to raise my child, to grow my family and to reach my dreams,” says Vahe with a smile. As Vahe walks up the hill to Yerablur, the burial site of Armenian soldiers who died protecting their homeland, the song praising the bravery of his fallen friends can be heard far and loud. Vahe’s lifelong dream of becoming a singer will come true with the help of AECP’s doctors and generous donors.



**PROTECTIVE EYE GEAR
FOR ARMENIA'S SOLDIERS:
PROTECT THE EYES OF THOSE
WHO PROTECT THE MOTHERLAND**

It's exceedingly clear that due to the continued unrest in the border regions of Armenia, the demand for care among Armenia's soldiers is the greatest it has been since the 1990s, during the first conflict with Azerbaijan. While the AECP continues to prioritize care for Armenia's injured soldiers through prosthetic surgery and other treatment options, our organization noticed a need to provide preventative care for Armenia's soldiers as well.

To address this urgent need, the AECP has launched its "Protect the Eyes of Those Who Protect the Motherland" campaign, which will provide Armenia's soldiers with protective eyewear so that if there is an attack from cluster bombs or other measures, the soldiers' eyes are protected, preventing blindness or serious injury to the eye.

Personal protective eye gear, also known as ballistic eyewear, is a form of glasses or goggles that protect from small projectiles and fragments. Ballistic eyewear offers protection to soldiers from potential injuries during training and combat. Military-grade eyewear also offers visibility enhancement, UV reduction, and ballistic protection from fragments and projectiles in a tactile environment. AECP is working with the Armenian government to ensure the protective equipment meets the needs of Armenia and its military system. Once procured, the shipment will be delivered to Armenia and disseminated among soldiers serving in high-risk border areas and active conflict zones. Thousands of Armenian soldiers need our help! Please consider supporting this vital campaign!



**\$100 WILL PROVIDE ONE SOLDIER WITH
ONE PAIR OF PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR**



From the Desk of:

AECF Country Director Nune Yeghiazaryan

Since December 2022, the Republic of Artsakh has been in blockade. Its people, our compatriots, who live just 100 miles away, have little to no access to food, health care and other basic rights. With both Artsakh and Armenia's border territories at risk, the threat impacts everyone – from a soldier on the border to a villager under shelling to any civilian or organization who lives or works nearby.

Despite these challenges, the AECF is working to provide quality eye care for those in need, paying special attention to families of recent fallen or injured soldiers and those displaced from Artsakh.

We also continue with our mission. This includes the expansion of regional care services through our Diagnostic Eye Clinics, which will complement our existing Regional Eye Centers and Mobile Eye Hospital to synergistically strengthen the overall ophthalmic infrastructure of Armenia.

As well, our partnerships with groups like USAID, CHLA, World Diabetes Foundation, Fund for Armenian Relief and more maintain fruitful results. And we continue to place priority on medical education in Armenia through our participation in International Medical Conferences as well as our initiation of several symposiums among professionals in Armenia and the U.S. We are confident we will overcome any challenges that come our way with help from our supporters, volunteers, partners and community. The AECF is an organization that looks to the future. Let us use our successes and failures from the past to guide us and focus onward as we evolve!

Medical Mission to Armenia

We are pleased to announce our upcoming Medical Mission in Armenia, which will take place October 12-22, 2023. The AECF Mission will include activities like our annual Ophthalmology Conference, Pediatric Conference and visits to our many facilities to meet with patients and physicians and review complicated cases. If you are interested in joining our Mission, please contact us at info@eyecareproject.com



**YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT ENABLES AECF TO
CARRY ON OUR MISSION IN ARMENIA**



LUTHER KHACHIGIAN: REMEMBERING A TITAN

The AECP's board and staff shares our deepest sympathy on the passing of Mr. Luther J. Khachigian. As we say goodbye to our beloved friend, we reflect on Luther's booming personality, love of family, thoughtful generosity, and his relentless desire to give back and make a lasting impact for the people of Armenia. Luther came from humble beginnings as the son of John and Elizabeth Khachigian. His father, "Ohannes," fled his historic homeland as a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, and when settling in Central California the Khachigian family personified the many Armenian immigrant families who made their livings as farmers.

Luther worked alongside his brothers on the family farm through his college years and began his own successful business on one acre leased on the soil where he toiled as a young man. From there, he went on to form his own business and determined to honor his Armenian heritage through charitable giving. A longtime supporter of the AECP, Luther has contributed greatly to our organization's many sight-saving initiatives. This includes the funding of a Regional Eye Center in Gyumri – the *John Ohannes Khachigian AECP Regional Eye Center* – named after Luther's father who Luther loved and respected very much.

"Luther was not only a great supporter and a generous and committed benefactor, but he was also a very dear friend," AECP Founder Dr. Roger Ohanesian shared. "He was instrumental in providing long-term support to various AECP initiatives and always stressed the importance of getting more Armenians involved." Luther's tremendous impact and contribution to eye care in Armenia will be felt for generations to come as thousands of patients continue to be treated at his regional center in Gyumri. He will be sorely missed by us all.



Platinum
Transparency
2023

Candid.

Platinum Transparency Seal

The AECP has been awarded the 2023 Platinum Seal of Transparency on Candid (formerly GuideStar)! This is the highest level of recognition on the world's largest database of nonprofit organizations. The Platinum Seal places our organization in the top 0.1% of nonprofits in the U.S. and indicates that we share clear and important information with the public about our goals, strategies, capabilities, achievements and progress. The AECP is proud to be listed among the top nonprofit organizations in the U.S.!



Mesrop Mashtots Order

During AECP's 62nd Medical Mission to Armenia in 2022, Armenia President Vahagn Khachaturyan awarded the Order of Saint Mesrop Mashtots to AECP Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian. This honor is awarded for outstanding achievements in the areas of health, science, invention, education, culture and social activities in Armenia. Dr. Ohanesian is only the 106th recipient of this prestigious award for his achievements in healthcare and many years of dedicated service to Armenia.



World Diabetes Foundation Recognition

The World Diabetes Foundation (WDF) recently highlighted the work AECP is doing in Armenia for people with diabetes and selected our Country Director Nune Yeghiazaryan as a Diabetes Champion! "Dr. Yeghiazaryan has paved the way for making diabetes eye care available to the Armenian public, making an enormous contribution to reducing the burden of preventable blindness," WDF wrote. "Her work demonstrates that strengthening diabetes eyecare is a vehicle to improving the whole continuum of care for people living with diabetes."

AUGUST IS NATIONAL MAKE-A-WILL MONTH

This National Make-A-Will Month, we would like to emphasize the importance of having an estate plan and the impact planned giving can make in countless lives. By supporting the AECP through planned giving, you can ensure our programs in Armenia continue and Armenians are given the sight-saving care they need and deserve.



Armenian EyeCare Project
100 W. Foothill Blvd., Suite 203
San Dimas, California 91773

Save The Date!

Join us for the most elegant night of the year!



Saturday, December 2, 2023
Balboa Bay Resort
Newport Beach, California

Event reservations and
information: 949-933-4069
www.eyecareproject.com