

Armenia

“Since its foundation in 1982, the Zoryan Institute has been a unique center for the development of contemporary Armenian studies dedicated to objective analysis and intellectual integrity in service of the Armenian People.” These are the words used by the President of Armenia in describing the Zoryan Institute.

The modern history of Armenia may be divided into four broad periods: 1) the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; 2) independent Armenia and the years leading to sovietization; 3) the Soviet era; 4) the post-Soviet era of independence and the problem of Nagorno Karabagh.

In 1987 the Zoryan Institute entered into a joint venture agreement with the Institute of Diaspora Studies in Armenia to study the history and development of different diasporas and exchange scholars for research and lectures. To this end, two scholars were sent from Armenia, one to Canada and one to the US, for the period of a year, to study and collect documents on these two specific diasporas. Zoryan provided the logistics and research assistance to complete the first phase of this project. After the completion of the first phase of documentation, when they returned to Armenia, funds were frozen by the Armenian Government for the research portion of the project due to the political and economic troubles of the newly born state.

Since 1989 the Armenian people have been overwhelmed by the Earthquake, the Karabagh Movement, the war with Azerbaijan, independence, the blockade by Turkey, the collapse of their economy and the loss of one-third of their population, and the assassination in their parliament. The Zoryan Institute studies these events and the factors that have made Armenia the most stable country in the region, in spite of them.

When one examines the Soviet era, Gorbachev’s policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* can not be studied without reference to the Karabagh Movement. This movement was manifested by one million Armenians demonstrating in the streets of Yerevan, demanding the reunification of Nagorno Karabagh with Armenia. This was the first political test of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

The Zoryan Institute’s ability to mobilize its staff and academic board to deal with sudden developments is perhaps best illustrated by its response to the following. When the dynamic events surrounding the Karabagh Movement hit world consciousness in February 1988, it was readily apparent that there was no reliable English language source of information explaining the background to this phenomenon. Within three weeks after the Karabagh Movement gained international attention, the Institute published the authoritative monograph, *The Karabagh File* in English and *Le Dossier Karabagh* in French, to be used as a reference book at the International Conference on Peace and the Media, attended by some three hundred journalists in Moscow in March 1988. This book was the fruit of the Herculean efforts of some twenty-two scholars, writers, secretaries, and office staff.

Within a year of the devastating December 7, 1988 earthquake in Armenia, the Zoryan Institute co-sponsored two major international conferences, in Paris and Yerevan, involving scores of scholars and aid groups, such as Red Cross, Project Hope, Medecins sans Frontières, etc., to analyze what had happened, why it had happened, and what to do to remedy the problems. A

film crew from PBS and three representatives of Zoryan were sent to Armenia to investigate, document, and report on international aid, its implementation, and the corruption associated with it.

After the pogroms against the Armenians in several cities in Azerbaijan, the Institute translated and published *The Sumgait Tragedy: Pogroms against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan. Volume I: Eyewitness Accounts*, by Samvel Shahmuratyan in 1990. The book, which includes a preface by Yelena Bonner, wife of the Russian human rights activist Andrei Sakharov, contained direct interviews with survivors and helped to expose to the international community the atrocities committed by the Azeris and also helped to explain the environment out of which the Karabagh Movement had grown.

During the very turbulent year of 1990, such influential personalities of the Soviet Union as Abel Aganbegyan, Rafael Kazaryan, and Samvel Shahmuratyan were invited on a tour of several North American cities to present the evolving developments of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, their collapse and their influence on newly emerging independent republics.

After independence, the Government of Armenia sought the research assistance of the Institute in such areas as developing a new constitution, election law, etc. In 1989 Zoryan was asked by the Government of Armenia to make its resources and experience available to the President's Dept. of Research and Analysis and actually invited the Director of the Institute, Jirayr Libaridian, and other members of the Institute, to do work in Armenia. Zoryan was asked to assist "our newborn state in ways consistent with its mission."

In 1995, within five years of independence, the Government of Armenia asked the Institute to co-sponsor and jointly organize a major, international conference on the 80th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, bringing together some 35 foreign scholars from 12 countries and 15 from Armenia. This conference was used by the government to launch its political program regarding the genocide.

In 2005, the Government of Armenia again asked the Institute to co-sponsor and jointly organize a major, international conference in Yerevan in commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. With the participation of world leaders known for their moral courage, media and scholars from Turkey and Israel, as well as many other countries, one of the themes of this conference was Armenia's willingness to dialogue with Turkey, but not to forget the Genocide.

In 2010, the Government of Armenia again asked the Institute to jointly organize a major, international conference, this time in São Paulo, Brazil, in commemoration of the 95th anniversary of the Genocide. The theme of the conference was the Armenian Genocide as prototype and precursor of modern genocide.