

## Armenian Environmental Network Launches San Francisco Bay Area Chapter

On January 27, 2013, the Armenian Environmental Network (AEN) marked the launch of its new San Francisco Bay Area Chapter with an event hosted by the University of San Francisco (USF). The event, which was attended by 70 people, was organized in partnership with the University's Department of Environmental Science and the Associated Students of USF Sustainability Committee.



The event began with opening remarks from Jerry Manoukian, president of the Armenian Medical International Committee, who served as Master of Ceremonies throughout the evening. AEN San Francisco Chapter Organizer and Bay Area native, Lilit Markosian, also gave a brief introductory speech in which she related her experience and involvement with AEN. Markosian explained, "The purpose of this event is to inspire members of the Bay Area Armenian community to take initiative and join AEN in its fight for Armenia's environment." She continued, "This is everybody's fight. I hope that after you hear about everything AEN has to offer, you will see AEN as an opportunity to get involved and make a difference."



The first speaker of the evening was Dr. Thomas MacDonald, professor of environmental science at USF, who illustrated examples of international and local environmental issues, which have been addressed by means of grassroots movements. Professor MacDonald also expressed USF's support for AEN's new initiative in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Next, Areg Gharabegian, Environmental Committee Chair of Armenian Engineers and

Scientists of America, presented various environmental concerns in Armenia, including deforestation, the poor state of Lake Sevan, and destructive mining.

The last speaker of the evening was Ursula Kazarian, AEN President and Founder, who described the organization's history and development since its inception in 2007, including opening its Yerevan office in 2011. She also highlighted AEN's primary project in Armenia: the Integrated Waste Management Project, which involves a community-based approach to establish the country's first sanitary landfill.

Finally, Kazarian explained AEN’s mission, which she described as two-fold. The first step, she said, “is to inform the Diaspora and the international environmental community about urgent environmental issues affecting Armenia, and the second is to develop that heightened awareness and interest in Armenia’s environment into meaningful partnerships with development professionals and practitioners on the ground in Armenia to create real and lasting change. To achieve this dual mission, it naturally follows that we should establish chapters in various Armenian communities in order to truly ‘think globally and act locally.’” She continued, “AEN is thrilled to find such an active and environmentally informed community in the Bay Area, and we couldn’t be happier with Lilit as our energetic and talented chapter organizer.”



*Greg Manoukian and Kyle DeWitt from the local band Libertine Circle.*

To wrap up the evening, Markosian gave some closing remarks, stating, “AEN is ready and this chapter is ready, all we need is your enthusiasm and your motivation. Having a conscious community is half the battle so at the very least, sign up for AEN email updates. Stay tuned and come to future events”.

Following the presentations and a twenty-minute Q&A, a reception was held with live music provided by Greg Manoukian and Kyle DeWitt from the local band Libertine

Circle. Additionally, a wide array of tasty food and refreshments were donated by two local businesses: La Mediterainee Restaurant and Royal Market and Bakery.

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*AEN’s mission is to increase information sharing and engagement among Armenians, in Armenia and in the Diaspora, and the wider conservation community about environmental issues in Armenia, while facilitating environmentally sustainable development in Armenia through responsible partnerships of Diasporan and international resources. Please visit the website [www.armenia-environment.org](http://www.armenia-environment.org).*

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Photo Credit: Ruzanna Markosian