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DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

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Առաջնորդ

ARCHBISHOP HAIGAZOUN NAJARIAN
Primate

STATEMENT BY HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP HAIGAZOUN NAJARIAN

Beloved Members of the Armenian Community in Australia

As mentioned in my previous statement, I now take the opportunity to expand further on my recent remarks in the Parev-TV interview.

The interview with the Armenian Radio Hour of New Jersey (31/5/2020) conducted by Vartan Abdo, had as its main topic the Coronavirus in Australia and its effects on the Armenian Church and the Armenian community.

Those who saw the interview in its entirety will recall that the first part, conducted in English, concerned the State of New South Wales and the achievements against the virus through the dedicated and hard work of Premier The Honourable Gladys Berejiklian. Also, in my capacity as the Patriarchal Legate of India and the Far East, I provided an overview on the mission of the Armenian Church in this region.

The second part of the interview in Armenian, dealt with the mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Australia with a general reference to the community's history, achievements, its status and future.

It was in this part of the interview that I said, *'those Armenians who could not go to the USA, Canada or Europe came to Australia'*.

I am sorry that those words have created an unfortunate and unintended impression of me being critical of those early pioneers to Australia and of demeaning their memory.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I have an exceptionally high regard and respect for the early Australian Armenian pioneers. Indeed, my concluding remark in the Parev TV interview was, *"I am fortunate that I have the opportunity to enjoy the company of this senior generation"*.

The purpose of the remark was not to pass judgement on these earliest Armenian migrants who chose to settle here nor denigrate Australia. I know that there were highly educated people amongst them and more importantly they were all highly motivated to start a new life for themselves and their children.

I fully understand there were many Armenians who chose Australia as their sole destination.

However, it also is true that in many cases Australia was not the first choice of many people; probably not because of their attributes but because of quotas or other immigration regulations.

Since my arrival as Primate to this Diocese, I have come to learn more about the origins and settlement of the early Armenian migrants to Australia.

In fact, much of the documented history of Armenian arrivals into Australia is very well covered in the work of Mr James Kirkland in his landmark doctoral thesis titled, *'Armenian Migration Settlement and adjustment in Australia with special reference to the Armenians in Sydney'* published in 1980 for the Australian National University,

As Mr Kirkland's book confirms, when Australian migration policy opened up in the 1960's, opportunity became available for many who either did not want to wait for quota systems in the aforementioned countries or had visas rejected.

The attributes and educational standard of people who came to Australia was in many cases identical to those who went to the UK, the USA, Canada and Brazil. This is also confirmed by Mr Kirkland.

The second of my remarks which also has been criticised was, *‘Unfortunately, not so well-educated people have settled here’*.

I regret the way this has been taken and the impact it has had on our community.

I accept that I could have chosen other words or provided a more detailed explanation as to what I actually meant to communicate.

In fact many of those early Armenian settlers who may not have possessed University degrees were highly prized craftsmen, tradesmen and skilled workers who contributed greatly to the development of Australian industry and economy punching well above their weight.

Perhaps I should have placed a greater emphasis on how, from these humble beginnings, we now have such a strong, vibrant, diverse Australian Armenian community complete with churches, schools, sporting, cultural, welfare and political organisations and a full-service nursing home.

I am very blessed and honoured to have been given the opportunity to be part of and to serve this Australian Armenian community.

It is highly regrettable that some media organisations did not provide me with the opportunity to clarify my statements before publishing critical articles and opinions online.

Had I been contacted directly I would have expressed the above sentiments and perhaps the community outrage and negative comments to me and our beloved Church might have been avoided.

Those who know me recognise my care and love for my community. They know that together with our Diocesan, Ecclesiastical and Parish Councils, I work hard to achieve unity and togetherness based on Christian values across our whole community.

There is a lot to be done to ensure that the efforts of those early pioneers were not in vain. It is imperative that we all work together and be mutually supportive to ensure that our churches, schools, social, sporting, political and charitable organisations continue to be the natural spiritual and cultural anchorage for future generations of Armenians, in this free and democratic country where cultural diversity is valued.

The doors of the Armenian Church are open to all. It is your church and we the clergy are its servants. It is your direct personal involvement and support that will ensure its survival and service to the Community. It is my continued hope and prayer that our community flourishes, and the souls of our children are filled with love towards one another for the benefit of our national and ecclesiastical organisations.

16 June 2020
