

Letter from Coordinator

Eliza Minasyan



Dear Partners,
In this issue you will find stories of resolve, courage and ingenuity in the face of the tragic, and often unforeseeable, consequences

of war. Our organization has brought compassion where there is brutality, dedication where there was neglect, and adaptability even when the obstacles surround us on all sides.

As the armed conflict in Syria has unfolded with unexpected magnitude, there was no preparation for the great loss, terror and displacement that still continues unchecked. Despite these challenges, our commitment to bringing hope and healing to those in greatest need remains undeterred.

"We can instill hope for those desperate to know they are not alone."

Our strategy refocused on emergency assistance: alleviating suffering and addressing severe medical issues. Yet their physical needs are only the beginning of the horror and grief in their hearts. We can instill hope for those desperate to know they are not alone and pray with them earnestly for peace.

War reverberates for generations after the weapons are laid down, and so in Armenia we are seeking and serving veterans who believed they were abandoned.

Thank you for joining us in this work of relief, development and spiritual uplift. None of it could be done without your encouragement and support.

Travel to Armenia and witness our exciting work first-hand

Annual Study Tours in June and September
www.pcusa.org/armenia-studytour

Discover Armenia's exquisite history and culture. Experience rural life, visit Armenian families and meet young people impacting society. See Jinishian Memorial Foundation in action and how you can become involved in making positive social change.

Courage and Compassion: An Interview with Talin Topalakian, Syria Country Director

How did the Armenian community come to be in Syria?

Armenian roots have been in Syria for centuries. But since 1915 the population increased because genocide survivors were warmly welcomed. Although it was initially difficult, little by little, Armenians became an important part of the Syrian mosaic.

Since 1966 the Jinishian Memorial Program has always been there for the vulnerable and poor, and we are now well-known as a neutral charitable organization serving in Damascus, Aleppo (an industrial, Armenian core), and the agricultural area of Kamishly.

How are you weathering this war now going on two years?

These days are very difficult and sometimes very hopeless. We have casualties within our community. Nearly everybody is worried about the future and praying for stability; even the middle class must now apply for help. In every time and place we have the poor, but nowadays Syrians face many dangers.

And yet you came into your role as Country Director just a few months ago. How did you make that choice?

That timing was the biggest challenge for me. My desire was to serve the largest number of Armenians in need, regardless of their religious, social or political affiliation. I sought moral satisfaction and deeper empathy. Martin Luther King said, "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness."

Where does that courage come from?

Although our Jinishian Memorial Program family lives with all these dangers personally, we feel responsible for our community. Saving someone's life, giving shelter to a homeless child, giving hope to an abandoned, elderly and sick person, helping an unemployed breadwinner—this gives happiness to our hearts, and we can forget our own troubles a bit.

The more we give, the more God's love grows in us. If we don't help and love each other here, we can't love a God whom we don't see. "God is love, whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

What do you hope for, Talin? What would you wish our readers to know?

Our most important dream is for peace to implement projects with our partners and help Armenian families rebuild their lives.

Although some have left Syria temporarily, the majority struggle to survive here. I want to thank all those who support us. Together, we can give hope to one more family. Armenians in Syria need you more than ever because they trust this organization that has always been beside them.



Armenians have always been hard workers. Families who lost factories, shops or other jobs find ways to meet daily expenses. Photo by Talin Topalakian.

Talin's Prayer of Hope

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you . . ." (Isaiah 41:10)

We trust you, O Lord. You are the solid rock upon which we build our lives, and we pray and ask you to give peace to our hearts, to our country and to the whole world. Peace comes with forgiving and loving. We gain strength by loving each other. We cannot live on this earth without faith, hope and love. Only your promises give us hope and courage during these difficult days.

*"And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will restore, support, strengthen, and establish you."
(1 Peter 5:7-10)*

Hope and Healing for Nagorno-Karabakh War Veterans

By Alina Hovhannisyian, Armenia

The sad reality of the Artsakh War (Nagorno-Karabakh, 1988-1994) is that it wounded the soul of each person living there. It took away thousands of lives, and left children orphaned. Nothing is forgotten, but life goes on, and what else can we do? Some say they would rather have died in the war than continue to live as they do.

Armen is one of those people. Born in Hadrut town, he became a war veteran by age 21, traumatized psychologically and physically. During military action in Meliqashen village, he was seriously injured and his leg was surgically removed. It was 1993. His head and lungs were affected as well. Armen received medical assistance in Hadrut and Stepanavan hospitals. But another stab in the back was waiting at home. The girl he loved did not want contact with a handicapped man. Armen's health was getting worse and worse. He did not want to communicate with people. In 2005 memory loss problems arose. Armen lived with his family, who were all very vulnerable. They were on the list for receiving an apartment until...

Outreach visits by health care workers brought hope to 91 of the most vulnerable disabled Karabakh war veterans last year.

Someone finally heard his story when he was 35. Mareta Sargsyan, a nurse from Lady Cox Rehabilitation Center, visited Armen as part of a Jinishian Memorial Foundation project in Stepanakert. His mental and physical health was deteriorating.

Several days after his transport to Lady Cox Rehabilitation Center, Armen's physical state and behavior

started to change. He became more sociable, communicating with other handicapped people and participating



After fourteen years of loneliness and suffering from his war injuries, Armen's eyes show a glimmer of hope since his treatment through the Lady Cox Rehabilitation Center.

in different trainings. This small but significant improvement let us hope that, with assistance from professional medical staff, Armen will heal and one day, he will be able to overcome health barriers independently and start loving and enjoying life again.

Many people like Armen in different parts of Nagorno-Karabakh need our support. We began offering health care to disabled individuals there in 2007. Last year alone, 300 outreach visits brought hope to 91 of the most vulnerable disabled Karabakh war veterans through appropriate, professional health care. Based on patient need, the Jinishian team provides medicine, equipment, medical care and psychological support.

Lebanon Partners Overcome Tremendous Odds to Serve Syrian Influx

By Seta Pamboukian, Lebanon Country Director

Hundreds of thousands of people have crossed into Lebanon to escape the violence in neighboring Syria. Immediately they find unemployment, a high cost of living, and diminished funding from abroad. Resources are scarce due to the overwhelming need amongst both the Lebanese and the Syrians. But it is our mission to "serve the least of these" and to enable them to move from poverty and despair to self-sufficiency and hope.

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me..." (Matt. 25:35-36).

With this spirit of the scriptures, Jinishian Memorial Program-Lebanon is responding to the needs of Syrian refugees in our midst.

As of September 6, 2012 our social worker and community health workers started receiving Syrian

displaced people who applied for assistance. We offered medication for chronic illness, minor medical exams, and hospitalization. Because of good networking with our partners, the applicants were referred to dispensaries, laboratories and hospitals and secured major discounts or other savings. We made successful job placements for some employment seekers, and many families received food parcels.

Through continuous contact with our Aleppo colleagues, we were able to verify clients from Syria, and continue financial assistance to those clients in Lebanon, primarily for medical reasons, by transferring the Jinishian Memorial Program funds. Whenever needed, we made home visits. When new applicants came for aid—with some fact-finding into the socio-economic situation of the family—we worked with them to create an atmosphere of mutual trust.

The Armenian community in Lebanon is working diligently to coordinate the assistance given and to seek additional sources for



Through Jinishian partnerships and referrals, many families received household sanitary products, food and blankets from the Lebanese High Commission for Relief. Photo by Ashnag.

anticipated needs among the displaced. Dispensaries and medical centers offered their services for free, and Armenian schools did not ask for tuition payment for all those who claimed to be needy. The Howard Karagheuzian Commemorative Corporation provided transportation to the offices of the United Nations High Commission for Relief where they registered to receive assistance.

Human need in these times has multiplied beyond belief—initial civil unrest in Syria has given way to heavily armed insurgents and acts of war leaving a toll of death and destruction that still appears to have no end. And yet through cooperation and hope, we are meeting the needs before us. People are grateful, yet they are homesick. Jinishian Memorial Program-Lebanon is committed with a Christian spirit to help these, our brothers and sisters.