



## Armenian Jewellers Association Founding Report Genesis

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### Genesis executive summary

The AJA Founding report is a collective testament to historic events that led to the creation of the Armenian Jewellers Association (AJA). AJA president Gagik Gevorkyan mandated Pierre Akkelian to prepare the report.

The founding of the association occurred in four distinct stages.

- The vision to create the international AJA was followed by the formulation of the concept and the formation of the initial team that organised the first international assembly of Armenian jewellers.
- The first assembly of international Armenian jewellers, which took place in Yerevan on September 17-19, 1997 where participants unanimously decided to launch AJA.
- The second international gathering of Armenian jewellers, which took place in Basel Switzerland in April 1998 where participants elected a board to organise the second assembly in Yerevan.
- The second Assembly of Armenian Jewellers in Yerevan on October 2-4, 1998 where delegates formally approved the founding bylaws.

All jewellers who took part in the first 1997 assembly in Yerevan, individuals elected as members of the Board in Basel and those who signed the initial AJA bylaws of 1998 are **Founding Members of Armenian Jewellers Association**.

**Garnik Nanagoulian, Hratch Gaspar and Gagik Yeghiazarian** immensely contributed to the creation of the organisation as representatives of the government of Armenia; they are **Founding Members of AJA**.

**Pierre Akkelian** proposed the idea to create AJA and together with **Vartkess Knadjian** promoted and organised the first Yerevan Assembly, they are **Founding Fathers / Founders of the Armenian Jewellers Association**.

Armenian Jewellers Association serves the interests of Armenians involved in the jewellery industry regardless of their geographic location. It is the preeminent medium by which Armenians contribute to the advancement of the jewellery industry and nation building.

AJA's remarkable achievements are testaments to what is possible when Armenians from around the world collaborate to achieve common goals. AJA is also an exemplary prototype for collaborations between the private sector and state representatives and institutions.

Armenians are to the jewellery what the Swiss are to watch making; AJA is the proud bearer of this legacy making all Armenians proud. The Association is home to everyone in the industry and belongs to every righteous Armenian jeweller.

The Founding Report is a work in progress with shortcoming which we hope to correct with contributions from all those who participated in the creation of the organisation.

We welcome and encourage everyone involved to submit additional information, documents, pictures and videos that they possess. Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned for submissions and corrections that will complement and enhance the accuracy of the report.

Respectfully submitted,

Pierre Akkelian

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### The Founding of the Armenian Jewellers Association

#### The Mandate

On AJA's 15th Anniversary, AJA President Gagik Gevorkian requested that an accurate and incontestable version of AJA's history be prepared and made available to members.

On behalf of AJA Board, the president mandated Pierre Akkelian to prepare the historic account of the founding of AJA in collaboration with all active participants.

The final report and all individual submissions alongside curriculum vitae of founding members, news & magazine articles [D-31], relevant documents, photographs and videos will become part of AJA archives for posterity.

The testimonials of the founding members of AJA are to serve as the collective authentication of the history and origins of the organisation. All active participants who founded AJA are invited to present their statements and recollection of events that lead to the establishment of the association.

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## The Founding of the Armenian Jewellers Association

### The Report

The creation of AJA occurred in four distinct stages.

- 1. Stage One:** The vision to create AJA, followed by the incubation period to propagate the idea and to gauge support. The formation of the initial team that successfully organised the first international gathering in 1997 of the Armenian jewellers in Yerevan Armenia.
- 2. Stage two:** September 17-19, 1997 the first international assembly of Armenian jewellers in Yerevan "The Founding Assembly". The collective decision of those assembled to launch the Armenian Jewellers Association.
- 3. Stage Three:** April 1998 the meeting of Armenian Jewellers in Basel Switzerland to elect members of the first AJA Board, followed by the second board meeting in Antwerp Belgium on June 13-14, 1998.
- 4. Stage Four:** October 2-4, 1998 the second international Armenian Jewellers Assembly held in Yerevan. The approval of the official by-Laws of the Armenian Jewellers Association.

The participants, of each stage are to approve the final document that will be submitted to the AJA President to form the official and incontestable version of the history of the creation of AJA. Dissenting opinions from the majority will be duly noted in the report.

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### Stage One Report

The original vision to create the AJA and the first Armenian jewellers assembly in Yerevan

October 8, 1995. Tokyo, Japan. [P-01, P-01a, P-01b]

Pierre Akkelian presents his vision to create Armenian Jewellers Association to his friend [T-02] Vartkess Knadjian.

To launch the association, Pierre suggests inviting prominent Armenian jewellers from around the globe to meet in Yerevan with the aim of:

- A. Creating the international network of Armenian jewellers that can be instrumental in assisting and creating trading opportunities with one another.
- B. To meet, advise, and work with industry members in the newly independent Armenia to provide them global expertise and access to international markets.

Pierre and Vartkess undertake the responsibility to discuss and promote the concept to their respective circle of Armenian friends and contacts in the jewellery industry.

October 10, 1995. Kobe, Japan.

Pierre Akkelian discusses and receives a strong support from Pierre Hajjar, one of the leading pearl dealers in the world. Hajjar commits to participate in the conference in Yerevan if and when one is organised.

October 24, 1995. New York, USA.

At the GIA League of Honor reception at the Plaza Hotel, Pierre and Vartkess discuss with Bill Boyadjian, the illustrious President of GIA, the AJA concept and the plan to hold an assembly in Yerevan. Bill expresses his support

and encouragement to go ahead with the plan.

As the President of (CJA) Canadian Jewellers Association, Pierre is a VIP guest at the opening ceremonies of GIA headquarters and Mouawad campus in Carlsbad California on May 28, 1997. On that occasion, Pierre officially invites Bill to attend the Yerevan assembly and conference. Bill promises to attend if his schedule permits it. Bill provides Pierre a concise list of prominent Armenian Jewellers to invite.

Pierre follows-up with a letter of invitation on July 22, 1997 [D-17]

#### **October 25, 1995. New York, USA.**

Pierre & Vartkess meet Louise Simone Manoogian, President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in her Manhattan office and present her with AJA's vision and concept. They ask Louise for recommendations and assistance in order to hire conference organisers in Yerevan.

Louise Manoogian is sceptical about the success of the AJA project; nevertheless, she offers the services of AGBU office and staff in Yerevan to assist in local logistics for the first Assembly. Vartkess is the president of AGBU Belgium and Pierre is a lifelong and active member of AGBU. [P-07]

#### **October 1995. Ottawa, Canada.**

Pierre Akkelian introduces AJA's vision to [T-01] Garnik Nanagoulian, the first Ambassador to Canada of the Republic of Armenia. Gagik unequivocally supports the AJA idea and encourages him to go ahead with plans.

Garnik Nanagoulian served as the first Ambassador to Canada for the Republic of Armenia from Jan 1995 - Oct 1996.

Garnik and Pierre met in early 1995 through a group called Friends of the Armenian Embassy in Canada [P-02d], with the help of their mutual friend Hrach Gaspar. Pierre was an active member of the group that supported the establishment of Ottawa's Armenian Mission 4 years after the creation of the Republic of Armenia on the September 21, 1991. Hrach was entrusted with trade and technical backing portfolios at the mission.

Pierre and Vartkess continuously promote AJA's concept to respective contacts and to Armenian jewellers they meet at international shows.

#### **Vicenza January 1996 - Basel April 1996 (and again in 1997)**

Pierre meets Tzolac Momjian of Israel and Ruben Hagopian of USA who are very supportive and interested; as are Hagop Dakessian and Harouth Manjerian of Lebanon.

#### **Antwerp Belgium.**

Vartkess discusses the project with Armenian colleagues involved in the Diamond industry.

No concrete action is taken to hold an assembly in 1996.

#### **October 1996 Yerevan.**

Garnik Nanagoulian is appointed Minister of industry and Trade of Armenia and serves in that capacity from October 1996 to December 1998.

Levon Ter-Petrosian is the President of Armenia (Oct. 1991- Feb. 1998) and Robert Kocharyan the Prime Minister (March 1997- April 1998).

Initially due to family constraints and obligations, Garnik Nanagoulian maintains close ties with Canada occasionally commuting back and forth between Montreal, Ottawa and Yerevan.

#### **December 1996 Montreal, Canada.**

Garnik & Pierre meet in Montreal at Canadian Gem office where Pierre is founder and President. Garnik visits Canadian Gem offices to congratulate Pierre for his election as the President of the Canadian Jewellers Association (CJA), [P-02bind] the first Canadian of Armenian origin to the post since its inception in 1918.

Pierre informs Garnik of the positive feedback received from industry friends and colleagues for AJA concept and the willingness of those contacted to attend an Assembly in Yerevan.

Pierre requests Garnik Nanagoulian, the newly appointed Minister, to assist with the logistics of organising a conference in Yerevan.

Garnik Nanagoulian is extremely supportive and promises to secure Armenian government decision in this regard and to solicit local industry participation. Subsequently, the Minister informs the Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan about AJA plans and receives his approval and support.

Garnik asks Pierre to discuss the launch of AJA and plans to hold an international assembly of Armenian jewellers with Hratch Caspar and to formulate a detailed request and course of action to his Ministry. Hratch and Pierre have worked closely on various Montreal Armenian community projects and served on the Board of Canadian Armenian Business Council.

#### **March 10, 1997 Montreal, Canada.**

Hratch and Pierre hold one of many meetings in Pierre's Montreal office to discuss the First "Armenian Jewellers Assembly" to establish a transnational networking and support system devoted to the development of international trade and the Armenian Jewellery Industry. The plan of action consists of the following:

- To organize the assembly on September 21, 1997 in conjunction with the sixth anniversary of the Armenian Independence Day.
- To formally designate two executive presidents, one for North America (Pierre), one for Europe (Vartkess), an honorary president, a person of international fame and name recognition (i.e. Haig Arslanian) and the official coordinator (Hratch)
- To request government of Armenia ministerial level patronage of the event.
- To make the assembly by-invitation event, to only invite leading Armenian jewellers from the Diaspora and leading industry figures in Armenia.
- Request a registration fee from participants to cover costs.

#### **April 25, 1997 Yerevan, Armenia.**

Minister Nanagoulian in a letter [D-01] addressed to Pierre confirms receipt of the AJA proposal, commenting that he finds it a "very interesting and very exciting project". The Minister unequivocally supports the project "to make it a big success".

Pierre and Hratch begin the arduous task of compiling the list, submitted by various sources, of industry leaders from around the world to forward the invitation letters [D-06]. Armenian Embassies, there were only a handful at the time, USA, France, Egypt, Greece, and Moscow were formally asked to supply names of prominent Armenian jewellers in their respective countries and provide logistical support for the conference. Vartkess provides a contact list of Armenian diamantaires in Belgium.

Minister Nanagoulian's office begins the logistical planning of the assembly, supplying quotes [D-02] from tour operators and makes tentative arrangements for the September event.

In Armenia, Minister Nanagoulian entrusts deputy minister Gagik Yeghiazarian [T-04] with the task to coordinate and begin the planning phase by contacting industry representatives, supplying quotes from tour operators and making tentative arrangements for the September assembly.

Through the offices of Armintour office, which also falls under the Minister's supervision, all-necessary arrangements at the Armenia (Later-Marriott) Hotel are secured. The official event takes place at the Mirrors Hall of Armenia II Hotel. [D-04]

Hratch maintains communication and regularly reports to Pierre & Vartkess [D-03a] on developments from his end and the Armenia side [D-03]. Ani Mardian and other experts also lend their support from the Ottawa mission and regularly report.

To lend strong credibility to the invitation letters, Pierre, Hratch and Vartkess decide to secure the participation and the appointment of an honorary president, someone with the credibility and international industry recognition.

#### **June 29, 1997. Antwerp, Belgium.**

Vartkess visits Haig Arslanian's Antwerp office on June 29 and joins Pierre on a conference call to discuss the project. Pierre asks Haig to become the honorary President of the assembly. The honorary Presidency of AJA was symbolic in nature and required no financial contributions; nevertheless, Haig refuses to get involved.

The Arslanians are internationally renowned as one of the world's top rough diamond dealers. They were also heavily involved in Armenia with the launch of Lori Diamond Co. factory in 1992-93 employing approximately 200 people. (Note: The new Lori factory building was inaugurated during the AJA Assembly in 1997).

Vartkess suggests a new strategy to secure Haig's involvement.

#### **June 30th, 1997. Ottawa, Canada**

Hratch places an official call on behalf of the government of Armenia mission to request Haig's participation.

Hratch stresses the key role AJA is able to play to lobby the government and improve policies and regulations for the diamond cutting and polishing industry in Armenia. Haig accepts the role of the honorary presidency of the first Armenian Jewellers Assembly in Yerevan. [D-08] [D-09]

The ensuing invitation to Yerevan gathering letter heading read:

**Armenian jewellers Assembly (AJA) Yerevan 1997.**

**Patron, His Excellency Garnik Nanagoulian**  
Minister of Industry and Trade Republic of Armenia.

**Honorary President, Mr. Haig Arslanian**  
Belgium.

**Executive President (North America) Mr. Pierre Akkelian,**  
President Canadian Jewellers Association, Canada.

**Executive President (Europe) Mr. Vartkess Knadjian,**  
Belgium.

**Coordinator, Mr. Hratch Gaspar,**  
Special Assistant, Embassy of Armenia Canada.

**July 22, 1997.**

Invitation letters to the Yerevan assembly signed by Pierre Akkelian as the President of Canadian Jewellers Association, Montreal Canada and Vartkess Knadjian, Antwerp Belgium are mailed and faxed from the Armenian mission in Ottawa and from Canadian Gem Montreal office. The letters included a draft AJA Mission statement, objectives, organisational structure, and Founding Assembly details.

Over 50 Invitations to the Founding Assembly accompanied with AJA mission statement, objectives and registration forms signed by Pierre & Vartkess are forwarded from Canada to an international list of VIP Armenian Jewellers such as Haytayan of USA and Chenorhokian of France [D-07].

Armenian embassies are asked to solicit and forward invitations to key jewellers from their respective countries. Registration payments are to be made to c/o embassy of Armenia in Ottawa.

**July 31, 1997. Yerevan, Armenia.**

Letters signed by Minister Nanagoulian [D-05] (back-dated 29 June, 1997 with the wrong assembly dates Sept 17-21 instead of 17-19) were forwarded from Ottawa mission addressed to "participants". The Embassy in Washington also forwards invitations to some US Armenian media contacts.

**31 July 1997. Ottawa, Canada.**

Follow-up letters and faxes signed by Hratch Gaspar with Cc. to Pierre Akkelian are dispatched to key industry contacts and invitees, i.e. Tsolag Momjian of Israel & Hagop Dakessian of Lebanon. [D-10] [D-11]

The fax includes the list of 50 invitees already contacted and a plea to help organisers identify missing names and once again solicit wider participation.

Hratch travels to Armenia in June 1997 on a separate mission. During the trip, he discusses with Minister Nanagoulian and his coordinating team scheduling and organisational details. Hratch returns to Armenia in early August and once more follows up with the details of event organisation.

A last attempt to secure participation is made by follow-up telephone calls. Hratch entrusts the task to Ani Mardian, an Ottawa resident and a volunteer supporter of the Ottawa mission and the Embassy. Ani continues calling potential participants and new names provided by various contacts. Due to international time zone differences, she often places the calls from home [T-05].

Hratch initially receives 22 positive responses such as the one from Harout Missirian of Lebanon [D-16]; also many regrets [D-14] [D-15] [D-17] from Varoujan Iskanderian & Der Bedrossian from Australia, Bill Boyadjian from USA. Congratulatory notes from Keverians of Australia [D-18] and few scolding letters, i.e. from Varoujan Knouni [D-21] for not allowing enough time for participants to plan the trip.

Hratch forwards conference registration and hotel reservation forms, [D-13] visa information [D-23] etc. to those interested to take part [D-20]. As the Assembly date draws close, not a single check is received for registration fees.

August 27, 1997. Ottawa, Canada.

During Hratch's trip to Armenia, Ani Mardian reports to Pierre [D-19] the tally for attendees. There are only 3 confirmations and 7 serious considerations. Many regrets.

Pierre immediately calls Minister Nanagoulian to discuss a possible postponement of the assembly due to ever-increasing cancellations and lack of participants. Minister Nanagoulian encourages Pierre not to postpone the assembly and go ahead even if only "a handful of you jewellers participate".

Eleven (11+2) jewellers took part in the historic first Assembly. 4 from Europe, 2 from Canada, 1 from USA and 1 from Lebanon, joined by two jewellers from USA who happened to be visiting Armenia and learned from mass media about the Assembly.

Approximately 16 delegates from Armenia participated, including 3 heads of government owned Jewellery and diamond companies, the representative of a synthetic diamond manufacturing company, industry related mining and government department representatives, and academia.

The list of official participants:

ARMENIA: GAGIK ABRAHMYAN, SERGEY ABRAHMYAN, EMILE GRIGORYAN

BELGIUM: HAIK ARSLANIAN, HAMPIC IPEKDJIAN, VARTKESS KNADJIAN

CANADA: PIERRE AKKELIAN, VAHE ISNAR

DENMARK: EDWARD KUYUMDJIAN,

LEBANON: HAROUT MISSIRIAN

USA: SARKIS KITSINIAN plus RALPH RAPHAYELIAN, SAMUEL CHEKIJIAN

GOA: GARNIK NANAGOULIAN, HRATCH GASPAS, GAGIK YEGAZARIAN

A dozen, industry related government representatives and academia took part in various conferences and gatherings.



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## Stage two Report

The first international assembly of Armenian jewellers in Yerevan.

September 17-19, 1997.

The Founding Assembly in Yerevan is a resounding success beyond expectations. The official three-day packed agenda [D-25]. [Arm D-26] accords participants the opportunity to meet industry representatives from around the world, exchange ideas, form consensus, share common visions and unequivocally endorse the creation of the Armenian Jewellers Association.

The active participation of the government of Armenia insured the success of the first international Armenian jeweller's assembly. Minister Nanagoulian, Deputy Minister Gagik Yeghiazarian [D-27], and specially Hratch Gaspar from the Armenian embassy in Ottawa were instrumental in the success of the assembly.

The assembly plenary meetings took place in the Armenia Hotel II, which had been recently privatised and was to operate as a Marriott [D-17] [D-17a]. The three-day agenda is organised into morning plenary sessions, offsite meetings and visits in the afternoons. The first two-day plenary meetings are informative sessions and the third reserved for organisational discussion and decisions.

September 17, 1997.

Gagik Yeghiazarian, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade presides over the opening plenary. [P-03] Minister Nanagoulian welcomes delegates, congratulates the organising team, and delivers a welcome message of best wishes for successful deliberations from the Prime Minister Kocharian. Natural resources Minister Sargis Shahazian's message and reports [Arm D-29] are delivered by his representative Kevork Sargsyan. .

The honorary President of the assembly Haig Arslanian, who is also the honorary consul of Armenia in Belgium presents his welcoming message, followed by a presentation of the mission and objectives of the Armenian Jewellers Assembly by Co-founders Pierre Akkelian [D-32] and Vartkess Knadjian. All participants introduce themselves, their businesses and the status of the jewellery industry in their respective countries.

In the afternoon delegates visit state owned Yerevan Jewellery plant managed by its director Emile Grigorian. The plant, during pre-independence days, employed over 3000 people but is now operating at less than 10% capacity. Here, delegates reviewed a specially assembled exhibition of jewellery and silverware and received memorabilia made by the factory. [D-28a]. (Note: the resemblance of AJA original logo prepared by Gagik Y in collaboration with Pierre).

Jewellers then visited Echmiadzin and had an audience with his holiness Karekin I. [P-04]. After introductions and a brief presentation of AJA mission by Pierre Akkelian [P-04a], The Catholicos of all Armenians delightfully praised the group for their noble cause. Thereafter, the Holy Father shared the spiritual and economic projects with the jewellers that the church is involved with in these difficult times. Delegates then toured Echmiadzin church and museum. [P-05] [P-06]

## September 18, 1997.

Vartkess Knadjian presides over the second day plenary. Minister of Finance and economy Armen Darbinian is represented by deputy minister Eduard Muratian, Boris Haroutiunian, Director of EDIPA Economic Development and Investment promotion agency, Aram Vardanian, president of the Union of Entrepreneurs, Garegin Chougazian, chief of information and publishing directorate, Gagik Yeghiazarian, Emil Grigorian [Arm D-28] and Gagik Abrahamian [D-28b] present current business conditions and future prospects of the Jewellery industry in Armenia.

The assembly participants accompanied by Minister Nanagoulian visit Shoghaken [P-08] government owned and administered largest diamond factory where Backes & Srtaus rough diamonds are cut and polished. Gagik Abrahamyan the Director-administrator of the factory treats visitors to a tour, followed with a scrumptious lunch [P-08a] where he presents 40-year-old top of the line cognac bottles [P-09] each personalised with the names of Diaspora participants.

Assembly participants are then invited to take part in the official opening and ribbon cutting ceremony by Minister Nanagoulian of Lori Diamond cutting plant, owned and operated by Haig Arslanian's family [P-10] [P-11] [P-12].

The Assembly delegates are the first foreign group invited to visit the completely renovated Central Bank of Armenia. Central Bank President Bagrad Assadrian proudly presented the gold jewellery treasures, some dating back to 3000BC, on loan and display at the head office of the bank. On that occasion, Gagik Abrahamian's friend Bagrad Assadrian treats the guests to dinner.

The assembly program included lunch provided by the Armenia Hotel [P-15]. Delegates also had time to visit touristic sights [P-16] and returned to Echmiadzin to partake in Sunday mass celebrated by Catholicos of all Armenians. [V-xx]

## September 19, 1997.

Pierre Akkelian presides over the third day plenary with meetings dedicated to organisational matters [P-03bind]. The name of the organisation, its mission, membership, formation of the board, Executive Director - secretariat, database of Armenian jewellers worldwide, creation of the website, promotional-marketing materials [D-30] and AJA participation in the Basel show, etc. are formally discussed. Voting takes place by show of hands resulting with the following decision:

- To formally name the organisation Armenian Jewellers and Gem dealers Association.
- To organise the second Armenian Jewellers assembly in Yerevan, immediately following the Baselworld Fair in 1998.
- To promote the 1998 assembly as the official launch of the association.
- To create a committee lead by Pierre Akkelian to prepare draft by-laws for the organisation.
- Delegates from each country are to collect coordinates of Armenian jewellers in their respective countries.
- To create a website for AJA.
- To empower and mandate Haig Arslanian and Sarkis Kitsinian to secure an AJA booth at Baselworld fair in 1998.

One of the most symbolic and memorable events by delegates was the meeting with the Prime Minister Robert Kocharian at his office [P-13][P-14]. The 15 minute scheduled meeting lasted well over an hour due to the Prime Minister's immense interest in exploring the Diaspora potential in vitalizing the Jewellery and diamond sector in Armenia.

The Prime Minister promised to reward AJA a property in central Yerevan to serve as a jewellery centre and to host

a jewellery school [D-24].

Minister Nanagoulian hosted the AJA closing banquet [D-33]

### September 20, 1997.

Assembly organisers are invited to attend a VIP reception hosted by President Der Bedrossian to celebrate the 6th anniversary of the independence of Armenia [D-34] [P-16a] [P-16b]

### September 21, 1997.

Assembly delegates are proud witnesses to the majestic military parade and take part in the celebrations of independence in the central plaza immediately outside the Armenia hotel.

The jeweller's assembly is in the limelight, attracting the attention of great amount of news outlets. AJA is part of daily news features on all Armenian TV channels, radio programs and print media. [Media Index].

AJA's vision shared and supported by Armenian jewellers worldwide started as a discussion amongst friends Pierre & Vartkess. The dream two years earlier on how to best support the nascent jewellery industry in Armenia successfully took form and was realised with the first international gathering of Armenian jewellers on September 17-19, 1997.

The Armenian Jewellers Assembly would not have taken place if free and independent Armenia did not exist.

Kudos to Minister **GARNIK NANAGOULIAN**, **GRATCH GASPAS**, **GAGIK YEGHIAZARIAN** for the organisational work; to the honorary president **Haig Arslanian** for his passionate patriotic leadership; to Diaspora delegates' **PIERRE AKKELIAN**, **HAIK ARSLANIAN**, **SAMUEL CHEKIJIAN**, **EMILE GRIGORYAN**, **HAMPIC IPEKDJIAN**, **VAHE ISNAR**, **SARKIS KITSINIAN**, **VARTKESS KNADJIAN**, **EDWARD KUYUMDJIAN**, **HAROUT MISSIRIAN**, **RALPH RAPHAYELYAN**, who believed in the cause and travelled far to participate; kudos also to local industry leaders **GAGIK AND SERGEY ABRAHANYAB** and **EMILE GRIGORIAN** for their unequivocal support and hospitality.

All seventeen dedicated and visionary individuals named above are the first **Founding Members of the Armenian Jewellers Association**



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## Stage Three Report

### The first international meeting of Armenian jewellers in Basel. (Switzerland), April 26, 1998

One hundred business professionals from more than twenty countries participated in the Basel assembly of the Armenian Jewellers' Association.

After the opening remarks by Mr. Karen Nazarian, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the UN Office in Geneva, Mr. Gagik Yeghiazarian, the Head of the newly established Armenian Development Agency read the address of the President of Armenia, Robert Kocharian [3D-01], to the participants. This was followed by a ceremony honouring Mr. Haik Arslanian, Mr. Vartkess Knadjian (both from Belgium) and Mr. Vahe Isnar (from Canada), with special awards and certificates signed by President Kocharian for their significant contributions toward the development of diamond cutting and jewellery manufacturing in Armenia.

The Assembly elected a board with and Executive Committee of 13 members representing Armenia, Australia, Canada, the CIS, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, the Pacific and the USA. Mr. Haik Arslanian (Honourary Consul of Armenia in Belgium) and Mr. Gagik Abrahamian (Member of the Armenian National Assembly), were elected Co-Chairmen of the Armenian Jewellers' Association, and Mr. Vartkess Knadjian was elected Secretary, Vartan Sirmakes as Treasurer. The Executive Committee granted the title of Honourary Chairman to Kevork (Djanik) Oskanian, from Belgium.

The principle mandate of the elected Board was to organise the second Yerevan assembly with as large participation as possible. The Board was to prepare a draft charter and the groundwork for the official launch of the organisation in Yerevan in the same year.

Vartkess Knadjian coordinated the Basel assembly and dinner which was sponsored by Vartan Sirmakes. Armenian Development Agency headed by Gagik Yeghiazarian and team members Nune Magoyan and Levon Galstyan supported the initiative from Armenia and contributed to its success.

### 2nd Board Meeting

Antwerp (Belgium), June 13-14, 1998.

Following the election of the Board of the Armenian Jewellers' Association in Basel in April 1998, the Second Board Meeting took place in Antwerp on June 13th and 14th.

His Excellency Vigen Tchitechian, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the Benelux countries, NATO and E.U. welcomed the participants and stressed the strategic importance of the jewellery industry for the development of the Armenian economy.

The Board decided to invite Armenian jewellers from all over the world to an Assembly in Yerevan on October 3rd and 4th. The Assembly participants will become familiarised with the aims of the Armenian Jewellers' Association and participating government representatives will outline their policies regarding this strategic sector. The Assembly will be organised by the Armenian Jewellers' Association with the help of the Armenian Development Agency.

The board discussed and decided on multitude of organisational matters.

[3D-02] Report by Nune Magoyan

*To be continued...*

[3D-01] [3P-01] [3P-10] President Kocharian's message to AJA



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## Stage Four Report

### The second international assembly of Armenian jewellers in Yerevan

October 2-4, 1998

The second AJA assembly took place in Marriott hotel Armenia. [4D-01]

Highlights of AJA by-laws prepared by Pierre Akkelian was discussed and after modifications approved by the Board.

The signatories of the by-laws, in addition to the original seventeen members, are Founding Members of Armenian Jewellers Association. [4D-03]

Artinian Yervant, Avakian Edmond, Goukassian Kadjik, Dikidjian Vatche, Istanbulian Grigor [P-17], Knadjian Adom, Kaprielian Hratch, Kolanian Kevork, Minassian Michel, Momjian Tsolag, Oskanian Djanik, Sirmakes Vartan.

Minutes of the Board meeting [4D-04]

*To be continued...*

[P-20] - [P-21] - [P-22] - [P-23] - [P-24] - [P-25] - [P-26]



### STAGE ONE participants:

The synopsis of CV of the members of the initial AJA organising team.

#### PIERRE AKKELIAN

The president and founder of Canadian Gem, a jewellery manufacturing and wholesale company specialising in diamond and pearl jewellery, also producers of Tresoro handmade wedding bands manufactured in Montreal, sold all over the world. In 1995 -1997 Canadian Gem and subsidiaries employed in Canada over 50 people, most of them Armenians.

Pierre joined the Canadian Jewellers Association CJA Board in 1988. In 1995 he was elected as the first-Vice-President and served as President from 1996-1997 of the national organisation (established in 1918) with membership of over 1200 prominent Canadian retail and manufacturing companies. Pierre represented Canada in many International Jewellery conferences. [C-01]

#### VARTKES KNADJIAN

A graduate of London School of Economics, University of London BSc(Hons) Econ. 1976

Joined Backes & Strauss in 1976, became manager in 1982 and President 2003. Established in 1789 Backes and Strauss Co. based in Antwerp Belgium specializes in the trade of polished diamonds.

In 2006 launched a high end diamond jewellery watch brand under the 'Backes & Strauss' name in partnership with Franck Muller Genève.

The Co-Founder of AJA International and active member of the executive, Vartkess served in many capacities as the European President of the AJA, Secretary of the AJA board 1998-2005, Vice President in 2006, President of the AJA 2009.

Vartkess served as the Vice President of the BVGD (Diamond Dealers Association of Belgium). He is a past President of AGBU Belgium, served as a member of Belgian Armenian Elected Chamber in 1994 and as President of the 'Centre Culturel Arpag Mekhitarian' Brussels from 1993 to 2005. [C-03]

#### **HAIG ARSLANIAN**

The President of Arslanian Diamonds, world renowned diamond trading, cutting and polishing company. The founder of Lori diamond manufacturing facilities in Armenia established in 1992/3 that employed approximately 200 people. Also the founder of Arslanian cutting works of Yellowknife Canada.

#### **HRACH GASPAS**

Hrach Gaspar, is an international development consultant working with various international organizations and companies.

In the 1990s he advised the Armenian mission in Ottawa on trade and technical assistance matters. He also acted as ADA Representative in North America and an adviser to the Armenian foreign affairs department on trade and investment. He is an executive board member of the ATN Global Armenian Chamber of Commerce.

#### **GARNIK NANAGOULIAN**

Served as Minister of industry and trade ROA from October 1996 to December 1998. The first Ambassador of Republic of Armenia's Embassy to Canada from Jan 1995 - November 1996. Minister - Counselor and Deputy Chief of Mission ROA Embassy to USA from March 1992 to January 1995. First Secretary and second secretary of USSR Embassy to USA from April 1985 - Feb 1992

Fellow, associate Harvard University 2001, MA International Relations from Academy of Foreign Affairs USSR 1985, MS Physics & Mathematics from Yerevan State University 1975. [C-04]

#### **GAGIK YEGHIAZARIAN**

Gagik has more than 25 years of professional work experience. Of these, 19 years were spent at the consulting arm of Messrs Arthur Andersen legal and tax practice (1994-2000) in Moscow, and subsequently in Yerevan at KPartners JSC - a consulting firm, which he founded and was running as a managing partner since 2000.

In 1997 Gagik quit his job at Andersen and returned to Armenia. He was the Deputy Minister of Privatization and Foreign Investment, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade. Then Andersen hired him back and seconded to Armenian Development Agency to serve as its first CEO. He left ADA in 2000.

He is an investor in number of companies, including Media Partners Armenia (publisher of Cosmopolitan Armenia, and Forbes Armenia), and Media Partners Georgia (publisher of Forbes Georgia), Karat (member of Aegis group) Armenia, KPartners Kazakhstan, earlier Calisto Medical, USA. He is one of the founders and the CEO of Zangi Livecom Pte Ltd., Singapore based company with development base in Armenia: Zangi is competing with Skype and other major market players in internet voice and video telephony with its revolutionary technology and application.

A qualified Armenian lawyer and an internationally certified auditor, Gagik is a graduate of the Harvard University in the United States. He also holds a Master of Business Administration degree from the American University of Armenia (affiliate of UCLA), prior to which time he had completed undergraduate studies at the Yerevan Polytechnic Institute with honours. He is a member of the Armenian Bar Association. [C-06]

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### Document Index (Sorted by #) ▲

- [D-01] April 25, 1997 Armenia. Nanagoulian letter to Pierre confirming receipt of the first assembly plans from Hrach
- [D-02] June 7, 1997 Armenia. Minister Nanagoulian's letter to CJA Canadian Jewellers Association President Pierre Akkelian
- [D-03] June 9, 1997 Canada. Hrach's progress report to Pierre
- [D-04] June 27, 1997 Canada. Hrach's assembly invitation draft forms to Pierre
- [D-05] July 31, 1997 Armenia. Invitations signed by Nanagoulian with the wrong dates
- [D-06] June-Sept, 1997 Montreal, exchange of hand written notes from various sources, jewellers to forward official invitations.
- [D-07] July 22, 1997 Canada. Assembly invitations to Haytayan, USA & Chenorhokian, France
- [D-08] June 30, 1997 Canada. Haig accepts offer for the honorary Presidency
- [D-09] July 31, 1997 Canada. Hrach's letter to Haig Arslanian on AJA letterhead
- [D-10] July 31, 1997 Canada. Follow up letter/fax to Tsolag Momjian, Israel

[D-11] July 31, 1997 Canada. Follow-up letter/Fax to Hagop Dakessian, Lebanon  
[D-12] August 7, 1997 USA. Regret from Bogarz Inc Arzoumanian  
[D-13] August 11, 1997 Canada. Assembly date correction notices by Hrach  
[D-14] August 14, 1997 Australia congratulatory note Iskanderian  
[D-15] 14 August, 1997 Australia. Congratulatory note & regrets by Der Bedrossian  
[D-16] August 15, 1997 Lebanon. Missirian's "Almost confirmation"  
[D-17] August 20, 1997 USA. Bill Boyadjian correspondence with Pierre in regards to the assembly  
[D-18] August 21, 1997 Australia congratulatory note Keverian  
[D-19] August 27, 1997 Canada - Ani Mardian's update report to Pierre following calls to invitees  
[D-20] Sept 11, 1997 Canada. Hrach Gaspar's update to Vartkess regarding assembly agenda, VIP airport transport, accommodation etc.  
[D-21] Sept 11, 1997 Greece. Scolding Fax Varoujan Knouni  
[D-22] Sept 09, 1997 Canada. Pierre's notes to Hrach re the Draft Assembly agenda  
[D-23] Sept 05, 1997 Canada. Visa application to visit Armenia  
[D-24] Nov 21, 1997 Yerevan. Minister Nanagoulian's letter to Pierre to inform Prime Minister's choice of two city center properties for AJA center.  
[D-25] Sept 02, 1997 Canada. Updated 2nd draft Agenda for the upcoming Assembly  
[D-26] Sept 02, 1997 Canada. Armenian version of the draft Agenda  
[D-27] Sept 16, 1997 Yerevan. Welcome letter to Diaspora delegates from Deputy Minister Gagik Yeghiazarian  
[D-28] Sept 18, 1997 Yerevan. Emile Grigorian's presentation  
[D-28a] Sept 18, 1997 Yerevan. Memorabilia made by Yerevan Jewellery Plant presented to delegates  
[D-28b] Sept 18, 1997 Yerevan. Report from Gagik Abrahamian - General Manager Shoghakn  
[D-29] Sept 18, 1997 Yerevan. Natural Minister Shahazizian's message to the assembly delivered by his deputy Kevork Sargsyan  
[D-30] Sept 19, 1997 Yerevan. a draft pamphlet for the association  
[D-31] AJA Magazine article on the origins of AJA  
[D-32] AJA Founding opening Speech Pierre 1997  
[D-33] Sept 19, 1997 Yerevan. Closing banquet invitation from Minister Nanagoulian  
[D-34] Sept 20, 1997 Yerevan. Invitation to Pierre by President Levon Ter-Petrosian's for the sixth independence anniversary celebrations

---

[3D-01] President Kocharian's message to AJA  
[4D-01] Invitation letter to October 3-4, 1998 Yerevan assembly signed by Haik Arslanian  
[4D-03] Signatories of the AJA by-laws. Founding Members of AJA  
[4D-04] Minutes of the Board meeting 2-4 October 1998

---

## Pictures Index ▲

[P-01] 1995 Tokyo. Kazuya Taguchi & Kaori Kato wedding reception in Tokyo  
[P-01a] 1995 Tokyo. President of Japan Jewellers Association Hidetaka Kato, wife and daughter Kaori  
[P-01b] 1995 Tokyo. President of Kashikey Co. & Japan jewellers Association Hidetaka Kato & Oksan  
[P-02bind] The collar of office of the President of the Canadian Jewellers Association. Leaders of 24Karat club & Akkelian Family during the inauguration ceremony  
[P-02d] Mr. & Mrs. Garnik Nanagoulian, Friends of the Armenian Embassy in Canada  
[P-03] AJA opening plenary. Hrach Gaspar, Gagik Yeghiazarian, Haig Arslanian, Pierre Akkelian  
[P-03bind] AJA 3ed day Plenary. (Gagik Y, Vartkess, Pierre, Haig)  
[P-04] AJA audience with Catholicos Karekin I  
[P-05] AJA Co-founders Pierre & Vartkess at Echmiadzin  
[P-06] AJA Pierre & Gagik Y at Echmiadzin  
[P-07] AGBU President Louise Simone Manougian with Pierre & Norma Akkelian in Montreal 1997  
[P-08] Abrahamyan Gagik hosting AJA delegates at Shoghaken. Pierre, Haig, Sarkis Kitsinian, Ralph Raphayelyan, Harouth Missirian, Garnik Nanagoulian, Vartkess, Gagik Abrahamyan.  
[P-08a] Lunch and toasts by each participant at Shohaken  
[P-09] Armenian Cognac for AJA diaspora delegates  
[P-10] Assembly organising committee members at Arslanian Diamond factory  
[P-11] Minister Nanagoulian & AJA delegates at Arslanian factory opening  
[P-12] AJA group photo at Arslanian factory opening  
[P-13] AJA leaders meet the Prime Minister of Armenia Robert Kocharyan  
[P-14] AJA Founder Akkelian & Prime Minister Kocharian  
[P-15] Lunch at Armenia Hotel. Hrach, Pierre, Vartkess, Gagik, Sergey and Vahe Isnar  
[P-16] Visiting the Yerevan Opera, Pierre & Hrach Gaspar  
[P-16a] VIP Invitation from the President of Armenia Levon Der Bedrossian. Pierre, Edward Kuyumdjian, Haig, Army officer, Hampic Ipekjdian, officer, Sarkis Kitsinian, Gagik Y.  
[P-16b] VIP Invitation from the President of Armenia Levon Der Bedrossian. Catholicos Karekin I  
[P-17] Assembly badge for Istanbulian W compliments L Galstyan  
[P-20] Oct. 1998 AJA Dinner reception attended by ROA President Robert Kocharyan  
[P-21] Oct. 1998 AJA Dinner reception attended by ROA President Robert Kocharyan  
[P-22] Oct. 1998 The second international assembly of Armenian jewellers in Yerevan

- [P-23] Oct. 1998 The second international assembly of Armenian jewellers in Yerevan  
[P-24] Oct. 1998 The second international assembly of Armenian jewellers in Yerevan  
[P-25] Oct. 1998 AJA Dinner reception attended by ROA President Robert Kocharyan  
[P-26] Oct. 1998 AJA Dinner reception attended by ROA President Robert Kocharyan
- 

## Testimonials Index ▲

- [T-01] Nanagoulian's letter to AJA magazine editor  
[T-02] Vartkess address AJA Yerevan conference 2012  
[T-03]  
[T-04] Gagik Yeghiazarian - AJA is one of the best achievements in my life  
[T-05] February 2012 Canada. Ani Mardian - The recollection of a volunteer
- 

## Media Index ▲

- [M-01] Haik press article 12 & 18 Sept 97  
[M-02] Aravod Press about AJA 18 Sept 97  
[M-03] AZK Press re AJA 18 Sept 1997  
[M-04] AJA Press Russian 18 Sept 97  
[M-05] Haik Press 18 Sept 97  
[M-06] AZK Press 19 Sept 97  
[M-07] Aravod Press 19 Sept 97  
[M-8a] Finance & Banking Press 19 Sept 97  
[M-8b] Finance & Banking Press 19 sept 97 cont  
[M-09] Finance and Banking Press 19 sept 97  
[M-10] Republic Press 19 Sept 1997  
[M-11a] Hayastan Press 20 Sept 97  
[M-11b] Hayastan Press 20 Sept 97 cont  
[M-12] PM office press & Aravod 20 Sept 97  
[M-13] AJA press Russian
- 

## Index CV for 27 founding members ▲

### Stage one 6 members:

- C-01 Akkelian Pierre  
C-02 Arslanian Haig  
C-03 Vartkess Knadjian  
C-04 Garnik Nanagoulian  
C-05 Hratch Gaspar  
C-06 Gagik Yeghiazarian

### Stage two 10 members:

- C-07 GAGIK ABRAHMYAN,  
C-08 SERGEY ABRAHMYAN,  
C-09 SAMUEL CHEKIJIAN  
C-10 EMILE GRIGORYAN  
C-11 HAMPIC IPEKDJIAN  
C-12 VAHE ISNAR  
C-13 SARKIS KITSINIAN  
C-14 EDWARD KUYUMDJIAN,  
C-15 HAROUT MISSIRIAN  
C-16 RALPH RAPHAYELIAN,

### Stage three 12 members:

- C-17 Artinian Yervant,  
C-18 Avakian Edmond,  
C-19 Goukassian Kadjik,  
C-20 Dikidjian Vatche,  
C-21 Istanbulian Grigor,  
C-22 Kaprielian Hratch

C-23 Knadjian Adom,  
C-24 Kolanian Kevork,  
C-25 Minassian Michel,  
C-26 Momjian Tsoag,  
C-27 Oskanian Djanik,  
C-28 Sirmakes Vartan.

---

## Index Video & Audio ▲

V-01  
V-02

---