

# U.S. Government Assistance to Armenia News

U.S. Embassy - Yerevan, Armenia

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## Message from the Ambassador



The Republic of Armenia has made tremendous progress toward a modern, market-based democracy since its independence more than a decade ago. Despite the Soviet-era legacies of political oppression and command economics, a major earthquake in 1988, and an armed conflict, Armenia now has well-founded hopes for a prosperous and democratic future. The United States, in partnership with the Government of Armenia, non-governmental organizations, international donors, the Armenian-American community, and the private sector, is proud to play a key role in that ongoing transition. This newsletter offers a snapshot of our ongoing assistance programs.

Since the opening of the U.S. Mission in 1992, the United States has provided over one and one half billion dollars worth of assistance to Armenia. In the early and mid-1990s, our assistance program focused on the dire humanitarian needs facing the population. As it happened, I took part in the U.S. Government's critical response to Armenia's needs following the 1988 earthquake. Coordinating these efforts from Washington, D.C., I was already keenly aware of the unique relationship between our two countries and the friendship symbolized by the generous investment of the American people in Armenia and its future. At that time, we provided such immediate necessities as food, heating stoves, and fuel throughout the country to help Armenia through the difficult initial years of independence. Since the situation has stabilized, we have changed our primary emphasis to development programs that help Armenia build the long-term capacity it needs for the future.

Currently our assistance programs focus on helping Armenia achieve three primary goals: an open and pluralistic civil society, a functioning market economy, and a stable and secure political environment in the region. Several different U.S. government agencies focus on their specialized areas to advance these goals. Their programs include short- and long-term efforts that provide both immediate assistance to the average Armenian, who may not yet benefit from Armenia's transition process, and more long-term structural reform. We continue to assist Armenia in its quest for a mutually acceptable compromise settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as expanded regional cooperation.

Since arriving in Armenia, I have been deeply impressed by not only the breadth and depth of our assistance programs, but by their high quality and the exacting standards of the U.S. Government staff and implementing partners who help design, execute and evaluate these activities. We go to great lengths to ensure that U.S. Government funding brings the Armenian people the highest-quality assistance available today.

I am impressed by the strength, creativity, and determination of the Armenian people. I have great hopes for the future of this proud country, and I am honored to represent the President and the people of the United States and their commitment to that future.

John M. Evans  
Ambassador

## INAUGURATION OF THE FIRST U.S. GOVERNMENT "COMMUNITY SELF-HELP FUND" PROJECTS IN TAVUSH AND LORI MARZES



*Thanks to the U.S. Government's Community Self-Help Fund, Children in Noyemberyan now have a newly renovated and fully equipped sport facility where they can safely and productively spend their leisure hours. Children of different ages come to the Sport School every day to practice martial arts, athletics and participate in other activities.*

On June 2, U.S. Embassy representatives inaugurated the newly completed Noyemberyan Sport School facility in Tavush Marz. This project is the first in a series of U.S. Government "Community Self-Help Fund" projects in Armenia. As part of a proposal from the local Noyemberyan community, a grant from the U.S. Government completed the renovation of the complex and purchased furnishings and sports equipment. The community contributed volunteer labor and mobilized local resources as part of the project. The sports complex will now enjoy financial sustainability thanks to the addition of guest rooms and services that will be run from the center.

The second Community Self-Help Fund project to be completed, a playground and sports field in Vanadzor's Taron 4 district, was inaugurated on August 17 by Charge d'Affaires Anthony Godfrey. Until now, Taron 4 lacked a safe place for its children to meet and engage in sporting events. Reports of school children using earthquake-ravaged buildings as play areas were a major concern for the community. A local NGO worked

with community members to restore old playground equipment, build a sports field and bleachers, erect proper fencing and create a safe environment for the 700 children of the area.

The formal grant awarding ceremony for the first round of the Embassy's new Community Self-Help Fund program took place on March 15, 2004. On that occasion, the Embassy awarded grants to ten communities representing eight marzes. The Community Self-Help Fund assists local communities implement small, grassroots projects that address their most urgent needs. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is managing the project with implementation through Save the Children. The Embassy hopes to continue this program in the future and is currently reviewing applications for the second round, which was announced in July 2004.

For more information about the program, please contact Save the Children at [www.cshf.am](http://www.cshf.am) or visit [www.usa.am/assistance](http://www.usa.am/assistance)

## U.S. GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE CONNECTS ARMENIAN STUDENTS WITH THE ON-LINE WORLD



*Armenian students in remote areas without Internet connection now enter into the world of the internet thanks to U.S. Government Assistance and Project Harmony's Armenia School Connectivity Program (ASCP) Mobile Lab. Students receive instruction from Internet experts when the mobile lab drives into town. This project helps ensure that Armenia's youth will not be left behind as the world goes on-line.*

On June 14, 2004, Armenia's First Mobile Internet Lab was officially launched during a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Gegharkunik border region in Armenia. U.S. Ambassador John Ordway, Regional Governor Stephan Barseghyan, and Parliamentarian Hranush Hakobyan, Chair of the Education, Youth, and Culture Committee of the Armenian National Assembly, attended the ceremony. "One of the things I was concerned about when I came to Armenia and found out about this wonderful Armenia School Connectivity Program was ensuring that schools in remote areas had access to the Internet and the outside world," said Ambassador Ordway. "It is not possible to connect all schools in remote villages to the Internet so with this Mobile Lab we will bring the Internet to them."

The Mobile Lab, which connects to the Internet through a satellite uplink/downlink, will remain in a village for ten days and offer lessons to students, teachers, and community members. After the initial cycle through 20 villages, the Mobile Lab will return for a second cycle to allow for more exposure to Information Communication Technologies. The Lab consists of five computers, a scanner, printer, and LCD projector. The Mobile Lab is not only the first in Armenia but also the first in the former Soviet Union. It will serve over 12,500 people in 20 remote border

villages, including approximately 2000 students and 400 teachers, as well as a large refugee population. The Mobile Lab is a component of the Armenia School Connectivity Program, which is funded through U.S. Government Assistance in Armenia and implemented by Project Harmony.

For more information, please visit  
<http://www.projectharmony.org/cgi-bin/pubs/news/show.pl?index=1086789450>



*The Armenia School Connectivity Program (ASCP) Mobile Lab visits the village of Kuit to conduct computer training classes. ASCP, implemented by Project Harmony, brings educational technology to students, educators and community members by creating a network of Internet computer centers in 330 schools across Armenia. The Mobile Lab travels to remote villages to enable isolated communities to participate in the program as well.*

## NEW US EMBASSY BUILDING SPARKS TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ARMENIA'S CONSTRUCTION WORKERS



*Armenian construction workers have gained valuable skills thanks to the US Embassy/USAID vocational training program. With these new skills, they can now seek better, higher-paying jobs in the construction sector.*



*Armenian laborers learn first-hand from experts the latest in construction technology during on-site training at the new U.S. Embassy site.*

As work progressed on the construction of the new U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, the contractor, JA Jones International, realized that Armenia's labor market would not be able to satisfy their need for workers trained in western construction techniques and familiar with U.S. and European materials and standards. To fill this skills gap, JA Jones was forced to import workers from other countries. But while foreign workers met the company's immediate requirements, the contractor remained committed to the idea of employing local workers and assisting Armenia's economy.

Meanwhile, USAID/Armenia was planning a vocational training program as part of a broader effort to retrain Armenians displaced by the rapidly evolving economy. These pieces came together when USAID/Armenia and the U.S. Embassy joined to bridge the gap between the expertise needed to build the new Embassy and the skills most commonly available in the Armenian labor market.

The U.S. Embassy and USAID designed an intensive training program that would create a local workforce trained to meet international construction standards. USAID/Armenia provided the training plan and the Embassy funded the initial stages of the course. A team of construction education experts prepared a construction curriculum from the U.S. with input from

foremen at the Embassy site. The training covers most of the trades required on large construction projects including electrical work, plumbing, drywall, tiling, carpentry and painting. The Republic Labor and Employment Centers, part of Armenia's Ministry of Labor and Social Issues, is the contact point for participant enrollment, distributing and collecting applications and providing information about the program.

Trainees currently undergo 2-3 weeks of classroom training, followed by 2 weeks of on-the-job training. Successful participants will receive a certificate of completion and the best qualified will be offered jobs at the U.S. Embassy construction site.

This program will not stop after the new U.S. Embassy is completed. USAID recently met with local construction companies to identify skills they need to bid successfully on large-scale, western-standard construction projects in Armenia and negotiations are underway to provide local companies with more skilled workers. The program is raising the standard of construction nationwide and helping raise the standard of living for Armenia's construction workers.

For more information go to:  
[www.usaid.gov/am/article-embassyvocational.html](http://www.usaid.gov/am/article-embassyvocational.html)

## U.S. ASSISTANCE PROVIDES HOPE FOR THE EARTHQUAKE ZONE



*An Armenian family in the Earthquake Recovery Zone now can proudly welcome guests into a new, safe apartment thanks to the help of the United States Government.*

In 1988, over 25,000 Armenians died in a devastating earthquake and thousands of Armenian families were left homeless. Recovery was slow and the challenge of reconstruction was beyond the limited resources of the country, even with the assistance of international donors. Schools, factories, churches and hospitals were destroyed. For years, many victims continued to live in temporary shelters ("domiks") or public buildings.

In 2001, USAID launched its Earthquake Zone (EQZ) Recovery Program to help communities in Shirak and Lori marzes, where the majority of the damage occurred. The EQZ is a major, three-year housing and urban redevelopment program that invested over \$31 million to help rebuild and revitalize the region. The core of this program was a proven, but not yet widely utilized mechanism housing purchase certificates. Issued by USAID to eligible families, these vouchers have a face value based on the average price for apartments, considering both the size and the market. With the voucher, the recipient family was responsible for finding and purchasing a new apartment or house. Payment was made to the seller through a bank transfer based on the certificate.

This program is now expanding through a joint-effort of USAID and the Government of Armenia. Four villages in Shirak marz will participate in the certificate program. By the time of completion of USAID's program over 5,500 families will have purchased permanent homes through the help of U.S. Government Assistance.

For more information go to:  
[www.usaid.gov/am/eqzprogram.html](http://www.usaid.gov/am/eqzprogram.html)



*The removal of a domik (temporary shelter) from a public space in Gyumri opens the area for re-development.*

## KAPAN'S PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL CAN NOW PROPERLY SERVE ARMENIA'S SYUNIK COMMUNITY



*Rooms in the Syunik Regional Psychiatric Neurological Clinic in Kapan were in poor condition. Flooring was at times utilized by patients as firewood in the absence of proper heating in the facility.*



*The newly renovated kitchen in the Syunik Regional Psychiatric Neurological Clinic in Kapan features hot water, improved heating and flooring, windows and cosmetic improvements.*

Ambassador John Ordway inaugurated the Syunik Regional Psychiatric Neurological Clinic in Kapan on June 9, 2004. The project was a part of U.S. Government assistance to Armenia and was implemented by Save the Children in the framework of their Social Transition/Public Works program. The story of this project dates back to June 2003 when Save the Children received two heartfelt letters appealing for help. One letter was from the Head of the Regional Psychiatric Neurological Clinic and the other from the Marzpet of Syunik. The Clinic provides medical, preventive, mental, neurological and narcological treatment for the entire population of Syunik Marz (total population: 163,900). The clinic has 2,180 registered patients, the majority of whom are socially vulnerable. Some of these patients were abandoned or neglected by their relatives and many require intensive care. In most cases, the clinic's eighty beds were the only shelter for these patients.

The letters told of the clinic's run-down condition and the extensive needs of the patients. The roof, sewage system, living quarters, drinking water system, corridors and kitchen were in desperate need of repair.

The staff could not maintain elementary hygiene given the condition of the building. To protect patients from infection, the cement floors and walls of the bathrooms had to be washed daily with chlorine. As a result, the smell of chlorine permeated the premises and complicated the lives of both patients and staff. During winter, patients burned the parquet flooring in wood stoves in order to heat their rooms.



*The Syunik Regional Psychiatric Neurological Clinic in Kapan before its renovations. The poor state of the exterior reveals major structural problems both inside and out.*

Save the Children mobilized the community of Kapan and completed substantial renovations with help from the U.S. Government. The local government and community contributed a substantial portion of the project's total budget. Save the Children hired local workers for the project, which lasted from October 2003 to April 2004. During the renovations, heaters were installed, the roof was replaced, the water and sewage systems were rehabilitated, doors and windows were fixed, floors were replaced, bathrooms were tiled, and the external grounds were improved. The reconstruction and improvement of the Clinic created normal sanitary and hygienic conditions, as well as a healthy and comfortable environment for the patients.

For more information about the program, please contact Save the Children at [www.cshf.am](http://www.cshf.am)

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HELPS TALIN HOSPITAL GET BACK ON ITS FEET



*Two workers inspect a new boiler at the renovated Talin Regional Hospital. Hospital patients were exposed to cold temperatures before the US Department of Defense renovated the hospital as part of their European Command Humanitarian Assistance Program.*



*The Talin Regional Hospital was newly renovated as part of US Department of Defense Humanitarian Assistance. A new roof, new heating system and internal renovations on all three floors were provided to the Regional Hospital.*

For years, the Talin Regional Hospital sat in disrepair. Years of neglect and a lack of funds contributed to the decay of the medical center. Thanks to the United States Department of Defense, the Talin Regional Hospital is now enjoying a fresh start as the premier health center of Aragatsotn Marz.

The Talin Regional Hospital renovation project was sponsored and funded by the United States Department of Defense under the European Command (EUCOM) Humanitarian Assistance (HA) Program. The renovation work, which began in October 2003 and was completed in March 2004, included roof repair, plumbing systems, electrical systems, and interior refurbishment. Additionally, EUCOM HA restored heat to the facility following renovation of the boiler room.

This hospital is the only major health-care center in the Aragatsotn Marz, serving rural portions of both

Shirak and Armavir Marzes as well, with a combined population of more than 60,000 people. The hospital now boasts 38 modern patient rooms, 100 beds, and a staff of 127, including 14 doctors. The hospital has various departments, including a preparation and sterile room, a main operating room, an x-ray room, recovery rooms, a pediatric and quarantine room, and a maternity room.

Not only has the renovated hospital improved Armenia's ability to treat injuries in the event of natural or man-made disasters, but it has also made the facility a safer and healthier place for future patients and enhanced Armenia's regional medical treatment capabilities.

For more information, please visit <http://www.dsca.osd.mil/programs/HA/HA.htm> and <http://www.usaid.gov/am>.

## **ARMENIA'S ELDERLY GAIN ACCESS TO MEDICATIONS THANKS TO U.S. GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE**

The State Department funds programs implemented through International Relief and Development (IRD) to make a difference in the lives of Armenia's elderly population. Nora Marutsyan is just one example of their efforts.

Nora Marutsyan just turned seventy years old. Along with many other Yerevan inhabitants over the age of sixty, she is a single pensioner struggling to survive on her monthly pension. Her difficulties are compounded by her advanced diabetic condition. Nora often has to make serious financial sacrifices to cover the costs of her prescription medications

Nora does not have support from family or friends and is forced to live off her monthly pension of 5,400 Armenian Drams (approximately ten U.S. dollars). She makes her monthly visit to the Municipal Dispensary of Endocrinology to receive her medications. Without IRD's program in

Armenia, Nora would be forced to pay five dollars per month for her medications -- almost half her monthly income. Nora told us that, "Without this program, I would have to choose between buying needed food and buying medication... Where would I be then?"

In a region where counterfeit drugs can be a problem, IRD's program provides certainty in delivering quality medications that will control conditions such as Nora's diabetes. IRD's program also addresses the control and prevention of diseases. IRD supports more than 120,000 socially vulnerable recipients who receive their medications from 157 clinics, hospitals and dispensaries throughout Armenia. For many of these recipients, including Nora, this program is not only about quality of life, it is about life itself.

For more information about International Relief and Development please visit [www.ird-dc.org](http://www.ird-dc.org)

## **USAID SHOWS COMMITMENT TO ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH THE MEDI FORUM**

Recognizing an opportunity to promote small business growth, USAID recently brought together senior policy makers, micro finance practitioners, and donor representatives in Yerevan. The forum was sponsored by USAID/Armenia's Micro Enterprise Development Initiative (MEDI), and addressed topics related to the Armenian legal and regulatory environment for micro finance. MEDI, which started in July 2003, joined other USAID/Armenia programs helping to create a better environment for micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Armenia. The Government of Armenia has recognized that small business growth is essential for a robust economy and USAID is committed to helping stimulate MSE growth.

At issue was MEDI's recently completed Survey of the Legal and Regulatory Environment for Micro finance in the Republic of Armenia. MEDI's report advocates reforms that

will pave the way for increased access to financing for MSEs and identifies a number of hurdles that must be cleared by the government and other parties. The institutional arrangement for micro finance regulation remains an important question, with competing proposals for both the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance and Economy to regulate micro finance. The forum provided an opportunity to reach a consensus on these issues. Participants included Central Bank of Armenia board members, Deputy Ministers from the Ministry of Finance and Economy, a senior official from the Ministry of Justice, representatives from the World Bank, and executive directors from all of Armenia's major micro finance institutions.

For more information go to: [www.usaid.gov/am/activitypages/chem-medi2003.html](http://www.usaid.gov/am/activitypages/chem-medi2003.html)

## **WITH HELP FROM USAID, PURC CREATES ENERGY INSPIRATION FOR ARMENIA**

When budgets are tight, as they are in many state and municipal institutions, utility expenses account for a disproportionately large share of resources. When the reconstruction of the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) building began in April 2003, one of the major tasks was to propose an energy efficient system that would provide comfort in the office at a relatively low cost. The PURC wanted to install an energy and cost efficient air control system that would serve as a model for others in Armenia. The PURC was able to install an energy efficient system with help from the USAID-funded Energy Efficiency, Demand-Side Management and Renewable Energy Program.

A new heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system that

operates with both natural gas and traditional electricity was installed in the PURC building. The new system promises to yield significant savings as natural gas costs 75% less than electricity in Armenia. In addition, the building has an energy efficient fluorescent lighting system, which is cheaper than incandescent lighting. Energy efficient windows have been installed to reduce heat loss, and doors to the building were fitted to isolate hot and cold zones, thus increasing efficiency. The expected annual savings is estimated to be about \$9,000. The new PURC office is an excellent example of an energy and cost efficient building which showcases the potential for other similar projects in Armenia.

For more information go to: [www.usaid.gov/stories/armenia/ba\\_armenia\\_puc.html](http://www.usaid.gov/stories/armenia/ba_armenia_puc.html)