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CONGREGAZIONE MECHITARISTA

Prot. n.

Սուրբ Ղազար
San Lazzaro , April 2, 2017

PRESS RELEASE

FROM THE MEKHITARIST CONGREGATION

The announcement by the Mekhitarist Congregation, on May 31, 2016, informed the public that H.H. Pope Francis had named H.G. Levon Zekiyan, Archbishop of Catholic Armenians of Istanbul and Turkey, as the pontifical delegate for the Mekhitarist Congregation. The Holy See of Rome, beginning in the year 1977, periodically named an assistant, named “Visitor,” to assist the Congregation in resolving various problems, including those of financial and other natures. These persons, known at the international level for their administrative, cultural or scholarly achievements, were religious figures or priests of non-Armenian descent, belonging to various religious orders or to different degrees of ecclesiastical status. Unfortunately, this periodic assistance did not produce the expected results. Hence, on April 30, 2016, H.G. Mgr. Zekiyan was nominated as pontifical delegate.

The basic problems that the Congregation has faced can be summarized in three categories: *a.* vocational crisis; *b.* financial crisis; *c.* the abandoned, and hence unproductive, status of some immovable properties, which are also due to a lack of financial and human resources. Currently, some projects are being developed to address the vocational crisis and to preserve firmly and continuously, in whatever circumstance, the Armenian identity of the Congregation.

We must admit that the vocational crisis is today a general phenomenon, especially in Western countries and in the Middle East, which was the main fount of clergy for the Mekhitarist Congregation and has been, for more than a half-century, the center of devastating civil wars.

To the second point, in the course of the past ten months, the Congregation’s debt was reduced enough after donations and the sale of some land, abandoned for several decades and without the concrete possibility of construction in the near future, given the circumstances.

A few months before the nomination of H.G. Zekiyan, much confusion arose over the eventual sale of a large property situated at Hazmieh in Lebanon, where a small school is also active. His Grace, immediately after his nomination, officially declared to the Mekhitarist monks that no institutional immovable property (e.g., the College Moorat-Raphaël in Venice and the College Samel Moorat at Sèvres in Paris) would be sold. It is pointless to even mention here the absolutely inalienable character of both San Lazzaro and the monastery of Vienna, since these are the symbols and guarantees of perpetuity of the Congregation itself. He also declared that Hazmieh too should be considered inalienable and ruled out for sale, in the given context.

It is the objective of the present press release to inform the public about some projects which are now in progress, also in order to dissipate eventual misunderstandings.

I□ *Moorat-Raphaël (Venice) and Samuel Moorat of Sèvres*

These are two properties of an inestimable value where, for more than a century and a half, schools of the highest level functioned, nourishing and enlightening chosen Armenian youth. Specifically, the former College of Venice has held the most influential role in the cultivation of the outstanding achievements of the Awakening period in modern Armenian culture, both in worldwide colonies and in the Homeland. Those buildings, for many years, have remained in unfavourable conditions and face serious risks of different natures.

It is an absolute necessity that these properties be restored and restituted to their proper use, at the earliest convenience, according to international standards of restoration and reutilisation of historic and artistic monuments, and to their unique function in Armenian culture of the modern age.

The Congregation is now carrying out negotiations with various societies, following a basic guideline that a part of those properties be duly converted into spaces which may produce income, and a part of them be exclusively dedicated to systematically pursuing cultural activities in the centuries-long tradition of the Congregation.

It is well known that our forefathers, as a rule, endowed the churches and academic centres they founded with structures producing an income, so that those structures might be able to carry out their religious and cultural activities. The College of Moorat-Raphaël itself possessed until the 1970s many buildings in Padua and in other areas of the Veneto region that provided resources to distribute full scholarships to many needy students.

The foreseen expenses for restoration and reutilisation are of a high amount. The annual canon of location foreseen must be such that it may allow the Congregation to preserve decently and duly its huge cultural heritage (manuscripts, paintings, antique objects) and develop fully and freely its cultural and educational activities.

We also make use of this present opportunity to declare that all kinds of proposals by individuals and societies are welcome and will be taken seriously into consideration, on the condition that those who propose them take responsibility for all expenses of restoration and reutilisation and may pay also an annual canon of location, according to the aforementioned criteria. The deadline for such proposals is set for June 30, since time is of the essence and when the means become available, the process to obtain licenses etc. will require a significant amount of time. All are kindly requested to approach the question with due seriousness, without unnecessary and not productive rhetoric, as is clear from our recent history.

II. *Hazmieh*

The property in Hazmieh already enjoys the professional care of a real estate agency, one of the best known in the Middle East. Here, our aim is to transfer to Raouda the small school working at Hazmieh, enlarging and developing it according to high standards, and to build at Hazmieh new structures whose income may sustain the activities of the Congregation in Lebanon and in the Middle East.

The present press release is published for the information of our national communities and of all friends and benevolent people, both individuals and groups, who are interested in the Armenian culture.

Headquarters of the Mekhitarist Order
San Lazzaro, Venice, April 2, 2017