



## Habitat for Humanity, Armenian Apostolic Church Catholicos Unite to Build Homes

A new construction season with renewed hope of home ownership opened in the Republic of Armenia Tuesday, April 10, when Habitat for Humanity-Armenia kicked off the second annual "His Holiness Karekin II Work Project" at the Etchmiadzin Gevorgyan seminary. His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of all Armenians, blessed the

opening and called on Armenian Apostolic Church members to take up the mantle of helping lift an estimated 40,000 families across Armenia out of poverty housing.

The Church must reach out to the neediest people, the Catholicos said to some 100 volunteers, church members, government leaders and other humanitarian aid workers gathered at the opening ceremony. Working together and with the help of God, the Church and Habitat for Humanity-Armenia can make a positive difference in the lives of people struggling to provide for their families, he said.

During this construction season, the Catholicos has called on the estimated 8 million Armenians living outside their motherland to assist Habitat for Humanity-Armenia in completing 37 half-built homes to lift these families out of poverty housing. The homes are remnants of the economic collapse Armenia experienced in the early 1990s in the wake of a devastating earthquake, a war and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Haroyan family in the village of Khor Virap will be the first to host a work team during the 2007 construction season. The couple and their three children have resided in a neighbor's basement for seven years.

"We all understand well that family is the foundation of preserving our nation; the stronger our families, the stronger our country," said the mayor of Khor Virap.

But too many Armenian families continue to struggle to make ends meet, he said. Fifty-two of the 1,200 families in Khor Virap live in half-built homes. Small farming operations, averaging one hectare (about two acres), dominate. Money is tight. This second annual project between the Church and Habitat for Humanity-Armenia will change that situation.

"Thanks to international and local organizations giving a hand to the people of this land, that number will drop to 46 in Khor Virap this year," the mayor said.

"Together, hand-in-hand, we are building our house on a robust foundation, strengthening our communities with their deep roots and empowering our homeland," added Vardan Tovmasyn, president of the Habitat for Humanity-Armenia board of directors. He explained that the international nondenominational Christian organization



teamed with the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church less than a year ago to host Diaspora who helped renovate a 24-family apartment building.

“Thanks to His Holiness Karekin II, the project has become a tradition,” Tovmasyan said. “We are acquiring supporters from around the world to expand the army of volunteers helping families in need.”

The Right Reverend Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Washington, D.C., is a member of the board of directors of Habitat for Humanity International. He said the goal of completing 37 homes symbolizes the Armenian Apostolic Church’s 36 dioceses and its Holy See of Mother Etchmiadzin. Churches and other Diaspora groups are sending teams of volunteers between now and October to work alongside homeowners to complete the work.

Individuals and businesses such as K-Telecom CJSC (which operates Viva Cell in

Armenia) are also contributing money. The average cost to complete or renovate an Armenian home is \$7,360. As the largest corporate sponsor this year, Viva Cell General Manager Ralph Yirikian said his company realizes its corporate social responsibilities “because we are all the sons and daughters of Christ. As a company, we are successful due to the sons and daughters of Armenia, so we are showing we believe in the future of the sons and daughters of Armenia through our donation to build homes for them.”

