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## **THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLICOSATE OF THE GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA – HOLY SEE OF CILICIA IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ARMENIAN COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE UAE**

**Keywords:** Holy See of Cilicia, the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, UAE, National Council, Diocese, National Assembly, Armenian Community.

### ***Introduction***

Understanding the role and mission of the Holy See of Cilicia in the Diaspora's activities and its impact on the construction and reconstruction of Armenian communities is a sensitive and insightful task. The main purpose of this activity is to preserve Armenian identity and bring together members of the Armenian community around national culture and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Holy See of Cilicia has been instrumental in the development of the newly formed UAE community by engaging the Armenian community in the preservation and advancement of Armenian heritage through various events and approaches.

The Holy See of Cilicia is actively working to establish a permanent presence by uniting Armenians in different places, in order to foster flourishing communities as part of its mission. The Holy See of Cilicia's efforts towards the Armenians in the UAE demonstrate this mission.

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\* Հոդվածը ներկայացվել է 24.11.23, գրախոսվել է 25.11.23, ընդունվել է պաշտոնաթղթի 22.12.23:

***The Main Features of the Organization of Armenian Community Life in the UAE***

The Armenian Apostolic Church played a key role in establishing and developing the Armenian communities in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf countries, including the UAE to become an Armenian Diocese.

The UAE Diocese, in particular, received support from the Great House of the Catholicos of Cilicia and benefited from the organizational efforts of the Catholicosate Legate within the community in its initial phases, as noted by the pastor of the UAE during our conversation<sup>1</sup>.

The Holy See of Cilicia is one of the four hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, operating in various countries worldwide. It has church structures known as Dioceses, each with its own diocesan heads, including the UAE and Qatar, Cyprus, the Lebanon, Syria and Greece, as well as the Armenian dioceses of Iran (Tehran, Isfahan, Adrbadagan), Jezire, Venezuela, the USA, and Canada<sup>2</sup>.

The Kuwait Armenian-speaking community,<sup>3</sup> which has been in existence for over 60 years, is the most well-organized in the Arabian Gulf countries<sup>4</sup> within the diocese of Kuwait. The majority of Armenians who have relocated came from the Cilicia Diocese (Syria, Lebanon, Persia).

In 1956, the "Kuwait Armenian Apostolic Body" took the first steps towards forming a community by appealing to the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia for their spiritual and educational needs. On December 30, 1959, the Central Council of the Holy See of Cilicia reviewed the request and agreed to take

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<sup>1</sup> **Մանկասարեան** 23.11.2021, Զրոյց ԱՄԷ Հիսսային Հոգեւոր Հովիւ Արժ. Արամ Քիյ. Տէյիթմէնեանի հետ: ԱՄԷ եւ Քաթարի Հայոց Թեմին Կանոնադրութեան մէջ ներառուած օրէնքներն ու կանոնները:

<sup>2</sup> Առաջնորդարան Հայոց Ա.Մ. Նահանգներու Արեւմտեան Թեմի, (website կայքէջ) (Լոս Անճելըս), Անթիլիասի Կաթողիկոսները: <https://armprelacylb.org/aboutus/antelias-catholicos/> Dioceses of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia

<sup>3</sup> **Բայբուրդյան** 25.05.1990, 29.12.1990, Հայաստանի ազգային արխիւ, ֆոնդ 875, Ցուցակ. 16, Գործ 46, էջ 13-21, Սփիւռքահայութեան հետ Կապի Մշակութային Կոմիտէ, Հաշվետվություն Քուէթահայ գաղութ այցելելու մասին:

<sup>4</sup> Ազդակ Օրաթերթ (Պէյրուք) 03.02.2012, Կորին Արք. Պապեանի հետ՝ Քուէթի մէջ իր ինը տարուան նուիրական աշխատանքին մասին «Վանայ ծայն»-ի հարցազրոյցը: <https://archive.aztagdaily.com/archives/50922>

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Kuwait under its authority, acknowledging it as a Spiritual Pastoral District directly affiliated with the Catholicosate of Cilicia<sup>5</sup>.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Holy See of Cilicia demonstrated special care for the establishment and development of newly formed Armenian communities in the Gulf countries. The hard work and dedication of Armenian individuals within the community are highly valued, and the objective of building a strong Armenian community was realized with a nationalist mindset and vision under the patronage of the Holy See of Cilicia in 1979.

In Kuwait, the Catholicosate of Cilicia appointed V. Rev. Fr. Oshagan Choloyan, as Pontifical Legate, who also oversaw the pastoral care of other Armenian settlements in the Persian Gulf such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The Armenians in Kuwait officially recognized the Pontifical Legate as their spiritual head. It is important to note that the diocesan head holds the main and decisive authority in ecclesiastical matters. Additionally, V. Rev. Fr. Oshagan Choloyan as the head of the community board, has been appointed by the Catholicosate of Cilicia and the "National Central Council", and his jurisdiction includes handling spiritual, national, educational, and cultural affairs of the community.

The state of Kuwait has officially recognized the community council. V. Rev. Fr. Oshagan Choloyan had a great reputation, despite facing opposition from Hunchakian and Communist figures. As the head of the Armenian community national life and president of the community council, V. Rev. Fr. Oshagan Choloyan had the authority to address personal law matters such as inheritance and marital disputes. However, the community appointed a trustee to manage the "National one-day School" for a two-year term.

The Pontifical Legate in Kuwait and the Arab Gulf Countries is accountable to The Holy See of Cilicia, The Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, both materially and morally. However, it is important to note that at that time, Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf countries had not yet been established as Dioceses<sup>6</sup>.

The United Arab Emirates is the second community in the region. Armenians here are mainly located in Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where they gradually settled in the 1960s coming from Iran, the Lebanon, and Syria.

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<sup>5</sup> Քուէյթի Հայերը, (Wikipedia) խմբագրութիւն՝ Մանկասարեան Շ.:

<sup>6</sup> Տե՛ս նոյն տեղը

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This article highlights the difference in the migration of Armenians to the UAE compared to other Diaspora communities, with an emphasis on pursuing improved opportunities and a better quality of life for their families.

Economic circumstances have consistently been and remain the primary driving force behind displacement. It is understandable that we do not intend to provide an analysis of security, war, and other adverse conditions that have led to and continue to cause displacement, i.e., emigration.

In the 1970s, many young university graduates were able to secure visas and move to the United States with the support of their family and relatives. However, there was also the opportunity to move to the UAE by obtaining a special work visa to establish themselves there.

The primary objective and motivation for these relocations, and the main purpose of the movement of young people migrating to the Arab Gulf countries and to the UAE was to avoid the mandatory military service of the Syrian army and pay a sum instead<sup>7</sup>. In other words, working in the UAE was beneficial for them to earn a good income to support their families, and then relocate to western and distant shores such as the USA, with future plans in mind.

The UAE has unique qualities, including the abundant oil reserves, economic stability, job security, and diverse employment opportunities, that draw in a significant number of Armenians who contribute to the strength of the Armenian community<sup>8</sup>. Another noteworthy and unique aspect to note is the UAE state's religious tolerance, and the freedoms and opportunities provided to non-Muslim communities<sup>9</sup>.

The occupations of the first Armenian immigrants in the UAE and the expertise they brought in fields such as entrepreneurship, engineering, craftsmanship, and other scientific and professional areas should be carefully considered<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Sky News Arabia, (Abu Dhabi, UAE), 28.05.2013, Հինուորական ծառայության նպաստ (بدل الخدمة العسكرية) <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/260628> سوريا.. بدل الخدمة العسكرية 15 ألف دولار

<sup>8</sup> «Գիտական Արցախ», 2022, թիւ 4 (15), 47–48: «Արաբական միացեալ էմիրութիւններու հայկական համայնքի ծեաւորումը»:

<sup>9</sup> See «Գիտական Արցախ», 2022, թիւ 4 (15), 48–49:

<sup>10</sup> See «Գիտական Արցախ», 2022, թիւ 4 (15), 48–49:

Year after year, small Armenian communities continued to emerge in the countries of the Arabian Gulf, requiring a significant amount of effort and a laborious undertaking to organize the religious, cultural, and educational life within the communities. Acknowledging this need, the Catholicosate of Cilicia, the spiritual leadership of the religious, educational, and cultural life of these small communities, personally took on the responsibility to organize the Armenians of the UAE as a community. As a first step, His Holiness Khoren A.<sup>11</sup> consistently sent ecclesiastics and clergymen to the UAE<sup>12</sup>.

It is important to recognize that the Armenian community in the UAE is unique compared to other Diaspora Armenian communities. While other communities are formed around patriotic organizations and political parties, the Armenian community in the UAE is primarily based on religious affiliation. The UAE's restrictions, and unique characteristics have contributed to this distinction<sup>13</sup>.

Although it is not the topic of this article, mention should be made that the UAE government introduced the "golden visa" status in 2019. The Golden Visa is a long-term resident visa (10-year visa status) that allows foreign talents to live, work, or study in the UAE while enjoying exclusive benefits. Investors, entrepreneurs, scientists, notable students and graduates, humanitarian pioneers are entitled to receive a "golden visa"<sup>14</sup>.

### ***Formation of Community Structures in the UAE***

Forming the structure of the UAE community was a challenging task that required significant effort. Preserving and strengthening the Armenian identity within the community was not an easy task. The Armenian language is essential in preserving the Armenian identity, as we learned from our conversation with the spiritual pastor of the UAE<sup>15</sup>.

In the late 1970s, efforts **to preserve Armenian identity** and establish suitable infrastructure were made. Initially, two Armenian communities were

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<sup>11</sup> Years of the enthronement of his Holiness 1963–1983.

<sup>12</sup> ՀԱՍԿ Պաշտօնական Ամսագիր (Պեյրոյթ), ԿԴ. Տարի Մարտ-Ապրիլ-Մայիս 1995, էջ 157:

<sup>13</sup> See page 50

<sup>14</sup> Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs & Port Security (ICP), (website) Golden Visa, <https://icp.gov.ae/en/services/golden-visa/>.

<sup>15</sup> **Մանկասարեան** 23.11.2021, Զրոյց ԱՄԷ Հիասթային Հոգեւոր Հովիւ Արժ. Արամ Քիյ. Տէյրմէնճեանի հետ:

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formed in the UAE: one in Sharjah-Dubai and the other in Abu Dhabi. The majority of Armenians, over 80%, reside in Sharjah-Dubai, while the remaining 20% live in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, a number of Armenians also live in Al Ain, which is part of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, as well as in the Northern Emirates (Al Fujairah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain).

Prior to the formation of the "National Council", Tashjian had already organized a meeting with Serop Samurkashian and Haroution Sislian in Dubai-Sharjah to set up a community center for young people. Additionally, he and others in Dubai-Sharjah regularly held meetings and social gatherings for Armenians<sup>16</sup>. By 1976, a group of young people in Abu Dhabi, including Berdj Abrahamian, Hrach Arzumanyan, Vartan Ingilizian, Garo Sakdjian, and Krikor Djeredjian, had already established a community core<sup>17</sup>.

Dikran Tashjian (deceased)<sup>18</sup>, a central figure in the "Oman" Bank, which has since been renamed "Bank of Mashreq", was highly respected in the Armenian community for his patriotism. Due to his maturity and experience, he served as the Chairman of the First Armenian "National Council" in the UAE.

Among the young individuals who were actively involved in the formation and organization of the Sharjah-Dubai community from 1974 to 1980, were: Dikran Tashjian, Serop Samurkashian, Haroutioun Sislian, Hrayr Soghomonian (1948 – 2020), Zareh Tutunjian, Nishan Basmajian (currently serving as the chancellor of the diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand), Varujan Nerkizian (Chief Director of the Sharjah Bank), Nishan Manjikian (currently residing in Australia), Viken Klindjian (1980–2003, served as the principal of the "Ohanesian" day-school for 23 years), and seniors such as Bedros Aslanian, an Ethiopian Armenian (1934–2015)<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> **Մանկասարեն** 2022, (Զրոյց) Նախկին ԱՄԷ Ազգ. Վարչութեան ատենապետ Նշան Պասմաճեանի հետ: Տե՛ս նաեւ **Աշըգեան** 2008, 28:

<sup>17</sup> Տե՛ս Կարգ Օձման Սրբոց Նահատակաց Եկեղեցւոյ (Ապու Տապի), 12.12.2014, 8–9, Համառոտ ակնարկ Ապու Տապիի հայ գաղութի մասին:

<sup>18</sup> **Աշըգեան** 2008, 28:

<sup>19</sup> **Աշըգեան** 2008, 27: (Պետրոս Արսլանեան (Ատոխ Ապապա 1934 –Երեւան 2015) արմատներով Սեբաստացի, ծնեալ Ատոխ Ապապա, ուր աշխատած է Ճորճ Ճերանեանի Եթովպիայի առաջին մասնաւոր սեփականութիւն հանդիսացող տպարանը (գեղարուեստական տպիչներ) 1929 թ: Տե՛ս Սեպուհ Ասլանեան դիմատետրը <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10153783148425676&set=a.145452345675>

***The Role of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in the Formation of the Armenian Community in the UAE***

In the UAE, like in all other emerging and established Diaspora communities, it is essential to increase the strengthening of the community. This involves making significant efforts to preserve the Armenian national identity, including the culture and the common objective of preserving not only the religious values but also the Armenian heritage and language among Armenians. The majority of the newcomers were young people brought up with a strong desire to preserve their Armenian identity. They had also brought their traditions and their style of collective living from their home countries. Some of them were quite experienced in working in community organizations, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, when there was a significant effort to shape international public opinion on the “Armenian Cause” (Hay Tad) for Pan-Armenian unity. These encouraging facts helped in the establishment and structuring of the community<sup>20</sup>.

Dikran Tashjian, a prominent figure in the community, emphasized the visit of the late H.E. Arch. Mesrob Ashdjian (1974–1977), the Head of the Armenian Apostolic Diocese of Isfahan and Southern Iran to Sharjah-Dubai during his journey from Iran to the Lebanon. He was sure that this visit played an important role in uniting the Armenians in the UAE. Dikran Tashjian, Haroutioun Sislian, and Serop Samurkashian warmly welcomed H.E. Arch. Mesrob Ashdjian. A group of Armenians residing in Sharjah and Dubai organized a liturgical choir rehearsal<sup>21</sup>. On May 9, 1977, H.E. Arch. Mesrob Ashdjian performed the first Divine Liturgy in the UAE at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church of Dubai in the presence of about 70 Armenians. That was the first big assembly and the first liturgy of Armenians in the UAE.

In 1979, the UAE community was part of the Catholicosate Legate of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, with the Central Council located in Kuwait. It is important to mention that during this time, Kuwait already had a well-established community. Similar to the other diaspora communities, the “Armenian National School” and the Church played an extremely important role in preserving Armenian culture in

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<sup>20</sup> **Մանկասարեն** 2022, (Զրոյց) Նախկին ԱՄԷ Ազգ. Վարչութեան ատենապետ Նշան Պասմաճեանի հետ:

<sup>21</sup> **Մանկասարեն** 2022, (Զրոյց) Նախկին ԱՄԷ Ազգ. Վարչութեան ատենապետ Նշան Պասմաճեանի հետ: Տե՛ս նաեւ **Աշրգեան** 2008, 28:

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Kuwait. For example, it is obvious that the young people who graduated from the Armenian national school would rarely marry foreigners, whereas it was a common phenomenon for Armenian graduates of foreign schools<sup>22</sup>.

In December 1979, V. Rev. Oshagan Choloyan (now H.E. Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan) was sent by the Holy See of Cilicia to Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. After staying in Kuwait from December 6 to 19, V. Rev. Oshagan Choloyan accompanied by Mr. Melik Meliksetian, a benefactor from the Armenian community of Kuwait, arrived in Sharjah on December 20, 1979 to familiarize himself with the possibilities of organizing the Armenian community<sup>23</sup>.

On the day of V. Rev. Oshagan Choloyan's arrival, his first meeting with a group of Armenian benefactors from Sharjah and Dubai took place. 22 Armenian prominent figures were invited to form a temporary "National Council" of 5–7 people. They were: Dikran Tashjian, Haroutioun Diratsouian, Boghos Postadjian, Nishan Manjikian, Hrayr Soghomonian (1948–2020)<sup>24</sup>, Berdj Bedrosian, Toros Balian, Levon Jukjukian, Levon Bohdjelian, Misak Muradian, Levon Avakian, Pierre Keoseian, Zaven Baklini, Dr. Raffi Kambourian (deceased), Bedros Aslanian (1934–2015)<sup>25</sup>, Zohrap Teperdjian, Vartan Yeozkadian, Haroutioun Sislian and Vartkes Mahdesian (current State Representative of the Armenian Cypriot Community in Cyprus)<sup>26</sup>.

On the same day, December 20, the "National Provisional Council" elected an 8-member body after its consecutive sessions. This body would be the first elected body of the Armenians of Sharjah and Dubai responsible for organizing the national-cultural life and establishing an organizational structure for the community.

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<sup>22</sup> **Բայբուրդյան** 25.05.1990, 29.12.1990, Հայաստանի ազգային արխիվ, ֆ. 875, ց. 16, գ. 46, թ. 13–21, Սփիռքահայության հետ Կապի Մշակութային Կոմիտե, Հաշվետվություն Քուէյթահայ գաղութ այցելելու մասին:

<sup>23</sup> Հայ Սփյուռք հանրագիտարան, 98, Տե՛ս նաեւ **Աշրգեան** 2008, 29:

<sup>24</sup> **Մանկասարեան** 06-11-2021, Յօդուած՝ Հրայր Սողոմոնեան՝ ԱՄԷ Հայ Համայնքի Ազգային Բարերար, Ազգային Ընդհանուր Ժողովի Ատենապետ, <https://nt.am/am/news/308241/>

<sup>25</sup> Bedros Aslanian ( Euthiopian Armenian), was one of the UAE Armenian community philanthropists who donated 100.000 Dirhams for the construction of Saint Gregory the Illuminator Church of Sharjah, UAE.

<sup>26</sup> Ազդակ Օրաթերթ, (Պէյրոյթ), 14.05.2021, Վարդգէս Մահտեսեան կիպրահայ համայնքի պետական ներկայացուցիչ հռչակուեցաւ, <https://www.aztagdaily.com/archives/508838> 14 մայիս 2021: Զրոյց՝ Նախկին ԱՄԷ ատենապետ Նշան Պասմաճեանի հետ:



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On December 21–22, 1979, V. Rev. Choloyan made a visit to the community of Abu Dhabi. During his visit, he identified opportunities to establish a community in Abu Dhabi, and also appointed a “National Council” there. Additionally, he discovered that there was already a Sunday school, which had been started by Vartan Inkilizian, where students were learning the Armenian language and religion<sup>27</sup>.

The second church ceremony-assembly of UAE Armenians took place on the evening of Sunday, December 23, when Rev. Father delivered the evening service at the Holy Trinity Church in Dubai, with a significant turnout of Armenians from the Northern Emirates including Dubai and Sharjah. Following the service, Melik Meliksetian, on behalf of the Catholicos of Cilicia hosted a dinner-reception for the community members, chaired by V. Rev. Oshagan Choloyan at the Sharjah Federal Inn hotel. 151 Armenians attended the event<sup>28</sup>.

On December 23, 1979, V. Rev. Oshagan Choloyan and several Armenian benefactors met with Abdallah Jumaa Mutawa, the personal adviser of the Ruler of Sharjah (His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, member of the Federal Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah was away on business). During the visit, V. Rev. Father discussed the need for a gathering-meeting place for Armenians<sup>29</sup>.

The cooperation between Armenian benefactors and young members, along with the support from the Catholicosate of Cilicia, has played a significant role in the ongoing stability and growth of the Armenian community in the UAE. This has been recognized as a noteworthy example in the history of the Diaspora communities, as mentioned by the former chairman of the UAE Armenian community during our conversation<sup>30</sup>.

### ***The Structure of the "Diocesan Councils" of Kuwait and the Gulf Countries***

<sup>27</sup> Կարգ Օծման Սրբոց Նահատակաց Եկեղեցւոյ (Ապու Տապի), 12.12.2014, էջ 8–9, Համառոտ ակնարկ Ապու Տապիի հայ գաղութի մասին:

<sup>28</sup> Հայ Սփյուռք հանրագիտարան, 2003, 98: Տե՛ս նաեւ **Աշղգեան** 2008, 29:

<sup>29</sup> Emahay.com (website), Պատմական ակնարկ Տուպայի եւ Հիւսիսային Էմիրութեանց Հայ գաղութի մասին <https://emahay.com>

<sup>30</sup> **Մանկասարեան** 2022, (Զրոյց) Նախկին ԱՄԷ Ազգ. Վարչութեան ատենապետ Նշան Պասմաճեանի հետ: Տե՛ս նաեւ **Աշղգեան** 2008, 28:

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The Armenian national-religious community in the UAE was formed in 1980. Initially, it was organized through appointments and later through elections, leading to the formation of separate "National Councils"<sup>31</sup>.

The late H.E. Archbishop Goreun Babian (1941–2015) stressed the importance of establishing Diocesan Councils in accordance with the approved bylaws of the Holy See for the management and organization of community life<sup>32</sup>.

According to the approved bylaws of the Holy See of Cilicia, the administrative and economic activities of church communities are overseen by an Executive Body known as the "National Council" (Article 79).

The "National Council" consists of 5, 7, or 9 lay members who are elected by the Assembly of the "Church Council" for a two-year term (Article 86)<sup>33</sup>. According to the rules, "National Council" members can serve for two additional terms. After serving for three consecutive years, they are eligible for re-election after taking a two-year break.

During his initial visit to Kuwait, Rev. Fr. Oshagan Choloyan formed the first "National Councils" of Sharjah-Dubai and Abu Dhabi on December 20, 21, 22, 1979, to facilitate the organization of Armenian national life<sup>34</sup>.

In February 1980, during his second visit, V. Rev. Oshagan Choloyan appointed the same temporary body as the Armenian "National Council" of Dubai and Sharjah, with the exception of Zaven Baklini who was replaced by Haroutioun Diratsuiian due to his departure from the city. Levon Bohjalian also left the council for personal reasons<sup>35</sup>. From 1980 to 1994, the seven-member "National Council"

<sup>31</sup> Ազդակ Օրաթերթ (Պէյրուզ) 03.02.2012, Կորին Արք. Պապեանի հետ՝ Քուէյթի մէջ իր ինը տարուան նուիրական աշխատանքին մասին «Վանայ ծայն»-ի հարցազրոյցը: <https://archive.aztagdaily.com/archives/50922>: Տե՛ս նաեւ Հայ Սփյուռք հանրագիտարան, 2003, 99:

<sup>32</sup> Ազդակ Օրաթերթ (Պէյրուզ) 03.02.2012, Կորին Արք. Պապեանի հետ՝ Քուէյթի մէջ իր ինը տարուան նուիրական աշխատանքին մասին «Վանայ ծայն»-ի հարցազրոյցը: <https://archive.aztagdaily.com/archives/50922>

<sup>33</sup> See Same place.

<sup>34</sup> ԱՄԷ-ի Ազգային Վարչութեան արխիւ, Յունուար 1980: Ատենագրութիւն Շարժա-Տուպայ: ԱՄԷ մաս կը կազմէ Քուէյթի եւ Արաբական Ծոցի Կաթողիկոսական փոխանորդութեան՝ վարչական կեդրոն ունենալով Քուէյթ քաղաքը: Հոգշ. Տ. Օշական Վրդ. Զօլյեան Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոսութեան կողմէ կը ղրկուի Քուէյթ եւ ԱՄԷ:

<sup>35</sup> Հայ Սփյուռք հանրագիտարան, 2003, 39–40: Տե՛ս նաեւ **Աշրճեան** 2008, 30:

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worked with the following personnel: Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and three councilors.

Karekin II<sup>36</sup> of the Great House of Cilicia, also known as All Armenians' Holy Karekin A. Catholicos from 1995 to 1999, formalized the "National Council" with a letter dated March 15, 1980 (144/80).

Prior to the establishment of UAE Armenian community as a Diocese in 1994, the "National Councils" were appointed by the Pontifical Legate<sup>37</sup> V. Rev. Oshagan Choloyan<sup>38</sup>, who served as the Pontifical Legate of Kuwait and the Gulf countries. This continued until the Diocesan elections in 1994. During the period from 1980 to 1994, he appointed seven "National Councils" for two-year terms.

In April 1980, Rev. Oshagan Choloyan was appointed the Pontifical Legate<sup>39</sup> of Kuwait and Gulf countries. This led to the recognition of 1980 as the establishment date of the community. As a result of the formation of the Armenian "National Council", the Armenians of the Northern Emirates gained an organizational structure. In essence, Sharjah-Dubai became part of the Diaspora structure as an organized community, which is noteworthy for having occurred only five or six years after the influx of Armenians to the UAE.

At the initial stage, the "National Council" meetings were held at the homes of administrative members as appropriate. During the meetings, the date and place of the next meeting would be decided, for example, Sunday, January 17, 1982, at Dikran Tashjian's house; Sunday, January 24, 1982, at Nishan Basmajian's house; Monday, February 1, 1982, at Bedros Arslanian's house; and so on. The minutes of the "National Council" would be prepared by the appointed Chairman and read during the next meeting, after which the board members would approve it and it would be signed by the Chairman<sup>40</sup>. It should be noted

<sup>36</sup> Ազդակ օրաթերթ, (Պէյրուս), 27.08.2022, <https://www.aztagdaily.com/archives/556098>: Wikipedia, Karekin I, (Late Karekin II served as the Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church between 1995 and 1999. Previously, he served as the Catholicos of Cilicia from 1983 to 1994 as Karekin II). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karekin\\_I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karekin_I)).

<sup>37</sup> Կարգ Օծման Սրբոց Նահատակաց Եկեղեցւոյ (Ապու Տապի), 12.12.2014, էջ 8–9, Համառոտ ակնարկ Ապու Տապիի հայ գաղութի մասին:

<sup>38</sup> Գեղք. Տ. Օշական Արք. Զօլյեան, 1998-ին, ԱՄՆ-ի Արեւելեան Թեմի Առաջնորդ:

<sup>39</sup> ՀԱՍԿ Պաշտօնական Ամսագիր (Պէյրուս), Յունուար-Դեկտեմբեր 1979, 316–317: (Նիւ Ճըրգիի Բրինսթըն համալսարանէն Հայր Սուրբը աւարտած է երկու համալսարանական տիտղոսներ Մագիստրոսի աստիճանով՝ (Մ. Ա.) Քրիստոնէական Դաստիարակութեան եւ Աստուածաբանութեան մէջ):

<sup>40</sup> ԱՄԷ-ի Ազգային Վարչութեան արխիւ, 13.01.1982, Ատենագրութիւն Շարժա-Տուպա:

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that Dikran Tashjian was the Chairman of the First “National Council” of Armenians formed in the UAE.

From 1986 to 1988, the Armenian “National Council”, which originally had 7 members, continued its work despite a decrease in membership to five and then four. This was due to the resignation of advisers and the secretary for personal reasons, as well as the departure of the Treasurer. The Deputy Chairman would oversee the treasury until the end of the mentioned Armenian “National Council” serving period<sup>41</sup>.

The “National Council” would appoint a district council, a school trustee, and other necessary councils for the church's benefit. For example, under the “National Council” of Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, the “Armenian Youth House”, the “Art Committee” organizing the community's cultural life, the “Board of Trustees” ensuring school functioning, the “Ladies' Committee”, etc.<sup>42</sup>. All committees were appointed by and accountable to the Armenian “National Council”<sup>43</sup>.

From 1980 to 2006, two separate but collaborating “National Councils” functioned in the UAE: one in the Northern Emirates (Sharjah-Dubai), and the other in Abu Dhabi. There were certainly Armenians in other emirates, but their small population made it impractical to establish “National Councils” there.

Since 1995, the Armenian “National Councils” have transitioned from appointed to elected positions by the “Diocesan Assembly”.

It should be noted that on March 8, 2021, under the auspices of H.G. Bishop Mesrob Sarkisian Prelate of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, and in the presence of the Diocesan National Representatives Assembly, a “National Council”<sup>44</sup> was established within the diocese. The independent activity of the 3

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<sup>41</sup> ԱՄԷ-ի Ազգային Վարչության արխիվ, 13.01.1982 Ատենագրություն Շարժա-Տուպա:

<sup>42</sup> Հայկական Սփիւռք Տարեգիրք 2009, 256: ՀՀ Սփյուռքի Նախարարություն, ԱՄԷ-ի հայ համայնք, 256:

<sup>43</sup> See same place.

<sup>44</sup> Ել-Նամակ ԹԻՄ ԱԱ042/21, 9 Մարտ 2021, Նորընտիր Ազգային Վարչության Անդրանիկ Ժողովի եւ Դիանի Ընտրության Հաղորդագրությունը ստացել եմ: In the community the independent activities of the three existing National Councils were put together and a united National Council was created for the region instead.

National Councils was unified in one “National Council”. The “National Council” of Qatar had existed for the past ten years<sup>45</sup>.

To clarify, it should be mentioned that the term “Committees” used in the Diaspora area is the same as “The Executive Council” that operated under the status of the “National Councils”.

Today, our national life is managed according to the Diocesan Structure, which is presided over by the Bishop<sup>46</sup>.

***Formation of the Diocese of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Kuwait and the Countries of the Arabian Gulf***

During the “General National Assembly” of the Catholicosate of Cilicia held in Aleppo between November 16 and 22, 1992, Kuwait and the countries of the Arabian Gulf were declared the Diocese of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, which further strengthened the presence and identity of the Armenian community. Before the region became a Diocese, the “National Councils” were appointed by the Pontifical Legate<sup>47</sup>. With this important decision, the region acquired a Diocesan structure. Fr. Choloyan played an important role in transforming the region into a Diocese.

In February 1994, V. Rev. Fr. Oshagan Choloyan was consecrated as Bishop and elected as the leader of the Diocese by the “General Diocesan Assembly” of Kuwait and Arab Gulf countries. In May 1998, the Bishop was transferred to the United States and the Pontifical Legate of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates successively appointed H.G. Sebouh Sarkisian (1998–2000), H.G. Yeprem Arch. Tabakian (2000–2002), H.E. Arch. Goreun Babian (2002–2011), and H.G. Shahe Panosian (2011–2013). In March 2013, Rev. Father Mesrob Sarkissian was appointed as Catholicos’ Representative (Legate) for the region of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar by the decision of His Holiness Catholicos Aram I<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> **Մանկասարեան** 23.11.2021, Զրոյց ԱՄԷ Հիւսիսային Հոգեւոր Հովիւ Արժ. Արամ Քիյ. Տէլիքմէնճեանի հետ: ԱՄԷ եւ Քաթարի Հայոց Թեմին Կանոնադրութեան մէջ ներառուած օրէնքներն ու կանոնները:

<sup>46</sup> Emahay.com (website), Պատմական ակնարկ Տուպայի եւ Հիւսիսային Էմիրութեանց Հայ գաղութի մասին <https://emahay.com>:

<sup>47</sup> Կարգ. Օժման Սրբոց Նահատակաց Եկեղեցոյ (Ապու Տապի), 12.12.2014, էջ 9, Համառոտ ակնարկ Ապու Տապիի հայ գաղութի մասին:

<sup>48</sup> See same place.

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The main goal of establishing this region as a Diocese was to develop the “Diocesan Bylaws”<sup>49</sup>, and review them at the “Diocesan plenary” meetings, as well as obtain approval from the Catholicosate of Cilicia – Antilias, the Lebanon. This point was stressed by the former Armenian Community Chairman of the UAE during our meeting<sup>50</sup>.

The “Diocesan Bylaws”, which consisted of 100 articles, were carefully prepared over 18 months and went through several reviews by the “Central Council” of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. On April 30, 1994, His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, ratified the “Diocesan Bylaws”. It was immediately put into practice to create the necessary Diocesan structures, and has been in effect since then.

The revision of these Bylaws is regularly discussed at successive diocesan plenary assemblies, and every four years, the “General National Assembly” of the Diocese of UAE and Qatar assimilates the Bylaws, which are then approved by the Catholicosate of Cilicia. The previously published Bylaws are then considered null and void.

On December 16, 1994, the first Diocesan elections were held in Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Sharja and the first Diocesan Assembly was elected with 21 members (3 spiritual members and 18 laymen).

To provide further clarity, the “Diocesan Bylaws” are deliberated by the Religious and Lay Councils of the Central Executive Council of the Catholicosate. Following this, His Holiness Aram I, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, approves them with a Papal Letter for implementation.

Until now, the dioceses of the Lebanon, Peria (Syria), and Egypt, as well as several other communities have been using the term “Provincial Councils”<sup>51</sup>, whereas in other Diasporan communities it is referred to as the “Diocesan Councils” or “the Assembly of the Church Council”. This council is responsible

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<sup>49</sup> According to the Constitutional Reform of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, the latter has its Bylaws, guided by the main principles of the National Constitutional reform.

<sup>50</sup> **Մանկասարեն** 2022, (Զրոյց) Նախկին ԱՄԷ Ազգ. Վարչութեան ատենապետ Նշան Պասմաճեանի հետ: Տե՛ս նաեւ **Աշղգեան** 2008, 28:

<sup>51</sup> The “Provincial Council”, is known in the Community-Diocesan life of the Armenian Church as a meeting of deputies which is a body of Diocesan structure consisting of clergy and laymen.

for the election of the Prelate of a Diocese and the formation of the Religious and Lay Councils.

***Conclusion***

Similar to the Armenian communities in the Diaspora, the Armenian community in the UAE also employs practical methods to ensure unity and requires broad cooperation.

The three regions of the Arabian Gulf, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah-Dubai, were geographically distant from each other and located in two states, but they were part of one Catholicosate Legate and cooperated with each other, confirming their organization in different fields and levels.

The success of the formation of the Armenian community in the UAE can be accounted for by the fact that those Armenians, who came from the Diaspora and brought with them their nation-building experience, joined their efforts and care for the Holy See of Cilicia and were able not only to form an Armenian community but also develop the structures they created. They did their best to preserve the national heritage and the main features of the Armenian identity. In other words, they were devoted to their nation.

A group of far-sighted Armenian individuals and members of the “National Council” initiated financial support and contributed greatly to the prosperity of the Armenian community in the UAE.

The Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia as well as the Pontifical Legate Oshagan Choloyan played a significant role in strengthening the Armenian community between 1980–1998. Choloyan’s appointment in the position of the Pontifical Legate to Kuwait and the Arab Emirates in April 1980, was decisive in stimulating the relocation of a great number of Armenians in those areas. Archbishop Choloyan was elected as the region’s first prelate in 1992 and served the community for more than 17 years. It was quite natural that he earned the love and respect of the faithful, until his election in May 1998 as Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy. In November 1998, his great pioneering activities for the Middle Eastern community reached its peak with the consecration of the first Armenian Church in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. He was invited to attend the event by His Holiness Aram I, who consecrated the church St. Gregory the Illuminator amidst much joy and enthusiasm.

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In 1992, the region of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf States was declared as a Diocese, due to the ongoing efforts of successive Diocesan Assemblies. Ten years later, starting from 2013, the UAE Region continued its ecclesiastical mission as the Armenian Diocese of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

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ԱՄԷ-ի Ազգային Վարչութեան արխիւ, Յունուար 1980, Ատենագրութիւն Շարժա-Տուպայ:

**Աշրգեան Շ.**, 2008, «Քառորդ դար հայերը» Տուպայի եւ Հիւսիսային Էմիրութեանց մէջ, էջ 27–28:

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«Գիտական Արցախ», 2022, թիւ 4 (15), էջ 47–48: «Արաբական միացեալ էմիրութիւններու հայկական համայնքի ձեւաւորումը»:

Ել-Նամակ Թիւ **ԱԱ042/21**, **09.03.2021**, Նորընտիր Ազգային Վարչութեան Անդրա-նիկ Ժողովի եւ Դիւանի Ընտրութիւն Հաղորդագրութիւն:

Կարգ Օժման Սրբոց Նահատակաց Եկեղեցւոյ (Ապու Տապի), 12.12.2014, էջ 8–9, Համառօտ ակնարկ Ապու Տապիի հայ գաղութի մասին

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## ՄԵԾԻ ՏԱՆՆ ԿԻԼԻԿԻՈՅ ԿԱԹՈՂԻԿՈՍՈՒԹԵԱՆ ԴԵՐԸ ԱՄԷ ՀԱՅ ՀԱՄԱՅՆՔԱՅԻՆ ԿԵԱՆՔԻ ԿԱՅԱՑՄԱՆ ԳՈՐԾԻՆ ՄԷՋ

ՄԵՆԿԵՉԻԱՆ Շ.

### Ամփոփում

**Քանայի բառեր՝** Մեծի Տանն Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոսութիւն, Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոսութեան առաջնորդարան, Արաբական Միացեալ Էմիրութիւններ, Ազգային Վարչութիւն, Թեմ, Ազգային Երեսփոխանական Ժողով, հայ համայնք:

Այս յօդուածին մէջ կը հիմնաւորուի այն թէզը, որ այդ գործին մէջ կարելի էր Մեծի Տանն Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոսութեան դերակատարութիւնը:

ԱՄԷ-ի մէջ հայ համայնքի ձեւաւորման յաջողութեան գաղտնիքը սփիւռքէն եկած հայերու մէջ է՝ իրենց հետ բերելով ազգաշինութեան փորձը եւ Կիլիկիոյ մայր աթոռի հետեւողական ջանքերով, անոնք կարողացան ոչ միայն ձեւաւորուիլ, այլեւ աճիլ ու գոյատեւել իրենց կառուցած կառոյցներու ազգային ժառանգութեամբ եւ հայկական ինքնութեան հիմնական յատկանիշերով:

Գաղութի զարգացումը փաստացի իրականություն է՝ շնորհիվ յաջորդական Թեմական լիազումար ժողովներու, որ 1992 թուականին Քուէյթի շրջանը եւ Արաբական Ծոցի պետութիւնները հռչակուեցան թեմ: Տասը տարի անց՝ 2013 թուականէն, ԱՄԷ-ի հայ համայնքը կը շարունակէ իր եկեղեցական առաքելութիւնը, որպէս Արաբական Միացեալ Էմիրութիւններու եւ Քաթարի Հայոց Թեմ:

Համայնքային կառոյցի ստեղծման ու ձեւաւորման առընչութեամբ այս ուսումնասիրութիւնը եւ համայնքի ազգային ու հայկական կազմակերպչական փորձը, ինչպէս նաեւ ԱՄԷ-ի հայ համայնքի գործունէութիւնը եզակի օրինակ է Սփիւռքի բնակավայրերու կամ գաղթօճախներու պատմութեան մէջ:

## РОЛЬ СВЯТОГО ПРЕСТОЛА КИЛИКИИ – АРМЯНСКОГО КАТОЛИКОСАТА ВЕЛИКОГО ДОМА КИЛИКИЙСКОГО В ЖИЗНИ АРМЯНСКОЙ ОБЩИНЫ ОАЭ

МЕНКЕЧЯН Ш.

### Резюме

**Ключевые слова:** Святой Престол Киликии, Армянский Католикосат Великого Дома Киликийского, ОАЭ, Национальный совет, епархия, Национальное собрание, армянская община.

Святой Престол Киликии – Армянский Католикосат Великого Дома Киликийского играл важную роль в жизни армянской общины ОАЭ.

Корни успешности армянской общины ОАЭ кроются в том, что опыт армян Диаспоры по сохранению армянской идентичности и формированию национальных структур способствовал выживанию и становлению общины. Однако следует отметить также усилия Святого Престола Киликии, направленные на поддержку и содействие общине, что выражалось в создании армянских епархий: в 1992 г. в регионе Кувейта и стран Персидского залива были сформированы армянские епархии, а спустя 10 лет, начиная с 2013 года, в ОАЭ действует Армянская епархия ОАЭ и Катара.