

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN THE UAE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

ԱՄԷ-Ի ՀԱՅ ՀԱՄԱՅՆՔԻ ՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ԿԵԱՆՔԻ ԱՌԱՆՁՆԱՅԱՏՎՈՒԹԻՒՆՆԵՐԸ XXI ԴԱՐԱՍԿԻԶՐԻՆ

ОСОБЕННОСТИ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ЖИЗНИ АРМЯНСКОЙ ОБЩИНЫ ОАЭ В НАЧАЛЕ XXI ВЕКА

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Abstract – This article examines the cultural rights of Armenians as a national minority in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), focusing on various programs and events that contribute to the preservation and promotion of their cultural heritage. It delves into the activities of traditional Armenian charitable and cultural organizations, highlighting key initiatives in the fields of education and culture. The article examines the impact of Armenian Church activities, identity-building activities, and external forces, such as Armenia and the global Armenian diaspora, on the cultural life of the UAE community. In the 21st century, the Armenian community continues to actively participate in promoting cultural pride through educational initiatives, international partnerships, and strategic representation of Armenian culture on international platforms. These efforts will not only enrich the UAE's cultural fabric, but also contribute to the wider recognition of Armenian heritage on the global stage. The Armenian community in the UAE continues to engage in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage through various organizations and committees.

Ամփոփում – Այս յօդուածը կ'ուսումնասիրէ հայերու մշակութային իրաւունքները՝ որպէս ազգային փոքրամասնութիւն Արաբական Միացեալ Էմիրութիւններու մէջ (ԱՄԷ), կեդրոնանալով անոնց մշակութային ժառանգութեան պահպանմանն ու յառաջխաղացմանը նպաստող տարբեր ծրագրերու եւ միջոցառումներու վրայ: Այն կը խորանայ հայկական

աւանդական բարեգործական եւ մշակութային կազմակերպութիւններու գործունէութեան մեջ՝ ընդգծելով կրթութեան եւ մշակոյթի ոլորտին հիմնական նախաձեռնութիւնները: Յօդուածը կ'աւանդուի Հայ եկեղեցւոյ միջոցառումներուն, ինքնութեան ամրապնդման գործունէութեան եւ արտաքին ուժերուն, ինչպիսիք են Հայաստանի եւ համաշխարհային հայկական սփիւռքի ազդեցութիւնը ԱՄԷ համայնքի մշակութային կեանքին վրայ: XXI դարուն հայ համայնքը կը շարունակէ աշխուժօրէն մասնակցիլ մշակութային զարգացմանը՝ կրթական նախաձեռնութիւններու, միջազգային համագործակցութիւններու եւ հայկական մշակոյթի միջազգային հարթակներուն ռազմավարական ներկայացման միջոցով: Այս ջանքերը ոչ միայն կը հարստացնեն ԱՄԷ մշակութային հիատաճքը, այլեւ կը նպաստեն հայկական ժառանգութեան աւելի լայն ճանաչմանը համաշխարհային ասպարեզին մէջ: ԱՄԷ-ի հայ համայնքը տարբեր կազմակերպութիւններու եւ յանձնախումբերու միջոցով կը շարունակէ զբաղուիլ մշակութային ժառանգութեան պահպանման եւ առաջ մղման գործով:

Аннотация – В статье рассматриваются культурные права армян как национального меньшинства в Объединенных Арабских Эмиратах (ОАЭ). Особое внимание уделяется различным программам и мероприятиям, которые способствуют сохранению и популяризации их культурного наследия. В ней представлены деятельность традиционных армянских благотворительных и культурных организаций, ключевые инициативы в области образования и культуры. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию деятельности Армянской церкви, мероприятий по формированию идентичности и внешних сил, таких как Армения и мировая армянская диаспора, на культурную жизнь общины ОАЭ. В XXI веке армянская община продолжает активно участвовать в культурной жизни посредством образовательных инициатив, международного партнерства и стратегического представления армянской культуры на международных платформах. Эти усилия не только обогатят культурный пласт ОАЭ, но и будут способствовать более широкому признанию армянского наследия на мировой арене. Армянская община в ОАЭ продолжает заниматься сохранением и популяризацией культурного наследия через различные организации и комитеты.

Keywords – Armenian community, UAE, Diaspora, cultural heritage, identity.

Հիմնաբառեր – հայ համայնք, ԱՄԷ, Սփիւռք, մշակութային ժառանգութիւն, ինքնութիւն:
Ключевые слова – армянская община, ОАЭ, диаспора, культурное наследие, идентичность.

Introduction

The Armenian community in the United Arab Emirates has a rich history spanning over 50 years, during which it has successfully established and organized itself.

In the 21st century, the Armenian community in the UAE remains actively involved in preserving and promoting its cultural heritage through various organizations and committees. Through educational and cultural programs, international cooperation, and showcasing Armenian culture on prestigious international platforms, the community aims to enhance recognition of its heritage (Khzmalyan 2021, <https://www.armedu.am/index.php/am/news/view/8090>).

This article explores the cultural rights of Armenians as a national minority in the UAE, highlighting the programs and events that stem from these rights. It also delves into the activities of traditional Armenian charitable and cultural organizations, as well as the various national events such as educational initiatives, church events, and identity-strengthening activities. Additionally, the article examines the influence of external factors, including ties with the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora communities, on the cultural life of Armenians in the UAE.

Armenian Cultural Events in the UAE in the Context of Cultural Rights of National Minorities

Culture is crucial for a nation's identity and plays a significant role in its growth and preservation. Therefore, prioritizing the creation of conducive environments for the development of national culture through practical measures is essential. The UAE's efforts, particularly under the guidance of the Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, to safeguard heritage align with UNESCO's guidelines for preserving human heritage.

The UAE has demonstrated a deep understanding of its roots and heritage while also embracing future possibilities. The annual "Sharjah Cultural Heritage Days" festival exemplifies this balance of honoring cultural heritage while looking towards the future. Through its events, the festival contributes significantly to global initiatives aimed at safeguarding human heritage and protecting the national identities of communities from the risk of disappearance (Dr. Abdul Aziz Al-Muslim, Head of Sharjah Heritage Foundation, speaks to the UAE News Agency Newspaper 2022, www.youm7.com, <https://tinyurl.com/bdcnndv5>).

UAE Cultural Festivals

The UAE hosts a variety of cultural festivals that highlight the heritage of its diverse population. Notable examples include the annual Sharjah Heritage Days and the Dubai International Arts Festival, which showcase Armenian cultural events. One significant event was the "Armenian Cultural Week" in Abu Dhabi from March 24–29, 2001. Organized by the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the UAE and the Abu Dhabi Cultural Centre, an exhibition of 'Armenian Applied Arts' was inaugurated on March 24, 2001 in the big hall of Abu Dhabi Cultural Centre. This event was sponsored by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Minister of Information and Culture and son of the country's president. (An Exhibition of Armenian applied Art was opened in UAE Capital on March 24 2001, <https://hyeforum.com/topic/4460-exhibition-of-armenian-applied-arts-opened-in-abu-dabi/>). The RA Ministry of Culture also provided substantial support for the exhibition.

This cultural event marked a significant milestone in interstate cooperation following the establishment of the RA Embassy in the UAE. The exhibition opening was attended by government officials, ambassadors accredited to the UAE, members of the Armenian community, and art enthusiasts. The event received coverage from

prominent UAE media outlets, with interviews and comments highlighting the appreciation for Armenian art. (UAE Shepor Newsletter, Issue No. 13, Armenian Culture Week in the UAE (March 24–29, 2001), Report of the Armenian Embassy in the UAE). It is important to note that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' involvement in cultural events of national minorities in the UAE is typically based on initiative rather than legal requirements. Decisions to support such events are influenced by factors such as cultural alignment with the UAE's vision, diplomatic relations with the partner country, and the potential benefits of cultural exchange and community engagement. While there is no specific legislation mandating government sponsorship of these events, the UAE often provides support through entities like the Ministry of Culture and Youth, local governments, and organizations such as the Cultural Foundation-Abu Dhabi and Dubai Culture. The UAE's commitment to promoting cultural diversity, tolerance, and international cooperation aligns with its broader values and initiatives, including the Year of Tolerance in 2019 (The year 2019 was proclaimed as Year of Tolerance Upholding the UAE's Status as a Global Capital for Tolerance, <https://www.moet.gov.ae/en/-/en/year-of-tolerance-1>) and efforts to foster peaceful coexistence among its diverse population.

Cultural Heritage Institutions in the UAE.

The UAE is known for its various cultural institutions, including museums, art galleries, and cultural centres that serve as platforms for different communities to display their cultural heritage. The Sharjah Calligraphy Museum is the only museum in the Arab world solely dedicated to calligraphy (The Sharjah Calligraphy Museum, <https://www.visitsharjah.com/activities/culture/sharjah-calligraphy-museum/>). The Sharjah Maritime Museum illustrates the historical significance of the sea in the development of coastal cities over the past 6,000 years (The Sharjah Maritime Museum, <https://www.visitsharjah.com/activities/family/sharjah-maritime-museum/>). The Sharjah Heritage Museum has been devoted to showcasing the authentic heritage of Sharjah for several decades, celebrating the rich culture of the Emirate and residents of the city (The Sharjah Heritage Museum, <https://www.visitsharjah.com/activities/heritage/sharjah-heritage-museum/>). The Sharjah Cultural Heritage Days Festival, established in 2003, is a significant cultural event celebrated as part of UNESCO World Heritage Days (Armenia is an Honorary Guest of Sharjah Heritage Days Cultural Festival, <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2022/01/15/Nouneh-Sarkissian-in-Sharjah/> 15 January 2022). From March 10 to 28, 2022, the 19-day session of the annual Sharjah Heritage Days festival took place with the theme "Heritage and the Future". The event was attended by representatives from 33 countries, with Armenia being the guest of honour. The Armenian pavilion, located in 12 halls, showcased various aspects of Armenian cultural heritage, ranging from historical artefacts to contemporary expressions. Visitors had the opportunity to explore Armenian manuscript art, miniatures, music, and traditional crafts such as carpet weaving,

embroidery, lacemaking, woodworking, khachkar making, doll making, and Armenian costumes. (Sharjah Heritage Days 19th Edition. The annual festival held in Sharjah, UAE, from March 10th to 28th, 2022. This international event is hosted every year in the city's heritage area along the Sharjah corniche. <https://www.facebook.com/seta.balouzan/videos/542477787047792?idorvanity=209120942547692>, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=696307808229479>). The pavilion was visited by Karen Grigoryan, the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Republic of Armenia in the UAE, and Bishop Mesrop Sarkissian, the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of the UAE and Qatar (Introducing Armenian Culture to Foreigners at the "Sharjah Heritage Days" Festival, 14 March 2022, Ar.armradio.am, <https://tinyurl.com/bk8s4kbr>).

On April 27, 2024, the "Ajman Tourism Development Department" organized the inaugural "Folklore String Festival" on World Dance Day at the "Ajman Centre". The event featured international performances lasting 90 seconds each, showcasing 18 unique acts representing various folklore traditions from around the world. The performances included dances from Russia, Greece, Argentina, Georgia, Austria, Spain, Ukraine, India, Moldova, Hungary, and Armenia, highlighting cultural diversity and fostering cultural exchange. This event played a significant role in enhancing cultural relations and connections between different communities and nations. The Folklore String Festival is a showcase of artistic excellence—and a demonstration of the significance of cultural exchange. The Tourism Development Authority of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi organizes these events to foster mutual understanding and unity among diverse cultures, creating enduring community connections and encouraging cultural integration (Ajman Tourism organizes the Folk Strings Festival in celebration of World Dance Day, www.merimedia.net, <https://tinyurl.com/y27pspdt>, 27 April 2024).

UAE Government Grant Support

The UAE Government has consistently been a major donor to UNESCO, actively participating in various programs that have benefited people worldwide. Through grants and sponsorships, the UAE supports cultural organizations, encouraging communities to safeguard and showcase their distinct cultural identities (The UAE Embassy in Armenia organizes a Virtual Session "Intercultural Cooperation: UNESCO and Cultural Diplomacy" on September 20, 2020, <https://www.mofa.gov.ae/ar-ae/mediahub/news/2020/9/21/21-09-2020-uae-armenia>).

The main actors in the cultural life of the Armenian community in the UAE and the events they have implemented

The cultural life of the Armenian community in the UAE is driven by key organizations that have implemented various activities. These include the "Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi" from 1990–2010, the "Armenian Relief Society" from 2010–2017, and the "Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Union"

from 2011–2017. These organizations serve as the cultural and spiritual core of the community, organizing events, public gatherings, lectures, religious services, spiritual reflections, and Bible studies to strengthen community bonds and promote Armenian culture.

The "Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi" was established in 1990 in the United Arab Emirates by a group of Armenians with the aim of organizing cultural events for both Armenian and foreign nationals. However, the association ceased its activities in 2010 due to the relocation of its members. (The Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi was founded on February 11, 2020, and its activities can be found on their website www.emahay.com). Over the course of two decades, from 1990 to 2010, the association played a significant role in promoting Armenian culture in Abu Dhabi and showcasing Armenian art alongside other cultures. "The Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi", in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Concert Committee, organized a series of memorable artistic events—featuring the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra from Armenia. The orchestra, comprised of 25 musicians, was conducted by the late renowned Aram Gharabekian. The performances took place in 2000 on May 6, 7, and 8 at the Cultural Foundation Auditorium in Abu Dhabi (700 attendees), the American University of Sharjah (750 attendees), and the Crown Plaza Ballroom in Dubai (900 attendees). The same orchestra returned in 2002 for performances on May 4, 5, and 6 at the same venues, with audiences of 650, 1,000, and 600 spectators, respectively (The Commemorative Volume of the Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi 2014, 1).

Another significant event was the performance of the Classical Music Ensemble "Talented Children of Armenia" in the UAE from April 28 to May 1, 2007 (Young talents of Armenia in Dubai, April 2007, <https://www.azad-hye.com/news/young-talents-of-armenia-in-dubai/>). This event, along with the previously mentioned one, highlights the crucial role of cultural diplomacy and artistic exchange in strengthening connections between the Armenian Diaspora and various cultural communities. It is worth mentioning that the group was led by the late Romaine Kozmoyan, a former representative of the Committee for Cultural Relations with the Diaspora Armenians at the Soviet Embassy in Lebanon and the artistic director was Lolita Boghossian. The ensemble delivered four remarkable performances: on April 28 at the Alliance Française (French Cultural Centre) in Dubai, on April 29 at the ADMA OPCO's HQ Auditorium (ADMA OPCO Auditorium. 1st Floor ADMA OPCO HQ Building at Abu Dhabi Corniche. Located on Najda Street, between Khalifa Street and Corniche), on April 30 at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Institute Concert Hall, and the final performance on May 1 at the Pierre Keossean Hall of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church Complex in Sharjah. These events attracted audiences of over 400 music enthusiasts and 150 adults and children, respectively (The Commemorative Volume of the Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi 2014, 2).

These initiatives not only showcased Armenian art, but also fostered goodwill, cultural exchange, and awareness, illustrating how artistic endeavours can transcend borders and cultures. Such events play a vital role in preserving the identity and vibrancy of the Armenian Diaspora worldwide.

The Armenian Relief Society (ARS) is a prominent organization in the cultural life of the Armenian community in the UAE.

The Sharjah-Dubai branch of the ARS was established on December 23, 2010, and has since been actively involved in various activities. The branch has organized events such as promoting its activities and celebrating the anniversary of the founding of the ARS. The first anniversary of the ARS United Arab Emirates branch was celebrated on March 22, 2012, at the Pierre Keoseyan Hall in Sharjah. The second anniversary was celebrated on December 15, 2012, with a dinner and celebration organized by the Social Committee at the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church Complex in Sharjah. The ARS Educational Committee in the UAE Armenian Community organized a lecture on "Organizational Laws" on March 26, 2011, at the residence of Ms. Lisa Saghdejian. Women's Day was celebrated on March 22, 2012, at the Mall of the Emirates, Dubai. Mother's Day celebration took place on May 9, 2015, at the National Ohannesian and Abu Dhabi Schools, where students were presented with a statue of the Mother of God. (ARS celebrates Mother's Day, www.emahay.com, <https://tinyurl.com/32tmz37j>, <https://tinyurl.com/32tmz37j>). The ARS also organized a culturally significant event, the Ashughan (bardic) Songs Evening on October 19, 2012, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Sayat Nova's birth. Other activities organized by the ARS UAE branch included The Armenian Handicrafts Exhibition and Sale which took place on April 5, 2013, at the Dubai Festival City 'Armenian Creative Hands' pavilion, arranged by the Handicrafts Committee. Additionally, embroidery courses focus on Armenian embroidery traditions from Van, Marash, and Ourfa, as well as Svaz embroidery including crochet and cross-stitch courses from October 2014 to December 13, 2014, organized by the Handicrafts Committee. In addition to the importance of organizing a feast for community life and strengthening cooperative ties, a social committee held an event on December 21, 2013, at the Pierre Keoseyan Hall of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church Complex in Sharjah.

The ARS UAE chapter concluded its operations in the UAE in 2017, having successfully implemented various cultural initiatives and committees that were well-received by the community.

The Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Union has been a key player in the cultural life of the Armenian community in the UAE, offering a wide range of activities such as choirs, dance groups, theatre groups, literary and cultural initiatives, art exhibitions. The organization has played a vital role in educating the new generation, promoting Armenian culture, and supporting Armenian intellectuals in both the homeland and the Diaspora. Since its establishment, Hamazkayin has enriched the lives of the Armenian diaspora by emphasizing Armenian writing, litera-

ture, and culture, thereby contributing to the preservation of our heritage (Bedikian, K., October 30, 2024, Asbarez newspaper, <https://asbarez.am/archives/469366>).

The National Armenian Educational and Cultural Union established the "Mushegh Ishkhan" chapter of Hamazkayin in the UAE on April 16, 2011. Since its inception, the one-member chapter has hosted various events, such as a literary evening commemorating the "500th anniversary of Armenian printing" and the declaration of 2012 as the "Year of the Armenian Book" by His Holiness Aram I., a lecture on "The Role of Women in Armenian Literature" was organized on the 4th February 2012 (Armenian Diaspora Yearbook 2012, 3), a literary evening focused on Armenia-Diaspora cooperation was held by the literary group of the "Mushegh Ishkhan" chapter (Armenian Diaspora Yearbook 2012, 4).

The "George Sarkissian" theater group of the "Mushegh Ishkhan" chapter has been instrumental in showcasing Armenian cultural heritage through theatrical performances. Some notable plays include Jacques S. Hakobyan's "The Crane is making a call" in 2012, George Apelian's "We Became Millionaires" on March 10, 2013, and Hagop Baronian's "Shoghokort" on March 20, 2015 (Mangassarian, Sh. (Menkechian) 2024, The performances of the "George Sarkissian" Theater unit of the "Moushegh Ishkhan" Branch of Hamazkayin. Seta Mangasarian's Patriotic Activities in Aleppo, the Emirates, and Canada. Darperag21.net, <https://tinyurl.com/4wk6t7k6>). However, the theatre group eventually disbanded, leaving the community without a theatre group. Additionally, the Fine Arts Committee of the chapter organized a student painting competition and exhibition themed "MOTHER" on April 19, 2013, at 4:30 pm. in the Pierre Keoseyan Hall of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church Complex in the Emirate of Sharjah.

Cultural Activities of Native Armenian Organizations in the UAE

In the UAE, there are no compatriot associations that can fill the void left by cultural initiatives. Unlike other diaspora communities, which have various compatriot associations like the Cultural Union of Ayntab's Educators, the Revival Union of Ourfa, the Compatriot Association of Tigranakert, the Armenian Youth Union of Kilis, and the Zeytun, Palu, and Perechik communities.

Since the Armenian community was established in the UAE, the National Councils of the UAE and the committees under its patronage have played a role in preserving culture. This includes the Armenian churches in Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, the Ohannesian and Abu Dhabi Khanoyan Armenian Day Schools and Sunday Schools, the Abu Dhabi Church-loving Ladies' Auxiliary, and the Abu Dhabi Youth Committee.

The primary goal of establishing the UAE Armenian Youth House Committee is to bring together young individuals and organize events that support and preserve their Armenian cultural heritage. The UAE Armenian Youth House Committee provides a platform for Armenian youth to learn about their history, language, customs, and traditions, ensuring that these aspects are passed down to future genera-

tions. In 1991, the foundation was laid with the purpose of uniting the youth of the community and engaging them in activities such as sports and social events.

The UAE Armenian Youth House and Sports Committee offers opportunities for Armenian youth to participate in sports, cultural activities, and community services, fostering a sense of identity and community. These events also aim to connect the young Armenian generation in the UAE with their heritage and strengthen community bonds.

It is evident that the youth of the community have evolved since the 1990s when many young individuals left for educational purposes. A significant portion of today's youth are university graduates and promising individuals who have chosen to settle in the UAE. From 2010 to 2022, as part of the reorganization efforts of the Armenian Diocese of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the Surrounding Areas, the involvement of youth in the Youth Committees of the UAE, Dubai, the Northern Emirates, and Abu Dhabi has been expanded. (Statement from the UAE National Assembly, December 16, 2023, Link posted on the Emahay Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=741409651355836&set=a.550209983809138>).

Among the events carried out by the UAE Armenian Youth House operating under the National Administration of Dubai and the Northern Emirates include a SOAP FOOTBALL game at the Darb al Zalak Centre on June 12, 2015, an online Patriotic Songs Evening on May 26, 2020, a youth gathering at the Hard Rock Dining Hall on June 17, 2022, a Bowling Tournament at Al Nasser Stadium on November 6, 2022, and a Family Park trip and sports games event at Creek Park Gate 4 in Dubai on January 29, 2023. The latter event featured music, hospitality, gifts, and a pleasant atmosphere, with participants aged 10 and above taking part in the games (The Youth Committee has organized a Family Park Trip. December 16, 2023. Emahay Facebook link, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5119800828121854&set=a.283547171747268>).

Cultural events and activities organized by the Armenian community in the UAE (event analysis)

Community events are categorized into the following areas:

1. Armenian national and religious holidays,
2. Lectures and poetry evenings,
3. Screenings of national and cultural films,
4. Singing, dancing, theatrical performances, poetry readings, meetings, family outings,
5. New Year festive Bazaar, New Year's celebrations.

Events—and celebrations dedicated to Armenian national and religious holidays hold significant importance in the Armenian communities of the Diaspora and the Armenian community in the UAE, serving as a crucial aspect of Armenian identity and spirituality.

In the UAE, these celebrations not only showcase cultural pride, but also reinforce the spiritual values that have been passed down through generations. Through these events, Armenians in the UAE uphold their identity, heritage, deepen their faith, and strengthen their unity, embodying the enduring spirit and resilience of the Armenian community.

During the specified period, several significant events took place in the national and spiritual life of the community. Notable examples include the "Erebuni-Yerevan 2798" Celebration organized by the Artistic Committee on October 21, 2016, at the "Pierre Keoseyan Hall" of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church Complex, the traditional Vartavar celebration organized by the Abu Dhabi Youth Committee on July 24, 2022, and July 16, 2023, inside the Holy Martyrs Church complex in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, a Prayer of Solidarity with the Armenians of Artsakh was held in response to His Holiness Aram I's call to support Artsakh on Sunday, October 1, 2023, in the churches of the Armenian Diocese of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and surrounding areas. A Holy and Immortal Liturgy was conducted for the well-being of the Artsakh Armenians, along with a Requiem Mass for the souls of the martyrs of Artsakh (Prayer of Solidarity for the Armenians of Artsakh, 1 October 2023, St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, Sharjah, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=698354838994651&set=pcb.69835528994582>). The Ascension Day banquet-program organized by the Abu Dhabi Women's Auxiliary on Sunday, May 12, 2024, concluded with a Holy and Devine Liturgy at the Suren Kojakian Hall of the Holy Martyrs Church Complex in Abu Dhabi.

Lectures and Recitation Evening Lectures play a crucial role in the Armenian Diaspora by preserving cultural heritage, strengthening the Western Armenian language and identity, and fostering community unity. These educational programs are instrumental in safeguarding the Armenian language, history, and customs, instilling a deep sense of connection to their roots in the younger generation.

Lectures organized within the Armenian community in the UAE promote inter-generational dialogue and enhance community bonds. Some of the topics covered in these lectures include: "1700 Years of Christianity as the State Religion in Armenia" by Rev. Alemezian on December 2, 2001, and "Honey and Bee" by Hrayr Soghomonian on October 30, 2002. Additionally, a recitation took place under the title PA-REV on Sunday, March 17, 2024 (Recitation Afternoon, inside the Pierre Keosseian Hall of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Complex in Sharjah, Sunday March 17, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=802245901938877&set=pcb.802246065272194>).

Film screenings – Feature film screening

The Cultural Committee organized a presentation on Sunday, November 5, 2023, in the Pierre Keoseyan Hall, focusing on the preparatory work for the feature film "Queen Keran of the Armenian Cilician Queens". Armen Piri Masih, the pro-

gram's creator, provided a detailed explanation of the film's concept, production process, and current progress. The film draws from historical sources, with a production team that includes historians, art historians, ethnographers, and musicians. It will depict the era of the powerful Armenian kingdom and is slated for international distribution on platforms like Netflix. The audience engaged with the author through a question-and-answer session, expressing enthusiastic support for this patriotic and culturally significant project aimed at preserving Armenian heritage (Presentation: The preparation process of the film series "Keran, the Cilician Queen" Armenian Queens, by the author of the film program Armen Bir Masih November 5, 20 23, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=722763326553802&set=pcb.722764176553717>, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=716279660535502&set=pcb.716279803868821>, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=715760063920795&set=pcb.715760127254122>).

Song, Dance, Performance, Meeting, Family Park Trip

Armenian communities in the Diaspora, including the Armenian community in the UAE, host a range of events such as recitals, song concerts, dance performances, parent-teacher meetings, family gatherings, and park trips. These events are aimed at preserving and strengthening Armenian cultural identity.

These gatherings provide valuable opportunities for families to connect and for children to embrace their heritage. They also help the community uphold shared Armenian traditions, reinforcing cultural values and language, fostering a strong sense of belonging among the younger generation, and promoting Armenian culture. By organizing such events, the Armenian community in the UAE ensures the continuity and vibrancy of Armenian identity and heritage across generations. Notable events include the Elements Band concert on October 2, 2015, Karaoke night on September 16, 2016, Music stop (Karaoke & Music Games) on October 27, 2017, organized by the Arts Committee, and Karaoke Night on December 11, 2023, organized by the Dubai and Northern Emirates Youth Committee at Leen's Bluewaters restaurant at 7:00 PM. Additionally, the Family Park Trip event featuring sports games, music, hospitality, gifts, and a pleasant atmosphere took place on January 29, 2023, at 10:00 am at Creek Park in Dubai, Gate 4 (Family Park Trip Event, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5119800828121854&set=a.283547171747268>).

New Year Bazaar, New Year's Eve Celebration

Annual events like the Armenian New Year celebrations, New Year Bazaar, and New Year's Eve festivities play a crucial role in preserving cultural traditions and promoting community unity through the reinforcement of social bonds and a shared sense of identity. The New Year Bazaar serves as a platform for showcasing Armenian crafts, products, and artisanal goods, thereby further solidifying cultural connections. The 18th edition of the traditional "New Year Bazaar" featured a variety of delectable sweets and pastries crafted by the Ladies' Committee. The event took place

on Friday, November 10, and Saturday, November 11, 2017, at the Pierre Keosseian Hall of the Sharjah Complex from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The 22nd New Year Bazaar, organized by the Ladies' Committee, was held on Friday and Saturday, November 19, 20, 26, 27, 2021, at the Pierre Keosseian Hall of the Sharjah Complex (New Year Bazaar, 19, 20, 26, 27 November 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3898159730285976&set=pcb.3898159943619288>)

The annual New Year's Eve party, organized by the National Committee of Abu Dhabi and the Northern Emirates, featured performances by Lebanese singer Hrach Kaydazgian and Seto Baghdasarian and his band on December 31, 2011 (Armenian Diaspora Yearbook 2012, 5). The National Committee of the Armenian Diocese of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the Surrounding Areas hosted the New Year party on Sunday, December 31, 2023, at the luxurious Al Wasl Hall of the Le Méridien Dubai Hotel and Conference Centre. These events serve to preserve Armenian traditions, foster intercultural understanding, and strengthen community bonds in the diverse and globalized UAE setting.

Collaborative Events Enhancing Armenian Cultural Heritage

The partnership between the Armenian Community Committees of Dubai and the Northern Emirates and Abu Dhabi is instrumental in promoting and preserving Armenian culture and heritage.

Through joint efforts, they organize a variety of events and initiatives that foster community bonds and celebrate Armenian identity. One notable example of this collaboration was the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of Christianity being declared the state religion in Armenia in the UAE. The Abu Dhabi "1700th Anniversary Committee" hosted an art competition and evening event where children and youth from the community showcased their talents in recitation, music, and painting. These artistic expressions, inspired by the historic occasion, were showcased at an event held at the auditorium of "The Club" in Abu Dhabi, bringing together participants and the Armenian community. Another significant event was a lecture titled "The Treasures of the Cilicia Museum", delivered by the Catholicos Vicar of the Diocese, His Eminence Archbishop Yeprem Tabakian, in Abu Dhabi on April 4, 2001. This lecture highlighted the rich heritage of Armenian Christianity offered an educational experience for the Armenian community. Additionally, a memorable family park trip gathering were organized by the Abu Dhabi National Administration on March 5, 2001, at the lush garden of the Gulf Hotel in Abu Dhabi, attended by members of the Dubai and Northern Emirates community (Shepor UAE Issue 13, April 2001, Pastoral Visit of His Holiness the Catholicos Vicar, page 15). A significant joint event was also held for the UAE's 40th National Day on December 2, 2011, with a family park trip gathering organized by the both National Councils of the UAE (Armenian Diaspora Yearbook 2011, 6).

Conclusions

In the multicultural environment of the UAE, the cultural life of the Armenian community during the first two decades of the 21st century reflects the community's dedication to preserving its national heritage and passing it on to future generations. The wide range of cultural events and public activities has played a vital role in safeguarding national traditions, promoting the Armenian language and culture, and fostering a strong sense of identity and belonging among community members. Community gatherings not only strengthen social bonds but also nurture Armenian identity and ensure the transmission of centuries-old heritage.

Organizations such as the Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi, the Armenian Relief Society, and the Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Union have significantly enriched the cultural life of the Armenian community in the UAE. Through their artistic, educational, and cultural initiatives, they have promoted Armenian literature and art and reinforced a strong sense of Armenian identity. These organizations have also contributed to preserving and promoting Armenian cultural heritage while building bridges between the Armenian community in the UAE and the wider global society.

Committees operating under the auspices of the National Board of the Armenian Community in the UAE, along with their cultural and sporting events, have provided valuable opportunities for community involvement. These initiatives have strengthened communal ties and inspired a deep sense of identity and civic engagement.

National and religious celebrations continue to highlight the resilience and unity of the Armenian community in the UAE. These events instill cultural pride, preserve traditions, and reinforce spiritual and moral values. They serve as a living testament to the enduring spirit of the Armenian people and their connection to ancestral roots.

Performances by talented Armenian youth in the UAE showcase the powerful role of cultural diplomacy and artistic expression. These events celebrate diversity, strengthen ties between the Armenian Diaspora, Armenia, and the global community, and emphasize the value of art in building meaningful connections. Such efforts not only preserve the rich legacy of Armenian art but also foster goodwill and cultural exchange, contributing to the unity and identity of the global Armenian Diaspora. Through these initiatives, the Armenian community in the UAE deepens its appreciation of Armenia's unique cultural heritage – including its art, music, and literature.

The UAE government's commitment to cultural diversity, tolerance, and international cooperation underscores its broader mission to support the cultural rights of national minorities. This commitment is evident in its promotion of peaceful coexistence and extends to fostering global harmony, positioning the UAE as a beacon of cultural understanding in an interconnected world. These efforts continue to inspire dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect among nations and cultures.

The UAE's public festivals serve as impactful platforms for promoting cultural harmony and enhancing connections between diverse communities. They underscore the universal language of art and the shared human values that unite people, highlighting the importance of cultural exchange in today's globalized society.

In conclusion, the cultural life of the Armenian community in the UAE represents a dynamic blend of tradition and innovation. Through festivals, performances, educational programs, and youth engagement, every initiative contributes to preserving Armenian heritage and nurturing a strong communal identity. These collective efforts not only strengthen ties within the Armenian diaspora but also promote intercultural understanding, enriching the multicultural fabric of the UAE.

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