

Armenian Film Foundation

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***The River Ran Red*, Final Film in Genocide Trilogy, Premieres at Arpa International Film Festival Oct. 24**

(Los Angeles, Oct. 24, 2008) – Culminating more than 40 years of interviews with 400 eyewitnesses to the Armenian Genocide of 1915, documentarian J. Michael Hagopian has completed the final film in his Witnesses Trilogy, *The River Ran Red*. The 60-minute documentary film premieres at the Arpa International Film Festival on Oct. 24 at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, California – four days after Hagopian's 95th birthday.

The River Ran Red is the epic search for survivors of the Armenian Genocide along the Euphrates, which snakes from the Armenian Plateau in Turkey to Syria. From his archives of 400 testimonies of survivors and eyewitnesses, Hagopian weaves a compelling story of terrifying intensity and resounding warmth. The search concludes with the discovery and testimony of the last three survivors, among several thousand, who had been stuffed into a burning cave in the forbidden desert of Deir Zor.

"If I succeed in translating to the viewer the experience and the pathos of those Armenians who were deported from their homes and made it to the Euphrates River only to witness the worst kind of bloodshed, then I accomplished what I set out to do," says Hagopian, who wrote and produced the film.

A resident of Thousand Oaks, California, Hagopian's hunt for survivors took him to 13 different countries on five continents over a period of four decades. He recorded such compelling accounts as the priest who returns to his birthplace and meets the man who killed his father and other family members, and people who reported seeing hundreds of bodies floating down what they described as the bloody waters of the Euphrates River.

Hagopian was honored with the Arpa Lifetime Achievement Award and the Armin T. Wegner Humanitarian Award in 2006. He also is the recipient of Jewish World Watch's "I Witness" Award for dedicating his professional life to chronicling the history of the Armenian people and commemorating victims of the Armenian Genocide.

"We are so pleased to have this opportunity to show Dr. Hagopian's documentary," says Arpa Film Festival founder Sylvia Minassian. "He is an amazing man."

Hagopian himself is a Genocide survivor. As a young boy, he was hidden in a well in a mulberry grove to escape Turkish marauders and later fled, with his family, to the United States, where he eventually earned a PhD from Harvard University in 1943. He started collecting film footage about Armenians early on in his 60-year career as a documentary filmmaker, and he established the Armenian Film Foundation in 1979 with the help of several community leaders. He has made over 70 educational films. Seventeen of those are about the Armenian people, including the *The River Ran Red* and the definitive film on the Turkish massacre of Armenians in 1915, *The Forgotten Genocide*.

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There is yet another film that Hagopian plans to make. "I have interviews with survivors of the 1892-95 massacres and of eyewitnesses to the burning of Smyrna," he says. There was a 30-year genocidal era in Ottoman Turkish history and that story needs to be told."

The Armenian Film Foundation is dedicated to preserving the visual and personal histories of the witnesses to the first genocide of the 20th century. Since 1979, the Foundation has made its mission to serve as the primary motion picture resource bank for Armenian Genocide footage for public television, educational institutions, and film and television producers worldwide. Plans are underway to digitize its archival materials within the next few years to make them more readily available to people from all walks of life.

For more information about the premiere and ticketing, please visit www.armenianfilm.org or call 805-495-0717.

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