

The Armenian Reporter

USC, Armenian Film Foundation agree to archive 400 survivor testimonies

Work to commence after needed funds are raised

Published: Monday April 19, 2010



Stephen Smith of USC (left) and J. Michael and Antoinette Hagopian signing agreement for digitization of filmed Genocide testimonies.

Los Angeles - The USC Shoah Foundation Institute, part of the USC College of Letters, Arts & Sciences, signed an agreement with the Armenian Film Foundation and Dr. J. Michael and Antoinette Hagopian on April 13 to help the preservation and dissemination of the largest archive of filmed interviews with survivors of and witnesses to the Armenian Genocide.

The two organizations and Dr. Hagopian will work together to make approximately 400 testimonies of Armenian Genocide survivors and witnesses available for educational purposes through the Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive.

The signed agreement is the first step in the process to digitize, index, preserve, and disseminate the filmed testimonies collected by Dr. Hagopian and the Armenian Film Foundation between 1968 and 2004.

Once the process is complete, the testimonies will become accessible through the Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive, which contains nearly 52,000 video testimonies of Holocaust survivors and other witnesses. Funds must be raised before work will commence.

"As a preliminary step towards including Armenian Genocide survivor testimonies in the archive, our agreement with the Armenian Film Foundation is a major milestone," said USC Shoah Foundation Institute Executive Director Stephen Smith. "This project will help preserve evidence of a genocide that must be acknowledged. It will honor the memory of those whose lives were taken, and it will ensure that future generations are able to learn from individuals who experienced the Armenian Genocide firsthand."

With the attempted annihilation of the Armenian people being the first major genocide of the 20th Century, the Armenian Film Foundation's filmed interviews are significant to the scope of the Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive. The Institute is beginning to work with partners around the world to expand its archive with testimonies from survivors and witnesses of other genocides, including the Rwandan genocide and the Cambodian genocide.

"We believe this agreement is the beginning of a long-term partnership with the world-renowned USC Shoah Foundation Institute that will promote the study and prevention of future genocides," said Dr. Hagopian. "Inclusion of these filmed Genocide survivor interviews, a 'national treasure' of the Armenian people, side by side with testimonies of Holocaust survivors in an archive that can be accessed and searched around the world, will finally help us fulfill our mission of disseminating these eyewitness accounts worldwide."

The Shoah Foundation Institute's mission is to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry-and the suffering they cause-through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies.

"Victimization and genocide perpetrated and denied in one part of the world, can become the breeding ground for greater crimes against humanity in another part of the world," said Dr. Hagopian, who is 96 years old and a Genocide survivor himself. "I have felt that it was my responsibility to educate and inform so that history won't be repeated."

About the Testimony Collection

The foundation's film archive includes nearly 400 interviews of Genocide survivors and witnesses conducted in 10 countries. The voices of these filmed survivors and witnesses, now deceased, echo from all corners of the world in 10 different languages. The majority of the 400 interviews are either in English or Armenian (some in rare dialects), with some witnesses speaking in Arabic, Greek, Spanish, French, Kurdish, Turkish, German, and Russian. Those interviewed were from 8 to 29 years of age at the time of the Genocide.

The major areas that were covered in those interviews are from the following cities and towns of Anatolia (mainly Eastern Turkey): Adabazar, Eskisehir, Konia, Sivas, Kharpert, Urfa, Aintab, Marash, Malatia, Dickranagerd, Erzeroum, Van, Bitlis, Der Zor, Smyrna, Erzingan, Musa Dagh, Kessab, Aleppo, Shabin Karahisar, Guren, Sepastia, Banderma, Yozgat, Everek, Hadjin, Zeitoun, Amassia, and Kutahya.

About the Armenian Film Foundation

The Armenian Film Foundation was established in 1979 as a non-profit, educational, and cultural organization dedicated to the documentation in motion pictures of Armenian heritage and life. Its goals are to inspire pride in and to create worldwide recognition of the Armenian people and their contributions, and to preserve the visual and personal histories of the witnesses to the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Dr. J. Michael Hagopian, co-founder of the Armenian Film Foundation, has released 17 documentary films on the Armenian heritage, culture, and history, including an epic trilogy on the Armenian Genocide comprised of *Voices from the Lake*, *Germany and the Secret Genocide*, and *The River Ran Red*.

The foundation has in its archives nearly 400 irreplaceable and invaluable filmed interviews with witnesses and survivors to the Armenian Genocide, as well as Genocide descendants, scholars and others.

Recognizing the pressing need to record the experience of Armenians who were subject to the first genocide of the 20th Century, Dr. Hagopian in 1968 began filming Armenian Genocide survivors and eyewitnesses.

As aging Genocide survivors began dying in large numbers, the Armenian Film Foundation embarked on a massive project to interview on 16mm film the remaining survivors of and eyewitnesses to the Armenian Genocide of 1915. When the survivor interview project commenced in 1982, an estimated 2,500 credible eyewitnesses to the Armenian Genocide of 1915 were still alive. Fifteen percent of these were subsequently documented on film by the Armenian Film Foundation, which retains the original footage, sound tapes, record books, relevant photographs, and other documentation that may have been provided by the survivors and eyewitnesses.

For more information, visit the Foundations's website, www.armenianfilm.org or call Tamar Mashigian at 818-778-1763

About Dr. J. Michael Hagopian

Born to an Armenian family in Kharpert-Mezreh, Dr. Hagopian is a Genocide survivor who has dedicated his life to the visual documentation of the Turkish extermination of 1.5 million Armenians in 1915. In all, his work encompasses nearly 400 interviews of survivors of and witnesses to the Armenian Genocide and 40 years of research.

Dr. Hagopian holds a doctorate in international relations from Harvard University and an undergraduate degree from the University of California at Berkeley. He also did two years of graduate work in cinema at the University of Southern California.

He taught political science and economics at the University of California at Los Angeles; American University of Beirut, Lebanon; Banaras Hindu University, India; and Oregon State University, Corvallis.

Dr. Hagopian is the chair of the Board of Directors of the Armenian Film Foundation and producer/director of many award-winning documentary films.

As President of Atlantis Productions, he has also been engaged in the research, writing and production of educational and documentary films for instructional and informational use in the classroom and on television.

He has written, directed and produced more than 70 educational and documentary films which collectively have won over 160 national and international awards, including two Emmy nominations for the writing and production of *The Forgotten Genocide*, the first full-length feature film on the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Several of his films were produced under grants from the U.S. Office of Education and the Ethnic Heritage Program, the MacArthur Foundation, California Endowment for the Humanities, and California State Department of Education.

Dr. Hagopian himself is the recipient of numerous honors, including 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. The Armenian National Committee honored him as Man of the Year in 2000.

About the USC Shoah Foundation Institute

Established in 1994 by Steven Spielberg to collect and preserve the testimonies of survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute maintains one of the largest video digital libraries in the world: nearly 52,000 video testimonies in 32 languages and from 56 countries. The Institute is part of the College of Letters, Arts & Sciences at the University of Southern California; its mission is to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry—and the suffering they cause—through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies.

The Institute works within the University and with partners around the world to advance scholarship and research, to provide resources and online tools for educators, and to disseminate the testimonies for educational purposes. In addition to preserving the testimonies in its archive, the Institute is working with partner organizations to help document the stories of survivors and other witnesses of other genocides.

For more information, visit the Institute's website, www.college.usc.edu/vhi.