



ZORYAN INSTITUTE OF CANADA, INC.

255 Duncan Mill Rd., Suite 310

Toronto, ON, Canada M3B 3H9

Tel: 416-250-9807 Fax: 416-512-1736 E-mail: zoryan@zoryaninstitute.org

www.zoryaninstitute.org

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Megan Swan

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Tel: 416-250-9807

Armenian Ambassador Praises Roger W. Smith of Zoryan Institute for Raising His Voice for the Truth

Washington, DC—In presenting the Movses Khorenatsi medal to Prof. Roger W. Smith at an official ceremony at the Armenian Embassy today, Ambassador Tatoul Markarian stated, “There are many deserving individuals in the Diaspora, especially among one of its most active and intellectual segments, the Armenian-American and Canadian community. Today, we are honoring an individual who is not an Armenian, but who raised his voice for the truth.”



The Movses Khorenatsi Medal, established in 1993, is awarded by the President of Armenia to individuals “for their prominent contributions in the fields of culture, arts, literature, education, and humanities.” Smith, Professor Emeritus of Government at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, and Chairman of the Zoryan Institute, received the medal “for his considerable contribution to the international recognition of the

Armenian Genocide.”

After thanking Amb. Markarian, Prof. Smith noted that he is often asked how he, a non-Armenian, became involved with the study of the Armenian Genocide. He explained that his interest developed in stages and was not planned. About 25 years ago, he decided to study genocide systematically in preparation for a course he was going to teach, but he found that there was little information published on the Armenian Genocide. In fact, not only was the Armenian

Genocide little remembered, it was actively denied by the Turkish Government.

At a conference at Princeton, he presented a paper on genocide denial and was asked by another professor if he was Armenian. “No I’m not Armenian,” he replied. “Why do you ask?” She answered, “So if you’re not Armenian, why do you care what happened to them?” He found the implications of this statement grave and replied to her, “This is bystander behavior, and it’s because of bystanders that genocides can proceed.” It reminded him of the famous quotation by the Irish philosopher and statesman, Edmund Burke, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

But for Smith it also raised a very fundamental question, the one exemplified by the Biblical story of the good Samaritan, that is, “Who is my neighbor?” He explained, “To me, the question of who is my neighbor is a very real one. And the answer is not someone who is in my tribe, who shares my religion, or whatever; it is somebody who is in need. And I think in the Armenian community that’s been widely understood and acted upon.” He went on to give as an example the work of several Armenian groups who have been instrumental in trying to get attention for the situation in Darfur. “The notion of exclusiveness,” he went on to say, “demeans us all.”

Prof. Smith then spoke about his first encounter with the Zoryan Institute in 1985, when he was invited to a seminar on denial. The paper he presented at that seminar was well received and he was encouraged to develop it further, which he did, eventually publishing it as a major study in the *Armenian Review*. He mentioned that experience specifically, because “in many ways, what



From left to right: Edward Alexander, Aram Hamparian of ANCA, Bryan Ardouny of AAA, and Roger Smith.

came out of that has been the foundation for all the work I have done since on denial.” He also gave special mention to Zoryan’s Genocide and Human Rights University Program, which brings in students from all over the world for “training and grooming and encouraging a new generation of genocide scholars and human rights activists. I have contributed to that program, but have also in many ways been shaped by it,” he remarked.

Among those in attendance were community leaders, representatives of national organizations, Ambassador John Evans, and Edward Alexander, author and for many years with the US State Department.



From left to right: K.M. Greg Sarkissian, Roger Smith, George Shirinian of the Zoryan Institute

The Zoryan Institute, parent organization of the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies and the International Institute for Diaspora Studies, co-publisher of *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* and *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, is the first non-profit, international center devoted to the research and documentation of contemporary issues with a focus on Armenian social, political and cultural life, with the concern for the human rights of all. For more information please contact the Zoryan Institute by email zoryan@zoryaninstitute.org or telephone (416) 250-9807.