

Hope and Healing

HART visit to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh)



HUMANITARIAN AID RELIEF TRUST

SEPTEMBER 2018

SCHEDULE OF VISIT

Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh)

8 September	Fallen Soldiers Museum Missing Persons Museum
9 September	Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi Shushi Gorge National Archaeological Museum National Gallery The Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre: 20 th Anniversary Celebration
10 September	Meeting: Archbishop Pargev Martirosyan, Archbishop of Nagorno-Karabakh Meeting: Masis Mayilian, Minister of Foreign Affairs Armenian Relief Society Kindergarten The Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre: tour of facilities Youth Palace Theatre: performances from talented musicians and dancers to celebrate the Centre's 20th anniversary
11 September	Gandzasar Monastery Home visit to Vanya, one of the Centre's patients Meeting: Vahram Balayan, Vice-President of National Assembly.

Armenia

12 September	Khor Virap Monastery, where Gregory the Illuminator was imprisoned for 13 years in a dungeon.
13 September	Visit: Genocide Memorial Visit: Genocide Museum Meeting: H. E. Armen Sarkissian, President of the Republic of Armenia; Zoya Lazaryan, Adviser to the President and former Health Minister Meeting: David Tonoyan, Defence Minister of Armenia
14 September	Meeting: Judith Farnworth, UK Ambassador to Armenia

THE LADY COX REHABILITATION CENTRE

This year marks the 20th anniversary of The Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre – an internationally recognised ‘Centre of Excellence’ in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The health facility provides hope and healing to over 1,000 patients every year. Its inspirational staff, led by the Centre’s Founder and Director Vardan Tadevosyan, are helping to break the stigma of disability widespread throughout the former Soviet Union. Therapeutic services include physiotherapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy, as well as a state-of-the-art hydrotherapy pool and a new Day Care Centre for children with autism.

The Government of Nagorno-Karabakh provides the main funding for the Centre. HART’s support contributes towards staff costs and the wider availability of medicines and effective therapies.



Caroline Cox with the Centre’s inspirational staff caring for a child with Cerebral palsy

We visited the Rehabilitation Centre. During our visit, we also met political, religious and community leaders in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia.

TIMELINE

THE LADY COX REHABILITATION CENTRE

1988-1994	The Nagorno-Karabakh War left many soldiers and civilians wounded or disabled and lacking even the most basic medication for pain relief.
1998-2000	A bomb-damaged building was reconstructed as the region's first and only rehabilitation facility for people with disabilities.
1999-2000	Intensive specialist courses for local nurses.
2005	The rehabilitation facility was re-named The Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre.
2006	A state-of-the-art hydrotherapy pool was installed.
2007	A Day Care Centre opens for young children with mental and physical disabilities.
2017	The opening of a specialised sub-centre for the treatment of children with autism and Cerebral palsy.
2018	Today, the Centre has over 60 members of staff, including 25 nurse specialists. Its Home Visits Division provides services to more than 100 people with severe disabilities. Over 1,000 patients receive care annually including physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and other therapies including music, art and sport.



A patient receives treatment in the Centre's state-of-the-art hydrotherapy pool
[Photo credit: The Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre]



Caroline Cox at the Rehabilitation Centre's Day Care Unit

The Centre's achievements are all the more remarkable given the ongoing military tensions in the region. Nagorno-Karabakh has existed under a fragile ceasefire for over twenty years. A situation of 'no war, no peace' has become the status quo, leaving the area economically and politically isolated.



Caroline Cox with H. E. Armen Sarkissian, President of the Republic of Armenia
[Photo credit: President of the Republic of Armenia]

BACKGROUND

Nagorno-Karabakh is a historically Armenian region in the South Caucasus. However, during Stalin's divide-and-rule policy of the 1920s, the territory was given to Azerbaijan. As Soviet rule collapsed towards the end of the 1980s, Armenian-Azeri tensions increased. By 1991, Azerbaijan initiated full-scale war, identified by the Azeri political leadership as ethnic cleansing, resulting in the deaths of about 30,000 people. A ceasefire was brokered in 1994 and ethnic Armenians have since established control of Nagorno-Karabakh as a de facto independent state, though its independence is not internationally recognised.

Sporadic breaches of the ceasefire pose a serious threat to lasting peace. These occur mainly along the 160km front line, where opposing military forces are situated in close proximity. In April 2016, tensions sparked into full conflict in what is sometimes referred to as the 'Four Days War', resulting in the deaths of over 200 soldiers and several civilians.

FRACTIOUS PEACE

Years of peace talks have led to virtually no progress. As Judith Farnworth, UK Ambassador to Armenia, told us: *“It does not inspire confidence that Azerbaijan isn’t prepared to engage seriously in negotiations.”* With reference to Armenia’s recent ‘Velvet Revolution’ and the subsequent formation of a new government, she said: *“We hear concerns that Azerbaijan may take advantage of domestic developments in Armenia, though there is relief that they haven’t yet done so. Any change throws up the possibility of risk.”*



Fallen Soldiers Museum

There is also widespread concern over Azerbaijan’s reported stockpiling of weapons, as well as the presence of snipers on the Line of Contact. David Tonoyan, Defence Minister of Armenia, said the Four Day War in 2016 *“changed the mood between the two nations.”* He expressed concern that:

“Azerbaijan is advancing – they are reducing the distance between positions, which is forcing Armenia to do the same. Tensions are increasing. We know that some of their military support comes from abroad. But from the Ministry’s point of view, we are not concerned whether they are from Azerbaijan, or India, or elsewhere. They are mercenaries and they will never succeed”.

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is a frozen war, which – we were told – threatens to catch fire at any moment. Archbishop Pargév Martirosyan summed up these concerns when he said: *“Our priority for the region is peace – peace, peace, peace. But there is tension on the border and, the reality is, we are waiting for a new war.”* Or as

the President of Armenia described: *“Times are uncertain. The people of Karabakh live in permanent danger.”*

ARMENOPHOBIA

Tensions are exacerbated by increasingly divisive rhetoric and anti-Armenian propaganda, which is widespread in Azerbaijan. The rising level of hatred has been fuelled by social media and has glorified those committing war crimes against Armenians. Those whom we met expressed specific concerns about the distribution of school texts books in Azerbaijan that propagate negative stereotypes of Armenians. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Nagorno-Karabakh told us, such propaganda is *“very dangerous”* and is instilling Armenophobia from a young age.

UK-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

The UK is committed to working with the Armenian government and other partners to improve mutual prosperity and security. We heard from the UK Ambassador in Yerevan that work in ongoing to improve human rights and good governance, whilst programmes are underway to develop stronger ties with Armenian commercial sectors:

“We have very good engagement with the new Government of Armenia... It is very much for the Government of Armenia to decide their priorities. But we stand ready to support reforms. Since 2016 for example, we have helped to strengthen the application of European Human Rights Standards in the Armed Forces in Armenia. Theresa May has also appointed Mark Pritchard MP as British Envoy to Armenia, with the intention of boosting opportunities for trade and investment”.

Armen Sarkissian, President of Armenia, described UK-Armenian relations as *“fantastic”*, adding: *“The general mood is positive... there is a feeling that the UK wants to do more.”* We also heard from the Defence Minister that:

“For ten years, British military and civilian advisers have made valuable contributions to our defence reform programmes. Day-by-day, there is political will to strengthen cooperation between the two countries.”

These are positive developments. However, the UK Government still refuses to recognise the 1915 Armenian Genocide. By doing so, it fails to acknowledge the truth, incontrovertibly portrayed in the Genocide Museum. Historical and contemporary recognition is essential for healing and reconciliation.



The HART team visits the Armenian Genocide Memorial

'BEAUTY FROM ASHES'

The medium and long-term impact of this year's Revolution in Armenia remains to be seen. *"Expectations are high", the President told us, "but the process of transition takes time. Our people will have to be patient. We can nevertheless be proud of the non-violent change of power."*

Judith Farnworth, UK Ambassador to Armenia, echoed the President's sentiments about the need for patience:

"Since the revolution, political stability in Armenia is the priority. We are hoping that future elections will be free, fair and democratic and will really reflect the will of the people. The potential is huge. Over 30,000 have returned since the Revolution in April. But it is too difficult to say what the outcome will be. Of course our long-term goals to improve human rights and good governance are important. But our number one priority has to be political stability."

Both the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are taking steps to strengthen their democratic institutions, as well as seeking to embed the definition and protection of human rights in their constitutions. Despite threats to peace, the spirit of the people in Nagorno-Karabakh is positive. They continue to rebuild their bomb-damaged towns and villages, often with impressive architectural style.

As Masis Mayilian, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Nagorno-Karabakh, told us:

“We have two priorities: first, to make our society open to the world. We are seeking open relations in education, culture, education, health and in other areas. We want to enhance our relationship with other nations; second, for our country to be internationally recognised. Security for us is very important. International recognition would make us as secure as possible.”

The call for the recognition of statehood was unanimous in our various discussions. All of those whom we met said that international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh is vital to moving the peace process forward.



Caroline Cox, during her speech at the Rehabilitation Centre’s 20th anniversary celebration, said: “I am humbled and inspired by the spirit of the Armenian people: you not only survive but you create beauty from the ashes of destruction.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Humanitarian aid

The Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre continues to expand its therapeutic repertoire for people with disabilities ranging from the new-born to the elderly. Unfortunately, it is the only rehabilitation facility in the region. As diagnoses of patients with physical and mental disabilities improves – largely due to the efforts of the Centre and its staff – the number of referrals to the Centre increases. Constraints in funding and space limit the provision of care for people with disabilities to only 10 per cent of those who could benefit from the services.



Vanya, one of the Centre's patients, is a chess champion and enjoyed playing with us

With additional funding support, the Centre would be able to expand in the following ways:

- A new Centre on the outskirts of Stepanakert providing for more patients who would be able to benefit from more outdoor space and activities.

- Basic training for families of people with disabilities so that specialist care can be given at home.

Human rights and military offences

- Clear measures are needed to prevent further military casualties. It is imperative that Azerbaijani forces commit to a bilateral agreement of withdrawing snipers from the frontline, as advocated by the Nagorno-Karabakh Government.
- The international community must become more actively engaged in monitoring the military and human rights situations in Nagorno-Karabakh to serve as a deterrent to further military aggression.
- The international community must also investigate reports of the promotion of Armenophobia in Azerbaijan, including the anti-Armenian contents of school text books.

UK-Armenian relations

- Relations between the UK and Armenia are based on genuine friendship founded on mutual trust and a strong commitment to shared values. We urge the UK Government to support engagement with Armenia since its prospects for the future are compatible with the UK's commitment to a democratic state based on the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

We wish to thank everyone who received us in Armenia and Artsakh for their warm welcome, their valuable contributions of information and their traditional generous, gracious Armenian hospitality.

We also wish to record our profound gratitude to all who have contributed financially to the Rehabilitation Centre, enabling it to develop its excellent repertoire of therapeutic care for increasing numbers of patients of all ages and diverse needs. In particular, we wish to record immense gratitude to Jorge Vartparonian for his most recent and splendid donation of £20,000 to the Centre which will help Vardan and his team to maintain and expand their

transformational work; and our gratitude to the UK Support Group for Vardan's Centre, one of whose Committee members accompanied the visit.



Caroline Cox; David Thomas; Lola Yusuf at the Gandzasar Monastery in Nagorno-Karabakh.
Under Soviet Communism, all churches and monasteries were closed.
Today, there are hundreds in the region.

For more information about The Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre in Nagorno-Karabakh
visit www.theladycoxrehabilitationcentre.org

To find out more about Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust
visit www.hart-uk.org