



ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICA

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ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY MOURNS THE DEATH OF GERALD R. FORD

Washington, DC – The Armenian Assembly of America mourns the loss of President Gerald R. Ford who passed away on December 26 at the age of 93. Board of Trustees Chairman Hirair Hovnanian sent a letter to the former President's wife, Mrs. Betty Ford, expressing heartfelt condolences on behalf of the Armenian Assembly and the Armenian-American community.

Prior to his presidency, Ford represented the State of Michigan in Congress for 25 years, eight of which he served as House Minority Whip. In 1965, as a Congressman, Ford submitted a statement for the congressional record in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

“Mr. Speaker, with mixed emotions we mark the 50th anniversary of the Turkish genocide of the Armenian people. In taking notice of the shocking events in 1915, we observe this anniversary with sorrow in recalling the massacres of Armenians and with pride in saluting those brave patriots who survived to fight on the side of freedom during World War I.”

The letter praised President Ford's ability to lead the country following the resignation of President Richard Nixon. “Despite the extraordinary circumstances under which he assumed the Presidency, he returned our government to a place that upheld the ideals and principles of the Constitution,” said Hovnanian.

Although Ford's presidency is most often linked with the Watergate scandal, he was also an outspoken defender of human rights. As the 38th president, he signed the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 with the Soviet Union. This established the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe that later became the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which laid the foundation for human rights and fundamental freedoms including the principle of self-determination. As a result of the Helsinki Act, Armenia was able to declare itself a sovereign nation after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Hovnanian closed the letter by saying: “With every new challenge set before him, and every time the American people called on him, President Ford rose to the occasion.”

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Following is the full text of the Assembly's letter of condolence.

December 29, 2006

Mrs. Betty Ford
The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library
1000 Beal Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Dear Mrs. Ford,

On behalf of the Armenian Assembly and the Armenian-American community, we wish to express our deepest sorrow for what is not only a great personal loss for you and your family, but for the nation as well.

President Ford was a man who, throughout his long career in public service, served with honesty, integrity, and candor. The Armenian-American community will never forget his affirmation of the Armenian Genocide while serving as a Representative in Michigan in 1965. Nor will we forget that it was your husband that helped lay the foundation for civilized dialogue between East and West on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the principle of self-determination.

The strong leadership that President Ford provided the American people during their time of need was a testament to his abilities as a statesman. Despite the extraordinary circumstances under which he assumed the Presidency, he returned our government to a place that upheld the ideals and principles of the Constitution.

With every new challenge set before him, and every time the American people called on him, President Ford rose to the occasion. Although no single letter will assuage your bereavement, it is our hope that the totality of the nation's outpouring will bring you comfort during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Hirair Hovnanian
Chairman, Board of Trustees