



Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche Schweiz
Église évangélique réformée de Suisse
Protestant Church in Switzerland

Pfarrerin Rita Famos
Präsidentin · Présidente · President

**Greeting of Rev. Rita Famos, President of the Protestant Church in Switzerland PCS,
on the occasion of the centenary of the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches
in the Near East UAECNE, June 2024**

Dear President Paul Haidostian,
dear brothers and sisters,

It is with a heavy heart that I address you today from a distance, unable to join you in person. I want you to know that my thoughts and prayers are with each one of you.

On behalf of the Protestant Church in Switzerland, I extend warm greetings and heartfelt congratulations to you and the entire Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East as you celebrate your remarkable centenary. We have felt a deep bond with you ever since our Reformed Churches were called to show solidarity with our Armenian fellow Christians at the time of the Armenian Genocide.

A century of steadfast commitment, unwavering faith, and tireless service is a testament to the enduring spirit of unity that binds the community of Armenian Evangelical Christians across borders, politics and migration struggles. Let us celebrate the rich tapestry of your history - a tapestry woven with threads of resilience, hope, and love.

As we commemorate this milestone, may we continue to draw inspiration from your legacy. The Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE) has left a profound legacy that spans over a century. I would like to highlight the following five key aspects of its enduring impact:

1. **Educational Commitment:** From its inception, the Armenian Evangelical Church has emphasized the importance of education and runs several schools and a university.
2. **Ecumenical Engagement:** The Union has actively developed ecumenical ties with various churches, fostering dialogue and understanding across denominational boundaries. Its commitment to unity and cooperation has been a beacon of hope in a region often marked by division and strife.
3. **Steadfast Presence:** Despite challenges such as emigration, discrimination and even persecution, the Union continues to function with resilience. Its congregations throughout Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Iran, and even Australia serve as steadfast witnesses to Christ's message of hope and reconciliation.
4. **Social Services:** UAECNE operates old people's homes in Aleppo and Beirut, as well as a sanatorium in Azounieh, Lebanon. These institutions provide essential care and support to vulnerable populations, reflecting the church's commitment to compassionate service.
5. **Historical Resilience:** After the devastating impact of World War I and the Armenian Genocide, the Union was reorganized in Syria and Lebanon. Its ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity underscores its enduring mission and relevance in the Near East.

We do not only honor your diverse and inspiring commitments, but also work together in practical regard. Since many years Swiss Aid HEKS/EPER runs a Church Cooperation program and supports numerous projects of the Union. As an example, I would like to mention the scholarships program covering tuition fees for the most vulnerable students. Thanks to the project, 324 students from the four Armenian Evangelical Schools in Lebanon were able to continue their education. Furthermore, the Armenian Central High School in Beirut was equipped with solar panels.



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HEKS also continues its support for the afternoon program of the Social Action Center of the Union for socially disadvantaged children in Bourj Hamoud, including a hot meal for all students. [The Protestant Church in Switzerland and HEKS dearly remember their common interventions and visits to Lebanon during these last critical years:

In the aftermath of the devastating Beirut port explosion in 2020, both the Protestant Church in Switzerland and HEKS responded swiftly. They provided emergency humanitarian aid to the affected communities in Lebanon and have shown their solidarity through visits.

The year 2023 remained marked by global humanitarian crises, and Lebanon and Syria faced its share of ongoing challenges. HEKS intensified its efforts to support vulnerable populations. Beyond immediate relief, HEKS reinforced its commitment to sustaining aid efforts in both countries. Immediately after the terrible earthquakes on February 6, 2023, HEKS activated its emergency response team. In April 2023, a delegation from the PCS and HEKS embarked on a journey with the aim to renew and strengthen partnerships with local churches and organizations in Lebanon and Syria. While the delegation's entry into Syria was not permitted at the last minute, we were able to meet our Syrian partners at least in Beirut.]

In September 2023, I had the occasion to pay a visit to Armenia as part of a delegation of the World Council of Churches. The delegation aimed to convey deep solidarity with the Armenian people and churches, especially those who fled from Nagorno-Karabakh following the traumatic events. On 19 September, the WCC delegation planned to visit the entrance to the Lachin Corridor to observe the current circumstances for humanitarian access. However, some five kilometers before reaching the entrance, the delegation was stopped at an Armenian military checkpoint and advised that it would be unsafe to travel further due to fighting having broken out in Nagorno-Karabakh an hour or two previously, with Azerbaijani forces shelling Stepanakert. Subsequently I amplified with success the voices of those affected by the conflict by appealing to the Swiss Federal Council.

In summary, the aid measures and visits of the Protestant Church in Switzerland and Swiss Aid HEKS to Lebanon demonstrate our unwavering commitment as the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East continue to rebuild not only structures but also hope, trust, and community bonds. We work closely with local churches and community-based organizations to address issues related to refugees, food security, and social justice. In this shared journey, the Church cooperation program exemplifies love in action – a testament to the transformative power of faith.

May God's grace continue to guide your journey, and may God's blessings accompany and strengthen you as you celebrate this remarkable 100-year milestone.

May God bless all the churches in the Middle East and help them to bring hope and relief to people in this distressing time.