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DR. H. TCHILINGIRIAN DISCUSSES CHURCH-STATE RELATION IN ARMENIA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

In a lecture sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, on November 17, Dr. Hratch Tchilingirian of London discussed key issues and processes in the last 16 years affecting the Armenian Church's relations with the state, society and the Diaspora.

Against the background of the Armenian Church during Soviet and perestroika periods, he focused on the problems and complexities of transition from official atheism to freedom of religion in independent Armenia.

Dr. Tchilingirian argued that independence had brought many positive developments in the Armenian Church and generally in terms of freedom of religion and faith in Armenia. However, the Church, the State and society face many challenges: from religious tolerance and pluralism to fairness and full guarantees of rights, to addressing social and moral issues in a still evolving post Soviet country. The effects of State-sponsored atheism in Soviet Armenia on the one hand, and the impact of secularization and globalization on the other hand have had crucial consequences on religiosity in general and on church practice in particular. However, these far-reaching processes were never seriously studied or addressed by the Church hierarchy. Tchilingirian underlined that "the Church hierarchy can no longer simply pontificate about complex problems of society without real engagement in the life of the people". The critical question that the Church leadership needs to address is "What is the relevance of a 1700 year-old Church and religious faith to contemporary Armenians living in Armenia and outside, all around the world?"

Hratch Tchilingirian is Associate Director of Eurasia Program at Cambridge University's Judge Business School, where he teaches on multi-cultural issues in business leadership and management. He received his PhD in Sociology from the London School of Economics. Dr. Tchilingirian has written and lectured extensively on sociological and geopolitical developments in the wider Eurasia region, especially the Caucasus, the Armenian Church and the Diaspora.

During his visit to the University of Michigan campus, Dr. Tchilingirian also participated in a special workshop on “Minorities in the Middle East” organized by the University’s Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies with a paper on Armenian communities in the Middle East. That workshop was co-sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program and other units of the University.