

## *AHEPA is warmly received on Ottawa's Parliament Hill by Prime Minister Stephen Harper*



Left to right: James Giannoulis, Danielle Phaedra Efraim, Frank Antoniou, The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Gus James, Emmanuel Revelakis, Nikos Hatzitheodosiou, Nick Arouzidis.

On April 19<sup>th</sup>, the Canadian wing of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA), under the leadership of its President, **Frank Antoniou**, held its first annual Parliament Hill Day in Ottawa, Ontario.

The purpose for Parliament Hill Day was to strengthen the voice of Hellenism on Parliament Hill and let Canadian Parliamentarians know what AHEPA Canada is and what it stands for. The aim is to build a foundation and solid network of formal and informal forums within the Canadian Federal Government, ultimately providing a critical space for voicing the concerns of persons of Hellenic descent.

AHEPA Supreme **President Gus J. James II** was a key member of this delegation. This was the first stop of the AHEPA Leadership's annual trip to Greece, Cyprus and Constantinople. The organization makes an annual visit to major international destinations of importance to Hellenes of the Diaspora. This is the first year that Canada's capital was included in this journey.

"We want to build a solid network of supporters and to create an informational pipeline with the Canadian Federal Government and thus provide a critical avenue for AHEPA to voice concerns," said **James**.

“By adding the Ottawa visit , among the other major international capitals, AHEPA delegations visit every year is taking on the role as the ambassador for Hellenes of the Diaspora,” said **Antoniou**. “It was a pleasure to visit with our nation’s leaders and we were pleased by the warm reception extended to us.”

AHEPA met with Prime Minister The Right Honourable **Stephen Harper**, Minister of Health **Tony Clement** and Foreign Affairs Policy Advisor **Keith Fountain**, and the representative of Mr. **Tenzin Khangsar**, Chief of Staff for the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, the Honourable Jason Kenney.

Discussions focused on several issues, including:

- the promotion of continued efforts for a just and viable solution to the Cyprus problem,
- advancing reconciliation and rapprochement in the Eastern Mediterranean,
- securing the religious freedom and protection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Constantinople,
- securing the reopening of the Holy Theological School of Halki in Turkey,
- the international recognition of the Pontian genocide (position papers were left behind on this subject prepared by Danielle Phaedra Efram),
- the repatriation of the Elgin Marbles,
- strengthening relations with Greece,
- strengthening the Canadian experience of cultural diversity through the promotion of Hellenic ideals and culture,
- promoting funding for Cooley’s Anemia (Thalassemia) testing and research, a deadly blood disorder affecting largely people of Mediterranean descent (position papers were also left behind on the subject of health care prepared by Brother Nicholas Katsepontes).

During the question period in the House of Commons, **Jim Abbott**, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Kootenay Columbia, British Columbia) rose and acknowledged AHEPA’s visit to Parliament with the following statement:

*“Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to recognize AHEPA Canada. Founded in the United States in 1922, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association is one of the largest Hellenic heritage groups in the world and branched out to Canada in 1928. AHEPA is also in Greece, Cyprus, New Zealand and Australia.*

*AHEPA promotes the ideals of Hellenism, education, philanthropy, civic responsibility, family and individual excellence. In Canada, the organization donates more than \$300,000 a year toward education and charities at the local, national and international levels.*

*I would like to thank the President of AHEPA Canada, Mr. Frank Antoniou and the members of his executive for honoring us with their presence in Ottawa today.”*

Instrumental in the organization of this visit was past Son of Pericles **Dimitris Soudas**, now Deputy Press Secretary and Senior Advisor (Quebec) in the Office of the Prime Minister. We are grateful to him for his support and assistance. We received excellent treatment from his office, especially from Matthew John, manager of the PMO Outreach Program.

Health Minister Tony Clement was very warm and welcoming, and exchanged pleasantries with Supreme President Gus James about their common Greek Cypriot roots. We informed him about AHEPA's strong focus on healthcare initiatives. He was impressed by AHEPA's hospitals, HUD program for the elderly and general work in the area of health. He informed us that the Federal Government is a strong supporter in the area of gene therapy research, which is one of the areas that Cooley's anemia research is pinning its hopes on for a cure. He was informed about the Montreal chapter's pledge to donate \$250,000 to the Shriners Hospital and was invited to be a guest at the next Valentine's Ball in support of this cause.



Prime Minister Harper welcomed the delegation to his office and pointed out that Greeks are well represented in his administration with the presence of The Honourable Tony Clement, deputy press secretary and senior Advisor (Quebec) Dimitri Soudas and chief polster Dimitri Pantazopoulos. We enjoyed his warm reception.



Other members of the delegation included several members of the Canadian leadership of AHEPA: **Nick Aroutzidis** (Stratford, Ontario), **Danielle Phaedra Efraim** (Montreal, Quebec) **James Giannoulis** (London, Ontario), **Nikos Hatzitheodosiou** (Ottawa, Ontario), **Nicholas P. Katsepontes** (Ottawa, Ontario), and **Emmanuel Revelakis** (Montreal, Quebec).

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