



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FEZANA reaches milestone fundraising goal of \$1.1 Million (USD) in partnership with the University of Toronto, establishing first-ever FEZANA Professorship of Zoroastrian Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto**

*Transformative and sustainable for future generations, the endowed professorship advances the academic study and understanding of Zoroastrianism and its contributions to the world*

Burr Ridge, Illinois, USA, June 16, 2021 – [FEZANA](#), the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, at its 34<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting announced it has reached its matching fundraising goal of \$1.1 million (USD) in partnership with the University of Toronto, officially establishing the **FEZANA Professorship of Zoroastrian Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto**. This milestone achievement will transform and advance the study of Zoroastrian languages and literature in the Western hemisphere for future generations, and marks an historic moment for FEZANA, its member associations and small groups, and the hundreds of patrons who donated to turn concept into reality.

A worldwide search for a candidate to fill the position shall begin in the summer/early fall, with the goal to have a selected candidate in place to start their position at the University of Toronto in July 2022.

“The establishment of the FEZANA Professorship at the University of Toronto creates an academic milestone for the Zoroastrian community in North America,” said FEZANA President [Arzan Sam Wadia](#). “In our more than three decades of FEZANA’s existence, this has been the single largest capital project we have initiated, and its completion is deeply gratifying to the entire community. What is truly unique is the collective participation of individuals and institutions from around the world. FEZANA will forever remain grateful to every donor who helped realize this dream.”

“This generous gift from the FEZANA community propels our Zoroastrian studies program as a leader on the global stage, greatly elevating its significance and contribution to the study of Zoroastrianism,” says [Tim Harrison](#), chair of University of Toronto’s [Department of Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations](#) (NMC), in which the professorship will be based. “This professorship will help us greatly increase the number of students able to read and understand the ancient languages of Avestan and Pahlavi, and

advance research and publications on the translated texts and their context in history. Ultimately, it will help raise awareness of Zoroastrianism around the world.”

The milestone project was initiated in 2019 by FEZANA under the leadership of Homi D. Gandhi, immediate past President of FEZANA.

“It is important for faith-based organizations like FEZANA to invest in scholarship and educational opportunities for their communities and the world at large,” Gandhi said. “By fostering a greater understanding of the tenets that guide our lives, we can better understand other faiths who may believe differently, and in turn, achieve a global unity based on cooperation and understanding.”

The concept of an endowed professorship was first presented in 2017 at FEZANA’s 30<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, by Erv. Dr. Jehan Bagli who had met with University of Toronto representatives to broach the idea. Dr. Bagli worked closely with Gandhi, and both devoted energy and enthusiasm toward the fundraising effort. In total, more than 250 generous donors supported the cause, including Zoroastrian individuals, associations, institutions and foundations in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Australia, India, Europe and North America.

FEZANA recognizes the following religious, academic and executive leaders for their behind-the-scenes leadership and guidance that helped advance the cause: Ervad Arda-e-viraf Minocherhomjee, President, [North American Mobed Council](#); Behram Irani, FEZANA Fundraising Lead; Sean Elavia, FEZANA General Counsel; and Professor [Yuhan S-D Vevaina](#), Bahari Associate Professor of Sasanian Studies at The University of Oxford.

“The inestimable and multi-generational value of investing in religious and historical education is not simply a utilitarian concern, but a fundamental tenet of Zoroastrianism to be found in every stage of Zoroastrian literature, from the Avestan sacred texts to those written today in the global diasporas,” Oxford’s Prof. Vevaina commented. “FEZANA is to be truly congratulated for its profoundly forward-thinking commitment to the highest levels of academic scholarship on Zoroastrianism, and I genuinely hope this is the just beginning of many more endowed positions to come which will reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of Zoroastrians living and thriving across the breadth and depth of North America and beyond.”

“The FEZANA Professorship in Zoroastrian Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto ensures a foundational religion, and its heritage will be studied in perpetuity,” said [Prof. Jamsheed K. Choksy](#), Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Central Eurasian Studies at the University of Indiana - Bloomington. “This is a much-needed undertaking of enduring value.”

[Zoroastrians](#) are followers of one of the world’s oldest monotheistic religions founded by the prophet [Zarathushtra](#) more than 3,000 years ago in ancient Iran. Zoroastrians have long served as bridge builders in interfaith dialogue, believing in truth, righteousness, charity, beneficence, respect and care for the environment, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Zoroastrianism flourished as the imperial religion of three Persian empires, those of the Achaemenians, Parthians and Sassanians, and was the dominant religion from Turkey and eastward to China during those times. North America's Zoroastrian community includes those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent, known as [Parsis](#), and those who came directly from [Iran](#) seeking religious freedom.

### **About FEZANA**

Founded in 1987, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) represents a diverse and growing Zarathushti community in the western diaspora. Guided by the blessings of Ahura Mazda and the teachings of prophet Zarathushtra, the non-profit federation serves as the coordinating body for 27 Zoroastrian associations and 14 corresponding groups in Canada and the United States. The activities of FEZANA are conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation and unity among all member associations, and with due regard for the Zarathushti principles of goodness, truth, reason, benevolence, implicit trust and charity toward all mankind. Visit [www.fezana.org](http://www.fezana.org) and follow FEZANA on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook @TheFEZANA.

**###**

Media contact:

Jim Engineer

Chief Communications Officer

FEZANA

<pr> at <fezana> dot <org>