

1 April 2025

We, the officers of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Armenia in the UK Parliament, firmly condemn the continuing detention and trials of the 23 Armenian prisoners in Baku, and call on UK Government Ministers to put pressure on Azerbaijan to help achieve their release.

As reported by the Centre for Truth and Justice in 2022, Armenian prisoners of war in Azerbaijan have previously been put through “sham trials based on fabricated charges and forced confessions”.

The prisoners, who are democratically elected Arstakh officials and civilians, were arrested after the Azerbaijani offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted in the forced displacement of up to 120,000 Armenians.

There is much concern, including from relatives and the diaspora in the UK, about their lack of access to independent legal support, reports of physical and psychological torture, and the barring of international organisations and media from observing the trials.

We also express alarm at the suspension of BBC News Azerbaijani and Voice of America in Baku, reportedly on the instruction of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the closure by Azerbaijani authorities of the operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the country; and the reported threat of the eviction of multiple United Nations agencies.

Family members in the UK tell us that the prisoners are almost completely isolated with occasional contact with their families. We are also particularly concerned for the health of one of the prisoners, Ruben Vardanyan, who until recently had been on hunger strike for almost a month.

Their trials, based on what are reported to be fabricated charges, continue despite pressure from the international community at COP and the EU Parliament and the Belgian Chamber of Representatives where motions calling for the prisoners’ release have been presented.

The continued imprisonment of many of the Nagorno-Karabakh leaders has, we feel, further victimised a civilian population that has long experienced discrimination, mistreatment and conflict.

As well as being the just and compassionate thing to do, their immediate release would help pave the way for better relations between the two countries at a critical moment for achieving a renewed and lasting peace in the region.

We ask that Ministers explore opportunities for officials from the British Embassy in Baku to visit the 23 Armenian prisoners. We also ask that Ministers make strong representations to Azerbaijan to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to return to Azerbaijan and be allowed to visit them to check their wellbeing; to allow the reopening of BBC News Azerbaijani and Voice of America operations and enable the scrutiny of legal proceedings; and to immediately release all the remaining Armenian prisoners as a pathway to lasting peace between the two nations.

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