March 28, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs  
Room HT-2, the Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hal Rogers  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs  
Room HT-2, the Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Rogers,

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to submit testimony to your Subcommittee. As co-chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus, I believe the Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations bills should reflect our unwavering commitment to democracy building and strong trade relations with the Republic of Armenia and should promote peace in the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).

For years, the United States has invested in a negotiated peace to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and humanitarian assistance by providing funding for the HALO Trust’s vital landmine and unexploded ordnance clearance efforts in the former Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (Artsakh). Since 2000, HALO Trust has cleared almost 500 minefields in Artsakh, returning many acres of land to useful purposes and saving untold civilian lives. However, risk to civilian
populations remains high in the region with 12 casualties occurring since 2017, 12 near-miss scenarios for civilians over the past year, and millions of previously unidentified square meters of contaminated land discoveries in the former Autonomous Oblast.

There is a continued and demonstrable humanitarian need for HALO’s important demining program in Artsakh. I ask that you provide at least $1.5 million in demining and landmine risk education programs in Nagorno Karabakh to protect civilian lives and ensure this program continues its critical work.

Armenia’s government continues to take steps to bolster civil society and democratic institutions. The United States Congress can aid this process by ensuring we give targeted assistance during the country’s continued democratic transition. This is especially true for the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, which has generously supported Armenian and Artsakh in previous Congresses. We are in a critical moment in which a meaningful increase in Fiscal Year 2021 technical assistance to Armenia on important priorities – including media freedom, judicial independence, anti-corruption, and civil society purposes – will likely have an exponentially positive impact on the country’s budding democratic institutions.

I ask that the Subcommittee appropriate no less than $100 million for economic, governance, rule of law, and security assistance to Armenia. An increase in funding specifically to the Department of State’s Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia and the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Bureau for Europe and Eurasia should also be made available for these purposes.
Additionally, intimidation and violence against the Armenian people continues today, in part, because of continued U.S. military assistance to the Azerbaijani government. While much of the violence seen in the spring of 2016 has subsided, Azerbaijan continues to launch cross-border attacks into Artsakh and Armenia. Rather than agreeing to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, President Aliyev of Azerbaijan threatened renewed war between the two countries.

Most startlingly, over the last two years Azerbaijan received over $100 million in U.S. military assistance and is the third largest aid recipient from this security fund. This defies almost two decades of parity in U.S. security assistance for these countries, and we are concerned that it does not send a supportive, pro-democracy signal to our Armenian partners. The U.S. should suspend military aid to Azerbaijan until its government ceases its attacks against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh and agrees to the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.

Taking these steps will continue to build on the U.S.-Armenia strategic relationship, grow the seeds of pro-democratic and civil society institutions in Armenia, and protect innocent lives from tragedies caused by landmines in Artsakh. I urge the Subcommittee to invest in peace and assist Armenia at this exciting time of continued development.

Sincerely,

FRANK PALLONE, JR.

Member of Congress