

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
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
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Rogers:

We write to thank the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs for its longstanding leadership in support of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh). As you prepare the Fiscal Year 2021 foreign aid bill, we ask you to include the below provisions, which are vital to the continued U.S.-Armenia strategic partnership based upon shared interests and common values.

Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh)

For years, and with the support of Congress, the United States has invested in humanitarian assistance and a negotiated peace to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict 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 and 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 the funding of this important program, one which Congress has repeatedly supported, and we urge you to include the following provisions in the foreign aid bill:

- Of the funds appropriated by this Act, not less than \$1.5 million shall be made available to fund demining and landmine risk education programs in Nagorno Karabakh.
- We further request that the committee provide robust funding for Nagorno Karabakh-based regional rehabilitation services for survivors of landmine injuries and individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities.

Armenian Democracy and Economic Independence

Following Armenia's nonviolent "Velvet Revolution" in April 2018 and subsequent free and open national elections in December 2018, the 116th Congress is in the unique position of aiding the most reform-minded government in the country's history. This is especially true with concern to the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, which has been generous in its support of Armenia and Artsakh in previous Congresses. Armenia's legislative and executive branches have indicated a clear intention to bolster civil society and democratic institutions – efforts that require targeted international investments for democracy, anti-corruption, and rule of law building measures. Additionally, we ask for longer term funding commitments to Armenia's aid-to-trade transition, its role as a regional haven for refugees, and the expansion of bilateral military cooperation in support of U.S. and NATO-led peacekeeping operations.

Though the Department of State announced around \$60 million in overall assistance to Armenia in Fiscal Year 2019, the lack of a Millennium Challenge Compact or defense relationship with Armenia means this support pales in comparison to the U.S. funds made available to Armenia's neighbors. Most startlingly, Azerbaijan received over \$100 million in U.S. military assistance over the last two years and is the third largest aid recipient from Section 333 Building Partner Capacity program funds. 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. We request the following provision in the foreign aid bill:

- Of the funds appropriated by this Act, not less than \$100 million shall be made available 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.

Azerbaijan Security Funding

Azerbaijan has continued to inhibit the pro-peace mission of the OSCE Minsk Group in recent years, including obstructing implementation of the bipartisan Royce-Engel accountability and peace proposals that could finally bring an end to this lasting conflict. Considering this refusal to cease its threat of violence and the continuous arms build-up and escalating aggression against Armenia and Artsakh, we urge the Subcommittee to:

- Suspend U.S. military aid, including under Section 333 Building Partner Capacity Program, to Azerbaijan until its government ceases its attacks against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, and agrees to the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.
- Add the following certification requirement to the President's waiver authority under Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act: " No funds appropriated or otherwise made available under this Act may be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh."

Again, thank you for your leadership on the Subcommittee. The provisions highlighted in this letter will help contribute to democratic values in the South Caucasus and further strengthen the U.S.-Armenia strategic partnership. We appreciate your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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