



# ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICA

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April 22, 2022

The Honorable Barbara Lee, Chair

The Honorable Hal Rogers, Ranking Member

House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member Rogers and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Armenian Assembly of America, I am writing to express the Assembly's strong support for a robust U.S. aid package to Armenia and Artsakh. In particular, we support the bipartisan letter spearheaded by Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. to the Subcommittee calling for:

- \$50 million for Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) used to provide humanitarian assistance and rebuilding and resettlement support to the Armenian victims of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- \$100 million for security, economic, governance, and rule of law assistance to Armenia through State Department and USAID accounts.
- The suspension of U.S. military aid for Azerbaijan until it has been verified to have ceased all attacks against Armenia and Artsakh.

**ASSISTANCE TO ARTSAKH** – Despite undertaking an obligation to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peacefully through the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group, Azerbaijan launched an unprecedented war against the Armenian people in the Fall of 2020. For six weeks (44 days), the Azerbaijani military, with the full and open support of Turkey, and with the use of over 2,500 jihadist mercenaries from Syria transported by Turkey and deployed in Azerbaijan, attacked and targeted the Armenian people. As a result, Armenians, having already faced a genocide in the 20th century, are facing it again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Upwards of 100,000 people - mainly children, women, and the elderly - were forcibly displaced from their homes, while hospitals, schools, and churches were destroyed by missiles, cluster and white phosphorus munitions, and drone strikes.

Although Azerbaijan agreed to a ceasefire and signed a trilateral statement in November 2020, its military continues to attack the Armenian people without consequences. In a clear sign that Azerbaijan is not serious about establishing peace or respecting international human rights conventions to which it is a signatory, Ilham Aliyev's regime has repeatedly violated the November 2020 ceasefire, including the illegal holding and torture of prisoners of war (POWs) and captured civilians. In addition, Aliyev marked Armed Services Day last year by stating that: "Nagorno-Karabakh is the land of Azerbaijan" and that "there is no territorial unit called Nagorno-Karabakh, there is no concept of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict... We have destroyed Armenia." In what is a persistent pattern and attempt to eliminate the Armenians of Artsakh, earlier last month in the middle of a harsh winter, Azerbaijan deliberately cut off the gas supply to Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh, leaving people without a source of heat. Azerbaijan's military also launched a drone attack on the village of Parukh in Artsakh's Askeran District and targeted civilians elsewhere along the line of contact.

The Assembly is deeply concerned about the threat of another genocide as well as the ongoing humanitarian crisis resulting from this unprovoked war. We believe that the U.S. can and must do more to help safeguard the people of Artsakh. The Assembly urges not less than \$50 million in assistance to Artsakh, and commends the important work of The Halo Trust. This direct funding, which we strongly encourage USAID to oversee from Stepanakert, will help protect a vulnerable Christian people as well as empower them to reconstruct their communities, rebuild their lives, and resettle in their homes. It also serves as an opportunity for the U.S. to have

a presence in the region and sends an important message about America's commitment to democratic governance in the face of autocrats that would like nothing more than to see democratic nations fall. We also urge Congress and the U.S. Co-Chair to the OSCE Minsk Group to uphold the fundamental principles of democracy, the right to self-determination, and the universal human rights of the people of Artsakh. The United States cannot send mixed signals on democracy and human rights, by appearing to support autocrats Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. We also support our partners in the Central and East European Coalition regarding aid to Ukraine and note that, just as the war was breaking out, Azerbaijan signed a 43-point declaration cementing their "alliance" with Russia. For example, Point 7 requires each party to "refrain from any actions that, in the opinion of one of the Parties, damage the strategic partnership and allied relations of the two states." Regarding this agreement, former U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Richard Kauzlarich stated: "History will remember that Azerbaijan President Aliyev met with Putin to sign this agreement at the same time Moscow was invading Ukraine."

**ASSISTANCE TO ARMENIA** – With two authoritarian regimes, Turkey and Azerbaijan, blockading Armenia for nearly three decades, we support the bipartisan letter spearheaded by Congressman Pallone to your Subcommittee calling for \$100 million in assistance to Armenia to "help make its people more secure, bolster its democracy, sustain economic development, stabilize its civil society, and aid its ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic." Given Armenia's commitment to democratic reforms, the U.S. has another important opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to a democracy threatened by neighboring autocratic leaders.

**SECTION 907 OF THE FREEDOM SUPPORT ACT** - Congress took a principled stand against Azerbaijani aggression with the adoption of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act in 1992, and needs to do so again. Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act states that U.S. funds "may not 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." In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on American soil, a national security waiver was added to Section 907. The exercise of the waiver is valid so long as it "will not undermine or hamper ongoing efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan or be used for offensive purposes against Armenia." A 2022 GAO Report found that the State Department did not "provide Congress with all required information – such as the impact of aid on the military balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia."

The 44-day war on Artsakh in 2020 resulted in a death toll of over 4,000 soldiers and civilians, some brutally beheaded according to Human Rights Watch and as documented by Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights and its "[Project on Atrocities in Artsakh](#)." The ramifications of the war are stark. The targeting of Armenian cultural and religious heritage sites by Azerbaijan is ongoing, and was recently condemned by the European Parliament. The opening of a "Military Trophy Park" in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, replete with Armenian mannequins and an entrance made with helmets of killed and captured Armenian soldiers depicts Armenians in a dehumanizing manner. Given all these, we urge that no U.S. taxpayer dollars be used to support Azerbaijan, and that starts with upholding the letter and spirit of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act.

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2023 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill, we appreciate your attention to these priority issues.

Sincerely,



Mariam Khaloyan  
Congressional Relations Director