

Armenian Assembly of America
Testimony by Mariam Khaloyan, Congressional Relations Director
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Schatz, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) headquartered in Washington, DC and with thousands of advocates throughout the United States welcomes the opportunity to provide testimony regarding U.S. assistance and policy for the South Caucasus region generally and to Armenia and the Armenian people specifically for Fiscal Year 2027.

For decades Congress and this Committee has played an instrumental role in shaping U.S. policy, which not only saved lives, but also helped ensure that Armenia, the first Christian nation in the world, survived. The Assembly extends its gratitude and deep appreciation.

The August 2025 signing of a peace framework between Armenia and Azerbaijan at the White House under the auspices of President Donald J. Trump was historic. At that time, President Trump promised to raise the release of the Armenian hostages with Azerbaijan's President. Speaking with Armenia's Prime Minister, President Trump made note of the fact that Baku was holding Armenian hostages: "So you said there's 23 Christians that you'd like to get out, right? 23? Because I'm going to ask him to do that. I think he'll do it for me too." The Assembly urges Congress to use every available tool to secure their freedom. A recently released report by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) entitled "Justice Under Pressure: Independence of Lawyers and the Right to a Fair Trial in Azerbaijan" confirmed the sham nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh political trials in Baku. The ICJ is an international non-governmental organization of leading judges and lawyers working to promote human rights and the rule of law across the globe. The Assembly strongly urges the inclusion of report language calling for the immediate release of all Armenian hostages. True and lasting peace cannot be achieved without the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian hostages, including the political leaders of Artsakh.

The rhetoric from both Azerbaijan and Turkey regarding the destruction of Armenian Christian civilization in Artsakh raises profound concerns. We are deeply troubled by the ongoing erasure of Armenian cultural heritage and Christian sites, including reports that Stepanakert's St. Hakob Church and Shushi's St. John the Baptist Church were demolished. We welcome the Final Statement of the International Conference on the Preservation of Armenian Religious, Cultural and Historical Heritage in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh, held under the auspices of the World Council of Churches in Bern, Switzerland, in May 2025. The statement rightly affirms that protecting heritage is not merely about preserving monuments, but about safeguarding the living expression of faith, identity, and memory. It further calls on governments and international bodies to take concrete diplomatic and legal steps to prevent further erasure, support the return of displaced populations, and work toward the release of Armenian hostages held in Baku. We,

therefore, urge report language that calls upon Azerbaijan to safeguard Armenian cultural and religious heritage sites.

The Assembly also strongly supports robust funding to help Armenia address the ongoing humanitarian needs of Artsakh's refugees residing in the Republic of Armenia—individuals and families forcibly displaced by Azerbaijan's 2023 campaign of ethnic cleansing, secure its border and further develop the bilateral agreements between the United States and Armenia, including the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity. Specifically, we urge the Committee to allocate not less than \$100 million in economic, democracy and humanitarian assistance.

We are encouraged by the deepening U.S.–Armenia partnership, including the historic visits this year by Vice President J.D. Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Given Azerbaijan's continued occupation of approximately 100 square miles of Armenia's sovereign territory, significantly expanded security cooperation remains essential. Therefore, we urge the Committee to allocate not less than \$20 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and not less than \$10 million in International Military Education and Training (IMET) to strengthen Armenia's defensive capabilities and deter Azerbaijan's ongoing threats of aggression. We also urge the Committee to consider additional measures to bolster Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

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, which restricts U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan until it ceases offensive actions against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Although a waiver authority was introduced following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, its use is contingent upon ensuring that it does not undermine peace efforts or enable offensive actions. In light of Azerbaijan's 2020 war, its failure to uphold international commitments, its 2023 military offensive and ethnic cleansing of Artsakh's Armenian population, the destruction of cultural and religious heritage, and the continued detention of hostages, the Assembly urges that Section 907 be fully enforced and that no U.S. assistance—including military or security aid—be provided to Azerbaijan.

The Right of Return

Azerbaijan's actions have undermined decades of international peace efforts under the OSCE Minsk Group framework. Following the wars of 2020 and 2023, the entire Armenian population of Artsakh was forcibly displaced from its ancestral homeland. Civilian infrastructure—including hospitals, schools, and churches—was targeted and destroyed. Freedom House's 2024 report documents a systematic campaign to depopulate Nagorno-Karabakh of its Armenian population through violence, deprivation, and coercion. As former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback stated, the fundamental question is whether Armenian Christians have the right to survive in their ancestral homeland. The Assembly affirms that they do.

In a letter to Members of Congress in September 2025, the Administration reaffirmed its commitment “to encouraging both governments to provide for the return of ethnic Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh in the context of a sustainable peace.” We urge Congress to uphold the fundamental right of return, the principles of self-determination, and the universal human rights of the people of Artsakh, and to take meaningful steps to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its actions.

Accountability and Sanctions

The Assembly has supported legislative efforts to impose sanctions on individuals responsible for human rights abuses and corruption. Azerbaijan’s record—including widely reported corruption schemes and credible allegations of war crimes—warrants the application of the Leahy Law and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. Azerbaijan must not be rewarded for its violations. We urge the Committee to address these matters.

Conclusion

Armenia, the world’s first Christian nation, has endured centuries of persecution yet remains resilient. As Ambassador Brownback has observed, its perseverance inspires religious minorities worldwide. At a time when Christian communities and other religious minorities face increasing threats globally, the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in 2023 serves as a stark warning. We can and must do more to protect Christian and at-risk minority populations.

The Assembly would also like to bring to the attention of the committee Israel’s recent affirmation of the Armenian Genocide, and Israel’s Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar’s comment to the effect that this measure was “both a moral and historical duty,” adding that “we must also firmly condemn any denial, minimization, or distortion of the historical truth.”

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