



Armenian Bar Association

P.O. Box 29111
Los Angeles, CA 90029
ArmenianBar.org
info@ArmenianBar.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In loving memory (2014)

H.E. António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
The United Nations Headquarters
Room: S-3800
New York, New York 10017

Re: Beyond Armenia and Artsakh: Urgent Need to Protect At-Risk Minority
Communities in Azerbaijan from Azerbaijan

Dear Secretary General:

Soon after Azerbaijan's September 27, 2020 invasion of the Republic of Artsakh,¹ the Armenian Bar Association—a legal organization comprised of hundreds of judges, attorneys, and law students worldwide—sounded the alarm about the specter of ethnic cleansing. We feared then that the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh, some 150,000 people, faced imminent threat of extinction by Azerbaijan and its military ally Turkey. Our fears were not misplaced. Indeed, soon after the invasion, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev made clear that his country would not cease its military aggression until every last "dog" (the pejorative word he uses to refer to Armenians) is chased out of Artsakh. Azerbaijan has repeatedly refused access to OSCE monitors,² and more recently has refused entry to international peacekeepers.³ Diplomacy and civil negotiation efforts have proved fruitless, as each of the three brokered ceasefires were violated by Azerbaijan within minutes of their effective dates and times.

While our concern for the well-being of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh remains the same, we also ask that the plight of non-Armenian victims not be forgotten and, instead, that it be brought to the fore. We call on the international community to recognize the dire predicament imperiling other minority communities residing in the Artsakh territories recently seized by Azerbaijani forces and around the contact-line in Azerbaijan—namely, the Talysh, Tat,

¹ Formerly known as the "Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast," during the Soviet Period, and still referred to as "Nagorno Karabakh" by Azerbaijan and Turkey.

² "Azerbaijan Blocks OSCE Monitors in Karabakh," Mar. 10, 2017, *available at* <https://asbarez.com/161114/azerbaijan-blocks-osce-monitors-in-karabakh/>; "Azerbaijan Refuses to Lead OSCE Monitors to Front-Lines," Jul. 21, 2016, *available at* <https://asbarez.com/153178/azerbaijan-refuses-to-lead-osce-monitors-to-front-lines/>; "Azeris Deny OSCE Monitors Access to Frontlines," May 22, 2015, *available at* <https://asbarez.com/136290/azeris-deny-osce-monitors-access-to-frontlines-2/>; "Azerbaijanis Refuse OSCE Monitors Access to Frontlines," Feb. 10, 2015, *available at* <https://asbarez.com/131648/azerbaijanis-refuse-osce-monitors-access-to-frontlines-2/>; "Azerbaijanis Refuse OSCE Monitors Access to Frontlines," Nov. 5, 2014, *available at* <https://asbarez.com/128560/azerbaijanis-refuse-osce-monitors-access-to-frontlines/>.

³ Press Release, The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Oct. 30, 2020, *available at* <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/10/30/Nikol-Pashinyan-interview/> (explaining that Azerbaijan will not agree to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers).

and Lezgin people. Reports accompanied by satellite imagery show that Azerbaijan has positioned military facilities near or in villages comprised of these ethnic minorities.⁴ Furthermore, recent reports indicate that Azerbaijan has closed entrances and exits to towns and villages in and around Artsakh populated by Talysh and Tat ethnic minorities.⁵

For several reasons, we now know that Azerbaijan's recent and ongoing aggression was premediated. Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey conducted two weeks of joint military exercises in the lead-up to Azerbaijan's invasion.⁶ Turkey's sale of military equipment to Azerbaijan increased by 600% in the months leading to the invasion.⁷ Moreover, Turkey's recruitment of Syrian mercenaries to fight for Azerbaijan began at least a month before the conflict.⁸ Accordingly, all signs point to Azerbaijan having carefully planned its September 27, 2020 invasion. It is thus telling that during Azerbaijan's meticulous planning, it did not evacuate its civilian population from the villages immediately surrounding the contact-line.

We believe that the ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan are not at risk from the Armenian or Artsakhi defense forces, but from Azerbaijan itself. First, Armenians have no political, strategic, or logical reason to target them insofar as 3 million Christian Armenians live peacefully on a small plot of land and surrounded by nearly 100 million non-Christian Turks and Azeris whose governments have doubled down on their imperialistic designs. Second, more importantly, both democratic republics have long referred to Azerbaijan's ethnic minorities as similarly oppressed by the autocratic totalitarian regime of Azerbaijan. Indeed, recently, on October 4, 2020, the President of Artsakh addressed the "Talysh and Lezgin" minorities as "brothers and sisters" and stated as "a sign of our good will, [we] will not target the adversary military facilities located in [Talysh and Lezgin communities]."⁹

Rather, we believe there is a more sinister plan in the making. We know that on November 3, 2020, Turkish generals demanded the dismissal of Azerbaijan's defense minister and other Azerbaijani generals.¹⁰ There is now dissent within the leadership of Azerbaijan. Similar to how

⁴ "Azerbaijan army surrounds its artillery positions with own villages," Nov. 5, 2020, *available at* <https://news.am/eng/news/611678.html>. We note that Azerbaijan has used this tactic during the prior military aggressions against Artsakh. See "Armenia-Azerbaijan border fighting escalates: 16 killed," Jul. 15, 2020, *available at* <https://www.dawn.com/news/1569079>.

⁵ "Azerbaijan locks down areas populated by ethnic minorities," Nov. 2, 2020, *available at* <https://en.armradio.am/2020/11/02/azerbaijan-locks-down-areas-populated-by-ethnic-minorities-video/>.

⁶ "Azerbaijan, Turkey Hold Large-Scale Military Drills Amidst Escalation of Tensions With Armenia, Eurasia Daily Monitor," Vol. 17, Issue 121, Aug. 14, 2020, *available at* <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-turkey-hold-large-scale-military-drills-amidst-escalation-of-tensions-with-armenia/>.

⁷ "Turkish arms sales to Azerbaijan surged before Nagorno-Karabakh fighting," Reuters, Oct. 14, 2020, *available at* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-azerbaijan-turkey-arms/turkish-arms-sales-to-azerbaijan-surged-before-nagorno-karabakh-fighting-idUSKBN26Z237>.

⁸ "Syrian rebel fighters prepare to deploy to Azerbaijan in sign of Turkey's ambition," The Guardian, Sept. 28, 2020, *available at* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/syrian-rebel-fighters-prepare-to-deploy-to-azerbaijan-in-sign-of-turkeys-ambition>.

⁹ Statement by Artsakh's President Arayik Harutyunyan, Oct. 4, 2020, *available at* <https://en.armradio.am/2020/10/04/defense-army-will-not-target-military-facilities-in-talyshstan-and-lezgistan-artsakhs-president-says/>.

¹⁰ "Turks dismiss Azeri defense minister from command due to his ties with Russia," News.Am, Nov. 3, 2020, *available at* <https://news.am/eng/news/611399.html>.

former President of Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutalibov, explained that the 1992 massacre of the residents of Khojaly in the last Artsakh War of Independence (which Azerbaijan now attempts to blame on Armenian forces), was staged to undermine him and bolster his ouster from power (and it indeed did),¹¹ we now fear that a similar fate awaits the Talysh and Tat people. They soon may be caught in the cross-hairs of Azerbaijan's military-political leadership and for use in Azerbaijan's public relations and information war impugning Armenians.

We appeal to the United Nations and its bodies and agencies to take all steps necessary to protect Azerbaijan's ethnic minorities from being used as human shields by Azerbaijan.

Sincerely,

ARMENIAN BAR ASSOCIATION



Lucy Varpetian
Chairperson

¹¹ "Aliyev lies, Dana Mazalova reaffirms she interviewed former Azerbaijani president on Khojaly events," ArmenPress, Feb. 17, 2020, available at <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1005249/ilham-aliyev-lies-%E2%80%93-claims-reporter-who-interviewed-former-azerbaijani-president-on-khojaly-events.html> ("As the rescued residents of Khojaly say, all that was organized to create grounds for my resignation. I don't think that the Armenians, who had manifested a clear and knowledgeable approach to such situations, would have allowed Azerbaijanis to obtain evidence that tied them to fascist acts. If I declare that it was the fault of the Azerbaijani opposition I could be blamed for slander. But the overall picture of the conclusions is as follows: the Armenians had, in any case, provided a corridor to let the civilians escape. Why then would they shoot? As soon as Khojaly was surrounded by tanks it was necessary to immediately lead the civilians out. Earlier I had given similar orders regarding Shushi – to evacuate women and children and to leave only men in the city. It's one of the laws of war – civilians must be rescued. My conduct was appropriate and unambiguous – I gave such orders, but why they weren't followed in Khojaly is not clear to me.").