



14 June 2021

**The Honorable Antony J. Blinken**  
**Office of the Secretary**  
**U.S. Department of State**  
**2201 C Street NW**  
**Washington, DC 20520**

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the below participants of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in DC, a multi-faith coalition of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, we write to express our serious concerns regarding Azerbaijan's refusal to return prisoners of war and captive civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh, who risk torture and extrajudicial killings at the hands of Azerbaijani soldiers; the increasing Anti-Armenian hate speech, and the vulnerability of historic Armenian monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh to destruction.

In October 2020 a [congressional letter](#) was addressed to the former President Trump calling for Global Magnitsky sanctions to be placed on several leaders of Azerbaijan including the President Ilham Aliyev, the Chief of General Staff, and the Deputy Minister of Defense for their involvement in "ongoing human rights abuses taking place in Artsakh," with the attacks on civilians and destruction of religious sites.<sup>1</sup>

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has also raised concern in its March 2021 country update on Azerbaijan, in which they reported on how Azerbaijani forces' "targeted attack" on a Cathedral in Shusha could "constitute a war crime." The report also noted that even after

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<sup>1</sup> Congress of the United States, *Call for the Implementation of Magnitsky Sanctions Against Azeri Officials*, 23 October 2020.

<https://sherman.house.gov/sites/sherman.house.gov/files/10-23-20%20Cox%20BJS%20Letter%20to%20Secretary%20Pompeo%20RE%20Magnitsky%20Sanctions.pdf>. [accessed 10 June 2021].

the ceasefire of 10 November 2020, there were reports of attacks and vandalism of Armenian cemeteries and gravestones in the region.<sup>2</sup>

Most recently, UK Baroness Cox returned from a visit to the region of Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2021. In her report she notes Azerbaijan's refusal to release its prisoners of war and captive civilians despite the ceasefire. She raised concern regarding the safety of the Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian detainees amidst reports of humiliating treatment and desecration of corpses of POWs by Azerbaijani soldiers. As recently as May 3, 2021, human rights lawyers Siranush Sahakyan and Artak Zeynalyan published the list of 19 Armenian POWs who were brutally tortured and murdered in Azerbaijani detention camps, among those killed were, "twelve civilians, four of whom were women." The lawyers are currently representing families of over 100 Armenians at the European Court of Human Rights. The report also warned of the risk of additional destruction to hundreds of historic Armenian Christian monuments now under Azerbaijan's control. In addition, the report noted the increase in anti-Armenian rhetoric among Azerbaijani state officials and state-run media amongst others.<sup>3</sup>

On 13 May 2021, Armenia reported that Azerbaijani Army Forces on May 12, infiltrated the border area of Syunik region advancing 2-2.5 miles into sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia. Armenia estimates 400 troops of Azerbaijani Armed Forces within the territories of Armenia.

While we warmly welcome the State Department's recognition of the Armenian Genocide we would like to encourage the administration to follow the call to ensure "never again" and therefore respectfully urge the US State Department to use its influence to:

- Ensure Azerbaijan immediately releases all its prisoners of war and captive civilians
- Condemn Azerbaijan's destruction of religious sites and to place pressure on Azerbaijan to ensure the protection of the remaining religious sites in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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<sup>2</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Country Update Azerbaijan*, March 2021, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021%20Azerbaijan%20Country%20Update.pdf> [accessed 14 May 2021].

<sup>3</sup> HART UK, *Continuing Impunity: Azerbaijani-Turkish offensives against Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh*, 14 May 2021, available at: <https://www.hart-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-Continuing-Impunity-by-Caroline-Cox-April-2021-1.pdf> [accessed 14 May 2021].

- Apply Global Magnitsky Sanctions or similar measures on state officials who have been involved in war crimes in Nagorno-Karabakh or called for the eradication of Armenians.
- Work to effectively combat speech which dehumanizes Armenians, especially in schoolbooks.
- Review the Waiver of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act With Respect to Assistance to the Government of Azerbaijan.

We would also like to request a response from the US State Department in regards to what measures it has in place to ensure military and security aid is not being used for "offensive purposes against Armenia" and "furthering tensions" in light of the above reported material of increased threats towards Armenian people and the torture of prisoners of war.

Sincerely,

**Signatures**

*Organizations*

Anglican Persecuted Church Network

Armenian Council of America

Christian Solidarity International

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de

Conscience CAP Freedom of Conscience

Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) Suffering Church Network

International Unite Women Federation

Jubilee Campaign

Legalise Apostasy

Love Your Neighbor Community

Saint Nicholas Freedom Group

Save the Persecuted Christians

Set My People Free

*Individuals*

Father John Anderson  
*President*  
Saint Nicholas Freedom Group

Hamid Gharagozloo  
International Organization to Preserve Human Rights

Faith J. H. McDonnell  
*Director of Advocacy*  
Katartismos Global

Scott Morgan  
*President*  
Red Eagle Enterprises

Dr. Jianli Yang  
*Founder and president*  
Citizen Power Initiatives for China