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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARTSAKH

01/1271/2023
11.09.23

Honorable Robert Menendez
Chairman, Senate Foreign Affairs Committee
United States Senate
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Menendez:

I am writing to convey profound gratitude of the people and Government of the Republic of Artsakh for your unwavering support to our ongoing struggle for freedom and democratic sovereignty. Your efforts have been particularly significant, considering the hardships and challenges that the people of Artsakh have endured during the past nine months of living under a severe blockade by Azerbaijan.

The blockade of the Lachin Corridor has gradually escalated into a complete inhumane siege of Artsakh. This crime against humanity has garnered the attention of numerous countries, including the United States, as well as major international political and human rights organizations and media. As you know, the United States is actively involved in the negotiation process aimed at achieving a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Additionally, efforts are underway to initiate a dialogue between Artsakh and Azerbaijan to address the urgent matter of unblocking the Lachin Corridor, as well as to create an environment conducive to a comprehensive, peaceful, and dignified resolution of the conflict and normalization of relations between Artsakh and Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan continues to openly ignore numerous calls by the US Congress and Administration, as well as the relevant Order by the International Court of Justice to restore unimpeded movement between Artsakh and Armenia through the Lachin Corridor. Additionally, despite all the efforts of the United States to facilitate a meeting between the representatives of Artsakh and Azerbaijan, Baku has been refusing to engage in direct talks with Stepanakert under international auspices. Open disregard of the American stance on this issue cannot be tolerated, for it sets a dangerous

international political, legal and humanitarian precedent. Facing no repercussions for committing a crime against humanity, autocratic Azerbaijan proceeds with its genocidal anti-Armenian agenda. Aliyev and his regime, as well as the entire world must receive a clear signal that the United States remains adherent to protection of universal values of human rights and democratic liberties from hatred and intolerance in any form or manifestation.

Baku continues to set unrealistic maximalist preconditions and at the same time continues various provocations that undermine any prospect for constructive negotiations. For instance, the abduction of Artsakh citizen Vagif Khachatryan on July 29, 2023 and the abduction of three students from Artsakh on August 28, 2023 at the illegal checkpoint in the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijani servicemen have significantly eroded the prospects for holding any meeting in the Azerbaijani territory, including due to grave security concerns.

The actions taken by Azerbaijan consistently indicate that its leadership is not inclined to genuinely pursue a negotiated resolution of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Artsakh or the Karabakh-Azerbaijan conflict in a broader context. The government of Azerbaijan avoids negotiations and intends to forcefully subjugate Artsakh through repressions, including the inhumane siege of Artsakh and the use of starvation as a method of warfare against our people. Azerbaijan employs the blockade as one of the tools to pressure Artsakh into political subordination to Azerbaijan and to suppress our inherent and inalienable right to self-determination. In its effort to deny the people of Artsakh their fundamental rights, autocratic Azerbaijan has chosen the most extreme course of action that threatens the very existence of our people. The leading international human rights institutions, legal experts and scholars specializing in the study of genocide have classified the ongoing unlawful blockade as a genocidal crime. In particular, the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC), International Association of Genocide Scholars (IASG), Genocide Watch, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute, as well as distinguished individual experts like Juan Ernesto Méndez, Luis Moreno Ocampo, the current and former presidents and vice-presidents of IAGS, along with other prominent genocide scholars, have repeatedly issued atrocity alerts warning about the unfolding crime of genocide in Artsakh.

The Lachin Corridor is a crucial lifeline connecting Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia and the rest of the world. Its significance has been recognized not only in the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020, but also throughout the long history of negotiations between Artsakh and Azerbaijan. Neither Azerbaijan, nor any other involved party have ever questioned the need for the existence of the Lachin Corridor between Artsakh and Armenia, for it reflected the deep-rooted and inseparable ties between the two. The primary purpose of the Lachin Corridor is to ensure the continuity of these ties between the compatriots, thus also to foster conditions for a normal life and the development of our fledgling democracy. Restricting communication between Artsakh and Armenia represents an attempt to sever essential people-to-people and familial connections. This blockade effectively holds the entire Artsakh people hostage, and restricts their fundamental rights and freedoms,

including the right to live in freedom and dignity, right to health, right to education, freedom of movement and many others.

In this context, there is an urgent need for a united effort by the international community to put an end to the genocidal acts committed by Azerbaijan. We firmly believe that the United States has an important role to play in this matter. We will highly appreciate your support in conveying to the US decision-makers the imperative of increased engagement in the process, as well as stressing the moral and political importance of pushing forward the international efforts aimed at ending this inhumane siege and establishing conditions for a fair, dignified, and sustainable conflict resolution. International involvement and oversight in such a process would enable the United States to ensure the integrity of the political processes, fostering fairness, impartiality, and a conducive atmosphere for constructive negotiations.

As a crucial first step, Azerbaijan must immediately cease genocidal actions against Artsakh. The use of starvation as a means to subjugate the people of Artsakh should never be condoned under any circumstances. It is imperative to establish conditions for Artsakh to continue safeguarding the well-being and fundamental rights and liberties of its people. In this regard, the United States can consolidate international efforts by facilitating adoption of a UN Security Council resolution that would compel Azerbaijan to unconditionally lift the illegal siege of Artsakh and reopen the Lachin Corridor to humanitarian, commercial and passenger traffic, without linkages to other unrelated issues and strictly in accordance with the Orders of the International Court of Justice. In the face of Azerbaijan's persistent rejection to implement its international obligations, the United Nations Security Council resolution stands as the final diplomatic recourse to compel Azerbaijan to cease its flagrant violations of international law.

Lifting of the Lachin Corridor's blockade and elimination of the imminent threat of physical annihilation of the people of Artsakh will create the minimum essential conditions for initiating meaningful negotiations between Artsakh and Azerbaijan. In this critical juncture, a robust and meaningful international mediation process will be of utmost importance. Artsakh should have the opportunity to engage in equal negotiations aimed at a dignified and just settlement to the conflict. Such negotiations should exclude any predetermined outcomes, allowing for an open and inclusive discussion on the rights and security of the people of Artsakh, including the fundamental right to self-determination.

To this end, we firmly believe that any international mediation aimed at facilitating direct talks between Stepanakert and Baku should go beyond the scope of merely providing good offices. The settlement process must be firmly grounded on genuine negotiations, while any agreements reached should be based on the genuine and voluntary consent of the involved parties, free from any form of coercion or force. In this regard, the establishment of an internationally mandated mechanism with participation of involved actors is absolutely crucial. Such a mechanism would serve to guarantee the transparency of negotiations between Artsakh and Azerbaijan. Moreover, it would

ensure that conflict settlement proposals, along with the potential implementation phase, strictly adhere to the principles of international law and uphold universal values, such as fairness, peace, freedom, democracy, human dignity, and equality.

Dear Mr. Senator, hopefully you will find this letter useful as you and your colleagues in the Senate plan to discuss various concerns and approaches during the September 14, 2023 Senate Hearing on Assessing the Crisis in Nagorno Karabakh. We in Artsakh hope that by collective efforts we will eventually succeed in protecting our worldview and shared values of freedom, human dignity, peace and democracy from genocidal attacks and medieval cruelty by the autocratic regime in Azerbaijan.

Sincerely,

Sergey GHAZARYAN

