



Jacob Kamaras <jacob@stellarjaypr.com>

op-ed submission: Azerbaijan's U.S. ambassador on recent California protest

Jacob Kamaras <jacob@stellarjaypr.com>

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To: eclendaniel@bayareanewsgroup.com

Hi Ed,

How are you? I hope this finds you well. You've previously heard from me in a different capacity, when I sent you an opinion piece published in March on the implications of coronavirus for higher education:

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/03/03/opinion-coronavirus-implications-for-higher-ed-and-innovation/>

Today I'm reaching out on behalf of Azerbaijan's United States Embassy to offer The Mercury News the attached op-ed by Azerbaijani Ambassador to the U.S. Elin Suleymanov. Amid the recent escalation in the decades-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Eurasia, Ambassador Suleymanov examines the hate-crime investigation surrounding an Armenian-organized protest outside the Azerbaijani Consulate General in Los Angeles. He places the protest and its aftermath in a statewide context.

"It is imperative that all Californians, including the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, speak up and urge their elected leaders to uphold the Golden State's traditions of openness, inclusiveness and welcoming hospitality by rejecting all hate crimes," he writes. "The best way to prevent and deter such violence against any community or individuals in the future is the pursuit of justice and prosecution of the perpetrators."

The full text of the ambassador's piece is also included below my signature. Please let me know if The Mercury News is interested in publishing this op-ed, and thanks so much for your time and consideration!

Best,

Jacob Kamaras

Founder, Stellar Jay Communications

646-338-5946

Hate crimes have no place under the California sun

By Elin Suleymanov

For many around the world, California's happy and easygoing image was unexpectedly overshadowed by ethnic violence during the July 21 protest against the Azerbaijani Consulate General in Los Angeles.

On that sunny California day, some of the 3,000 Armenian protesters attacked a group of a couple-dozen Azerbaijanis, causing injuries which required urgent medical care. A Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officer was hurt as well. The LAPD has since launched a hate-crime investigation, while U.S. Embassies in Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as several Jewish groups, including the American Jewish Committee and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, made statements condemning the violence.

The protests in Los Angeles and elsewhere around the world by Armenians and Azerbaijanis followed the recent attack by Armenia across the border with Azerbaijan, which killed 12 people and threatened Azerbaijan's pipeline infrastructure, a vital source for Europe's energy security. This latest flare-up is another reminder that the protracted three-decade long Armenia- Azerbaijan conflict remains a major threat to peace and security in the wider Eurasia region. Despite mediation efforts

co-chaired by France, Russia and the U.S., no progress has been achieved, and Armenia continues to occupy some 20 percent of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territories in violation of four U.N. Security Council resolutions and numerous other international documents.

Vivid images and videos of violence in Los Angeles are disturbing to watch. They are an especially painful sight for me since I served as Azerbaijan's first consul general in Los Angeles before my posting in Washington. The Los Angeles I know enjoys a rich mosaic of diversity and is a welcoming home to many cultures. My many friends are equally proud of their identities and open-minded towards others. Therefore, I never expected to see such ethnically induced violence in broad daylight and the LAPD's failure to adequately protect counter-protesters.

Based on my own experience, I trust that overwhelmingly, Armenian-Americans are appalled by these hate crimes. I hope that Armenian-Americans will join the growing number of Jewish-American groups and others in condemning these violent acts as well as online threats against Azerbaijanis in California.

The confrontation in Los Angeles did not occur in a vacuum. Both Armenia and the Armenian communities abroad have long been plagued by extremist ideologies, political violence and a complicated history with anti-Semitism, Nazi collaborators and Middle Eastern radicals. In the 1980s, Turkish diplomats were assassinated by Armenian terrorists in Los Angeles and, in recent days, Azerbaijani embassies in Europe have been under attack by Armenian groups.

Just like the conflicts with neighbors and the unsustainable occupation of Azerbaijani lands undermine Armenia's own future, the self-serving agenda of radical political groups hurts the larger Armenian-American community. Their radical agenda offers neither peace nor prosperity to Armenia; instead, it perpetuates isolation and confrontation.

In recent months, America has undergone a thorough and, at times, traumatic soul-searching about race, discrimination and equality. From anti-Semitism to racist practices to Islamophobia, these are notions which have real-life consequences for real people. Clearly, hate crimes affect not just victims of violence. They have much wider implications for society as a whole.

Therefore, it is imperative that all Californians, including the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, speak up and urge their elected leaders to uphold the Golden State's traditions of openness, inclusiveness and welcoming hospitality by rejecting all hate crimes. The best way to prevent and deter such violence against any community or individuals in the future is the pursuit of justice and prosecution of the perpetrators.

There should be no place for hate in California. Rather, the state should continue celebrating love, friendship and creativity under its ever-shining sun.

Elin Suleymanov is Azerbaijan's ambassador to the United States.

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