

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 23, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Secretary Pompeo,

We write to express our concern regarding Azerbaijan's ongoing military offensive against the people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Since September 27th, Azeri shelling and drone strikes have decimated Stepanakert and the surrounding towns. More than 10 hours of talks between Armenian and Azerbaijani officials resulted in a ceasefire agreement on Saturday, October 10th, which Azerbaijani forces broke immediately after it went into effect. Its ongoing bombing campaign targeting large population centers throughout Artsakh is destroying critical civilian infrastructure and disrupting daily life by forcing residents to stay in their bomb shelters and basements.

Protection of civilians caught in the escalating conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region must be prioritized. On October 5th, Amnesty International confirmed the use of cluster munitions in the city of Stepanakert. They also reported an unidentified number of civilian casualties after further shelling in Stepanakert and the town of Shushi. Azerbaijan has continuously shelled civilian areas, and has targeted infrastructure of important Christian heritage, including the Holy Saviour Cathedral.

Human rights abuses undermine the values that form an essential foundation of stable, secure, and democratic societies. These abuses have devastating impacts on individuals and the rule of law, and they cause deep trauma that can last generations. Historically, the United States has sought to impose tangible and significant consequences on those who commit serious human rights abuses under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (Public Law 114-328).

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov, Chief of the General Staff Sadikov Najmeddin Huseynoglu, Deputy Minister of Defense (Army) Mustafayev Kerem Narimanoglu, and Deputy Minister of Defense (Air Force) Tairov Ramiz Firudinoglu must be held accountable for their part in the ongoing human rights abuses taking place in Artsakh. Without a doubt, many of these individuals are responsible for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. Thus, we call on the Trump Administration to impose significant, tangible consequences on the individuals responsible for Azerbaijan's continuous campaign of aggression against civilians in Artsakh.

Azerbaijan's actions threaten strategic American priorities in the South Caucasus and the stability of international political systems in the region. Without a firm response from the United States, the return of fighting in the region stokes the possibility of a full-blown war embroiling Turkey and Russia. We have already seen Turkey's heavy hand in this conflict, including the recent deployment of pro-Turkish fighters from Syria and Libya to bolster Azerbaijan's army and reported use of Turkish F-16s in their ongoing bombing campaign. Any further escalation of fighting runs the risk of a much larger conflict threatening the lives not only of Artsakhians, but innocent civilians living throughout the Caucasus.

We look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



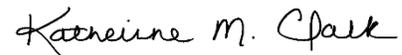
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