



Azerbaijani American Community of Florida (AACF)
A Florida Non-Profit Corporation

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Azerbaijani American Community of Florida

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The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Representative Bilirakis,

We are writing to appeal to you as Florida constituents, Azerbaijanis living in the United States and American citizens, to take an objective position in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

As members of the Azerbaijani American Community of Florida, it is our mission to promote Azerbaijan's rich heritage to South Florida's diverse community. To that end, we ask that you consider the Azerbaijani point of view in what seems to be a woefully one-sided narrative in Congress, and one you can impact in your role as Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues.

In their recent op-ed in the San Francisco Chronicle, Biden should make U.S. a force for democracy and human rights in Nagorno-Karabakh, Representatives Jackie Speier and Adam Schiff advocate that the United States "must reassert itself diplomatically and with urgency" in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

We couldn't agree more, and respectfully submit this brief overview of Armenian atrocities in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict from the Azerbaijani perspective:

1. **The illegal "Artsakh" regime is not recognized by any country, including Armenia itself.**
For 30 years Armenia has kept 20% of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan under occupation, including the Nagorno Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts, having carried out ethnic cleansing in 1992 against all Azerbaijanis in these territories. Specifically, **this regime committed war crimes and genocide against Azerbaijani civilians** in the city of Khojaly.
2. **Azerbaijan is the only country to fall victim of the Armenian invasion and has suffered greatly as a result.**
UN Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884; a 2008 General Assembly Resolution (62/243); and all UN Member States have **recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of the Republic of Azerbaijan**. This confirms the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan and demands that Armenia immediately withdraw its troops from the occupied territories and return all Azerbaijani refugees and displaced persons to their lands.

3. **Armenia has repeatedly resorted to provocations in the Azerbaijani territories and made new territorial claims.**

In December, The Economist reported on the destruction of Agdam, once an Azeri city of 40,000 people. Called “the Hiroshima of the Caucasus,” the city was virtually razed to the ground by the Armenians after the first Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1993, which displaced nearly one million people, most of them Azeris. “There is nothing left..., bar a sea of rubble and crumbling walls that stretches for miles in every direction, looking like the aftermath of a nuclear attack,” reports The Economist. The devastation can clearly be seen in this eyewitness video from one of the first visits to Agdam by a refugee after nearly 30 years,

4. **Armenian armed forces launched a series of rocket attacks against Azerbaijan, deliberately and intentionally targeting civilians and infrastructure.**

These repeated Armenian attacks– war crimes – in which cluster bombs were dropped on civilian areas far from the combat zone, **killed 104 civilians and injured 416**. As you know, **cluster bombs are banned** in much of the world because of their danger to civilians in residential areas.

These vicious attacks were reported in the media, including a gut-wrenching eyewitness account of the attack on Barda, written by a New York Times reporter who there during the attack which killed 21 people in downtown Barda and wounded 70 people.

At the same time, the two main cities of the Armenian-controlled territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, Khankendi and Shusha, also came under rocket attack, as they have on a regular basis since fighting began in October 2020. A city hospital was damaged in the regional capital and a civilian was killed and another wounded in Shusha.

These attacks were roundly condemned by international organizations including Amnesty International, who reported on the use of cluster munitions in Barda. Amnesty’s Crisis Response experts verified pictures of 9N235 cluster munitions fragments found in a residential neighborhood in Barda from Russian-made 9M55 Smerch rockets that appeared to have been fired into the city by Armenian forces. Marie Struthers, Amnesty International’s Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia said the use of cluster bombs in civilian areas is “cruel and reckless, and causes untold death, injury and misery.”

During a visit to Azerbaijan in November 2020, Human Rights Watch researchers documented four attacks from cluster munitions in three populated districts in Azerbaijan which killed at least seven civilians, including two children, and wounded close to 20, including two children.

5. Finally, as a result of the recent 44-day war and after 27 years of occupation, **Azerbaijan liberated its own territories and brought stability and prosperity to the South Caucasus region.**

On November 10, 2020, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, and the President of the Russian Federation signed a joint statement agreeing to a ceasefire, which has been strictly observed since.

An integral part of that statement includes **the return of one million IDPs to their own homes after 27 years of occupation**, and is meant to bring peace, prosperity, and stability to the whole region. So too, **improving the social welfare of Armenians living in Azerbaijani territory is a top priority for the Azerbaijani government**. An agreement signed by the parties on January 11, 2021 lifts all economic and infrastructure blockades between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Plans to build new roads through Azerbaijan will develop Armenia’s infrastructure at the regional level, with joint development projects to be implemented for Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Finally, it is our hope that ethnic hatred, unfairness and occupation ends in this war-torn region, and that you will use your position, both as a United States Congressman and Co-Chair Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues to promote peace and work to develop stability in the region.

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