

Testimony by Artak Beglaryan for the Congressional hearing at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the U.S. Congress

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Introduction

I stand before you today as a survivor of a people who have witnessed, in the 21st century, the complete eradication of their existence from their ancestral homeland. The indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) has been subjected to a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide by Azerbaijan, resulting in our total displacement, mass human rights abuses, and the deliberate annihilation of our cultural identity.

This unfolding tragedy defies not only the rulings of the International Court of Justice but also the very foundations of the post-Holocaust international order, built to ensure that such atrocities would "never again" be allowed to happen.

Yet today, Azerbaijan continues to deny displaced Armenians their right of return, holds political prisoners under sham trials, and aggressively erases the Armenian heritage of Artsakh — all under the banner of a state-sponsored Armenophobic ideology that now endangers the sovereignty of Armenia itself.

The time for mere condemnation has passed. Justice delayed is justice denied. We respectfully urge the United States to lead the world in recognizing the genocidal nature of these crimes, demanding accountability, and taking concrete steps to safeguard the rights and survival of the Artsakh people.

1. Post-Displacement Violations

1.1. Residential Areas and Property

Large residential areas and private and public property of Nagorno-Karabakh have been destroyed or appropriated by Azerbaijan. Such examples include:

1. In the late 2024 and early 2025 the most historic and one of the densest residential areas of Stepanakert (Nagorno-Karabakh capital city) has been destroyed with thousands of houses and apartments. On February 19, 2025, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for "Victory Park" in that area¹. This park will be developed over a 12.9-hectare area, and a total of 279,416 cubic meters of demolition waste has been removed from the area.
2. Azerbaijan has almost completely [destroyed the village of Sargsashen](#)² of Artsakh.

¹Aliyev, Ilham. "Ilham Aliyev Was Interviewed by Local TV Channels." *The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, January 10, 2024. <https://president.az/en/articles/view/68186>.

²Horizon Weekly. "Azerbaijan Completely Destroyed Artsakh's Sargsashen Village." *Horizon Weekly*, March 25, 2024. <https://horizonweekly.ca/en/azerbaijan-completely-destroyed-artsakhs-sargsashen-village/>.

3. In 2024, historic Qarin Tak village [has been completely destroyed](#)³ with its over 160 houses, community institutions, a church and other monuments.
4. Satellite imageries [show large destructions](#)⁴ of villages of the Hadrut region of Artsakh.
5. Azerbaijan has also illegally settled and appropriated thousands of private property of the Armenian people, and an example of such is [Aygestan village of Artsakh](#)⁵.
6. Following the complete depopulation of Artsakh, on November 23, 2023, by the decree of Ilham Aliyev, the "University of Karabakh" was established, slated to commence operations from September 2024 in the city of Stepanakert, within the premises of the Artsakh State University.

1.2. Cultural Heritage

The cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh has been systematically destroyed or vandalized in this period. Some of the most apparent cases include:

1. The complete [destruction](#) of the Saint John Baptist (Kanach Zham) church⁶ in occupied Shushi.
2. Another recent crime was [the complete destruction of the Saint Ascension Church of Berdzor \(Lachin\)](#).⁷
3. The cemeteries of the Avetaranots, Jraghatsner, Zardanashen, Madatashen and Sargsashen [have been destroyed](#)⁸ by Azerbaijan.
4. The Caucasus Heritage Watch Monitoring Report #7⁹ summarizes that fourteen sites in Nagorno-Karabakh have been destroyed, eight have been damaged, and thirty two are threatened by Azerbaijan's military. The report uses satellite imagery taken from October 2023 to June 2024 to monitor specific sites including; Ghuze T'agh Cemetery, Zar School, Chirag school, Kohak Sacred Place, St. Hovhannes Mkrtych Church (Kanach Zham), Ghazanchetsots Cemetery, Ptkat'aghi Vank' Church & Cemetery, St. Sargis and St. Grigor Churches, Surb Mariam Astvatsatsin of Vaghuhas/Gozlu and Surb Astvatsatsin church and village cemetery.
5. The Caucasus Heritage Watch Monitoring Report #6¹⁰ documented forty four impacted sites that have been threatened, destroyed, or damaged as a result of Azerbaijan's military. The report uses satellite imagery taken from October 2022 to April of 2023 to monitor specific sites including; Cemetery near Vazgenashen / Hajisamly, Meghretsots St. Astvatsatsin Church, Ghazanchetsots Cemetery, Yerevan Gates Cemetery, S. Astvatsatsin of Avetaranots / Chanakhchi, Kavak'avank' Church, Zorakhach' Church, St. Sargis Church (Mokhrehes/Susanlyg)
6. After the full occupation of Artsakh in 2023, official Azerbaijan embarked on a complete change of the historical, cultural, and ethno-religious character of Artsakh. This policy began back in the Soviet years when the entire Christian heritage of Artsakh was declared Albanian, and starting

³Monument Watch. "Complete Destruction of the Village of Karintak by Azerbaijan." *Monument Watch*, March 26, 2024. <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/complete-destruction-of-the-village-of-karintak-by-azerbaijan/>.

⁴<https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/781352/artsakh-after-the-occupation-of-azerbaijan-part-1-hadrut/>

⁵Azerbaijan News. "Xocalının Ballica Kəndi Sakinlərinə Qovuşdu." *Azerbaijan News*, April 14, 2024. <https://www.azerbaijan-news.az/az/posts/detail/xocalinin-ballica-kendi-sakinlerine-qovusdu-1734123602/347378>.

⁶Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. "Fresh Allegations Of Azerbaijani Destruction Of Armenian Heritage Sites In Nagorno-Karabakh." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 12, 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-armenia-nagorno-karabakh-heritage-destruction-karintak-dasalti/32918998.html>.

⁷Public Radio of Armenia. "Azerbaijanis Completely Destroy St. Ascension Church in Berdzor." *Public Radio of Armenia*, May 11, 2024. <https://en.armradio.am/2024/05/11/azerbaijanis-completely-destroy-st-ascension-church-in-berdzor/>.

⁸168.am. "Azerbaijan Continues to Destroy Armenian Cultural Monuments in Occupied Territories." *168.am*, March 21, 2025. <https://168.am/2025/03/21/2186554.html>.

⁹Caucasus Heritage Watch. *Erasure at Scale: Cultural Heritage Destruction during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War*. May 2024. <https://indd.adobe.com/view/b1b54fc0-dce2-4eb0-ba83-eb728c49dd20>.

¹⁰Caucasus Heritage Watch. *Silent Erasure: A Satellite Investigation of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan*. June 2023. <https://indd.adobe.com/view/c736e81d-f100-4aa9-8994-2f51464eb06a>.

from the 2000s, this heritage was attributed to the Udi community of Azerbaijan. Another trend is the islamization of the Artsakh cultural heritage¹¹, changing the history of certain monuments.

A large list of destroyed or vandalized cultural monuments of Artsakh is provided [here](#)¹².

Despite these documented human rights violations and international crimes, no international mission has accessed to Nagorno-Karabakh. Even UNESCO has been blocked by Azerbaijan from sending a mission and monitoring the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, as officially stated in their December 2020 statement¹³.

1.3. Armenian Prisoners

In January 2025, Azerbaijan initiated sham trials against 16 Armenian Christians before the Baku Military Court. Overall, there are 23 officially confirmed Armenian prisoners currently held in Azerbaijan—18 of whom were captured in 2023, and five in 2020. This group includes eight political prisoners, nine prisoners of war, and six captured civilians. The names of the hostages, along with additional details, can be found [here](#)¹⁴.

The Armenian prisoners have faced brutal tortures and inhuman treatment in Azerbaijan. Besides, they don't have any access to international human right organizations and monitoring bodies, as well as Armenian and foreign attorneys.

In a report issued in December 2023, former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Luis Moreno-Ocampo said the captivity of the “three former Artsakh presidents and . . . other community leaders” by Azerbaijan “is part of the genocide and a message to their community: if you come back to Nagorno-Karabakh, you will be starved, incarcerated, or killed.”¹⁵

It is also widely known that Azerbaijan imprisons political prisoners and the detention of these four is consistent with this practice. In December 2024, the Union for Freedom of Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan published an updated list of Azeri political prisoners with the names of 331 people.¹⁶ Both

¹¹Monument Watch. "Azerbaijan's Policy of Islamization in Artsakh." *Monument Watch*, May 6, 2024. <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbajians-policy-of-islamization-in-artsakh/>.

¹²The Armenian Report. "Artsakh's Christian Cultural Erasure: Azerbaijan's Systematic Destruction Continues." *The Armenian Report*, April 8, 2024. <https://www.thearmenianreport.com/post/artsakh-s-christian-cultural-erasure-azerbaijan-s-systematic-destruction-continues>.

¹³UNESCO. "UNESCO Awaiting Azerbaijan's Response Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh Mission." *UNESCO*, March 19, 2021. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-awaiting-azerbajians-response-regarding-nagorno-karabakh-mission>.

¹⁴Freedom for Armenian Hostages Initiative. "Azerbaijan's Arrests of Armenian Civilians and Military Servicemen." *Freedom for Armenian Hostages*, March 2024. <https://freearmenianhostages.net/?p=159https://www.thearmenianreport.com/post/artsakh-s-christian-cultural-erasure-azerbaijan-s-systematic-destruction-continues>.

¹⁵Luis Moreno Ocampo, *Current Genocides and the Consistent International Practice to Deny Them: Summary of the Case of Nagorno-Karabakh*, UNIVERSITY OF SAO PAULO, Dec. 2023, available at <https://luismorenoocampo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/USP-Innovation-on-Global-Order.-Nagorno-Karabakh-case-2023.pdf>

¹⁶*New List of Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan – 331 People*, Turan, Dec. 12, 2024, available at <https://turaz.az/en/politics/new-list-of-political-prisoners-in-azerbaijan-331-people-788109>.

Amnesty International¹⁷ and Human Rights Watch,¹⁸ among others, report that Azerbaijan imprisons political prisoners.

Even before the trials began in 2025 January, there were systematic and egregious violations of the rights of the Armenian defendants to due process of law under Articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Many procedural rights of the Armenian prisoners are continuously violated during the ongoing trial, in contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This has included at least the following violations:

- Article 9(1) – right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention;
- Article 9(2) – right to be informed of the reason for arrest and be promptly informed of any charges;
- Article 9(3) – right to trial within a reasonable time or to be released;
- Article 14(1) – right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal;
- Article 14(2) – right to the presumption of innocence (and right to the presumption of bail);
- Article 14(3)(a) – right to be informed promptly and in a language which is understood of the nature and cause of the charges;
- Article 14(3)(c) – right to be tried without undue delay;
- Article 14(3)(d) – right to legal assistance of own choosing; and
- Article 14(3)(e) – right to know about and examine adverse witnesses.

2. Right to Return of the Artsakh People

Since the forcible displacement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians (over 40,000 in 2020 and over 120,000 in 2023), no one has been able to return to their homes under Azerbaijani occupation. To date, no Armenian has had access even to cemeteries, churches, or any private or public property.

Moreover, Azerbaijan has announced its intention¹⁹ to close not only UN agencies, including the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, but also the International Committee of the Red Cross. This trend demonstrates that Azerbaijan seeks to eliminate any international presence, not only to continue its genocidal policy against the Armenian people and their heritage in the occupied territories but also to intensify domestic human rights violations.

¹⁷ *Azerbaijan 2022*, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/azerbaijan/report-azerbaijan/>

¹⁸ *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practice: Azerbaijan*, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, Mar. 20, 2023, available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/azerbaijan/>

¹⁹ OC Media. "UNDP, UNHCR, and ICRC Told to Leave Azerbaijan." *OC Media*, April 24, 2024. <https://oc-media.org/undp-unhcr-and-icrc-told-to-leave-azerbaijan/>.

3. Background Information

In 2020, authoritarian Azerbaijan launched a large-scale attack against democratic Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in the deaths of more than 4,000 Armenians, including over 100 civilians. Azerbaijani forces committed numerous brutal war crimes and crimes against humanity, as documented by international human rights organizations. Azerbaijan seized over 8,500 square kilometers of territory, leaving the remaining 3,000 square kilometers under the control of the Nagorno-Karabakh government, as stipulated by the November 9, 2020, trilateral ceasefire agreement mediated by Russia.²⁰

In December 2022, the Azerbaijani government imposed a blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh's 120,000 Armenian Christian inhabitants. As documented by UN Experts²¹, Amnesty International²², International Committee of Red Cross²³ and other leading human rights organizations, the blockade caused critical shortages of basic necessities, including food, medicine and fuel, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis.

Despite orders from the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) on February 22²⁴ and July 6²⁵, 2023, demanding Azerbaijan lift the blockade, the Azerbaijani authorities not only maintained the blockade but also launched an offensive in September, causing the forced displacement of the entire population. Currently, there are only over 10 Armenians remained in Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani control who are living with strict conditions.

After the forcible displacement of the entire Nagorno-Karabakh people, on November 17, 2023, the ICJ issued a new order²⁶ acknowledging the forced displacement and ordering Azerbaijan to ensure the safe and unimpeded return of the Nagorno-Karabakh people, the protection of cultural and religious heritage and several other steps. However, approximately 150,000 Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh remain deprived of any opportunity to return to their homeland, while Azerbaijan actively destroys cultural heritage and private property there.

²⁰ *Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh*, LEMKIN INSTITUTE FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION, Sept. 5, 2023, at 109; *Anti-Armenian Xenophobia and Racism in Azerbaijan 2022*, TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL ET AL., 2022, at ¶ 180, available at <https://transparency.am/en/publication/pdf/335/10651/>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² Amnesty International. "Azerbaijan 2023." *Amnesty International*, 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/azerbaijan/report-azerbaijan/>

²³ International Committee of the Red Cross. "Operational Update: ICRC's Work across the Lachin Corridor." *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)*, July 20, 2023. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/operational-update-icrcs-work-across-lachin-corridor>.

²⁴ International Court of Justice. *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan): The Court Indicates a Provisional Measure to Ensure Unimpeded Movement of Persons, Vehicles and Cargo along the Lachin Corridor*. Press Release No. 2023/10, February 22, 2023. <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/180-20230222-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>.

²⁵ International Court of Justice. *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan), Request for the Modification of the Order of 22 February 2023 Indicating a Provisional Measure, Order of 6 July 2023*. I.C.J. Reports 2023, p. 403. <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/180-20230706-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

²⁶ International Court of Justice. *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan): The Court Indicates Provisional Measures*. Press Release No. 2023/69, November 17, 2023. <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20231117-pre-01-00-en.pdf>.

4. International Assessments

The blockade and forcible displacement could constitute genocide according to Juan Mendez²⁷, the first UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Luis Moreno Ocampo²⁸, the first Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, the International Association of Genocide Scholars²⁹, Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention³⁰.

Just after the Azerbaijani aggression in September 2023, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, stated her concern³¹ on the human rights violations and the risk of genocide. Subsequently, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, published a comment³² and stressed the following: "Any reported violations of human rights or international humanitarian law require follow-up, including prompt, independent and transparent investigations to ensure accountability and redress for the victims, as appropriate." Furthermore, in October 2023, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a joint statement³³ supporting Volker Türk's comment. The UN Human Rights Council also urged Azerbaijan "... to promptly create conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of those who wish to go home. Their cultural and religious heritage should also be guaranteed and protected."

Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights affirmed³⁴ that forcible displacement had occurred, and the European Parliament condemned³⁵ the ethnic cleansing of the Nagorno-Karabakh people, urging the European Union leadership to use preventive measures for further Azerbaijani crimes against Armenians and Armenia.

Importantly, the Freedom House has published a large report³⁶, stating the following: "The Azerbaijani state's actions constitute ethnic cleansing using forced displacement as a means. It acted upon a

²⁷Permanent Mission of Armenia to the United Nations. "Letter from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations on the Report of the First Committee." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, November 20, 2023. <https://un.mfa.am/en/documents-UN/2023/11/20/letter-from-the-permanent-representative-of-armenia-to-the-united-nations-on-the-report-of-the-firs/12287>

²⁸Moreno Ocampo, Luis. "Report on Genocides, December 2023." *Luis Moreno Ocampo*, 2023. https://luismorenoocampo.com/lmo_en/report-genocides-december-2023/.

²⁹International Association of Genocide Scholars. *IAGS Resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh*. September 2, 2024. <https://genocidescholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/IAGS-Resolution-on-Nagorno-Karabakh.pdf>.

³⁰Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention. *Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh: Applying the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*. Final Draft. September 5, 2023 https://www.lemkininstitute.com/files/ugd/9bc553_2e3babd9d7834d7fbcfa262f88c9fa74.pdf

³¹United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. *Statement by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the Situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan*. September 22, 2023 https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/USG_Nderitu_Statement_Armenia_Azerbaijan_22092023.pdf

³²Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Azerbaijan–Armenia: Comment by UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk." *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, September 21, 2023. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/azerbaijan-armenia-comment-un-human-rights-chief-volker-turk>.

³³Permanent Mission of Armenia to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva. "Joint Statement by Armenia at the 54th Session of the UN Human Rights Council." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, October 11, 2023. <https://switzerland.mfa.am/en/news/2023/10/11/hrc54-%E2%80%9393-joint-statement/12149>

³⁴Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. "Armenia and Azerbaijan: Effective Human Rights Protection of All Persons Affected by the Conflict over the Karabakh Region Is Key to the Success of the Peace Process." *Council of Europe*, October 20, 2023. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/armenia-and-azerbaijan-effective-human-rights-protection-of-all-persons-affected-by-the-conflict-over-the-karabakh-region-is-key-to-the-success-of-the-peace-process>

³⁵European Parliament. "Joint Motion for a Resolution on the Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan's Attack and the Need for Proper Use of EU Assistance and a Review of Relations with Baku." *European Parliament*, April 24, 2024. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2024-0163_EN.html.

³⁶Freedom House. "New Report: Azerbaijani Regime Ethnically Cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh According to International Law Experts." *Freedom House*, February 26, 2024. <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-azerbaijani-regime-ethnically-cleansed-nagorno-karabakh-according-international>.

comprehensive, methodically implemented strategy to empty Nagorno-Karabakh of its ethnic Armenian population and historical and cultural presence. The documented evidence meets the criteria for ethnic cleansing as defined by a UN commission of experts' report examining violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.»

The Freedom House report³⁷ also “identifies a number of steps that democratic governments can take to address impunity. These recommendations include also the following: “Support international efforts to prosecute crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, including by making a state referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Implement targeted sanctions, such as travel bans and asset freezes, against Azerbaijani officials, military leaders, and individuals implicated in gross human rights violations and war crimes.”

³⁷Freedom House. "New Report: Azerbaijani Regime Ethnically Cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh According to International Law Experts." *Freedom House*, February 26, 2024. <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-azerbaijani-regime-ethnically-cleansed-nagorno-karabakh-according-international>.