



On the One Year Anniversary of the Artsakh Genocide

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It has been one year since the Artsakh Genocide of 19 September 2023, when Azerbaijan invaded the 3,000 year old ethnic Armenian enclave and de facto autonomous state of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) after a brutal 10-month siege. Azerbaijan killed hundreds of Armenians and displaced almost 100 percent of the remaining population. The siege and invasion were characterized by a terrible silence among the world’s powers, including the United States, as well as by the staggering inaction of various political leaders and international institutions, which signaled the start of a new era of “acceptable genocide.”

Since our last commemoration [statement](#) six months ago, the international community has taken almost no steps to pursue justice for displaced Artsakh Armenians or to condemn the actions of the [genocidal regime](#) of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The displaced Artsakhs remain in limbo, Artsakh officials and prisoners of war remain illegally detained, and Azerbaijan continues to evade any form of accountability for its crimes against humanity and genocide.

Moreover, despite protests from neighboring Iran as well as other members of the international community, Azerbaijan has continued to pursue an expansionist agenda, laying claim to the territory in the Syunik Province of Armenia for an Turkish-Azeri controlled “Zangezur Corridor.” Hidden behind Azerbaijan’s economic arguments in favor of this corridor is a continued Turkish-Azeri threat to Armenia’s territorial integrity and to regional stability. While the United States and Russia have shown support for the Zangezur Corridor, Iran has stated that it is firmly [against](#) it.

The Artsakh Genocide was tragically foreseeable. The Lemkin Institute [warned](#) about it throughout 2023 and published a 126-page [report](#) detailing the specific threat to Artsakh on 5 September 2023. Several other experts made similar warnings. Nevertheless, the world stood by as Azerbaijan invaded. As the Lemkin Institute has repeatedly warned, Azerbaijan’s genocide is ongoing: Azerbaijan’s patterns of territorial encroachment on Armenian land, violent Armenophobic rhetoric, and anti-Armenian ideology persist within its claims that all of Armenia is in fact “Western Azerbaijan,” its demands to shift

Armenian-Azerbaijani borders in favor of Azerbaijan, and its demands that Armenia rewrite its Constitution. These are all red flags for an ongoing campaign of genocide against Artsakh and Armenia.

Turkey — having pursued physical destruction and cultural erasure of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, in large parts of the South Caucasus, and in Artsakh — now appears to be using Azerbaijan to pursue a “reservation policy” for Armenia that would render the country an economically and politically weak rump state that is completely dependent upon these two hostile and Armenophobic neighbors for its existence. Unfortunately, both the United States and Russia appear to continue to support Turkey’s expansionist aims with little to no pushback, guaranteeing Turkey’s impunity.

In fact, Azerbaijan has been rewarded for its illegal, aggressive, and inhumane behavior. For example, the upcoming COP29 conference in Baku (Azerbaijan’s capital city), against which the Lemkin Institute and other NGOs have repeatedly protested, will be held in November 2024 without any public acknowledgment of Azerbaijan's genocidal actions by the United Nations sponsors of the event. So far, these same offices have failed to speak out against Azerbaijan’s illegal detention of dozens of Armenians or its unhinged Armenophobic statements. Allowing Azerbaijan to greenwash its ongoing genocide and violence against Armenians will only embolden its demands for more Armenian territory and give it greater political control over Armenia’s exercise of its sovereign rights.

International law guarantees the right of return for Artsakh Armenians. President Aliyev has attempted to avoid this detail by disingenuously suggesting that the Armenians of Artsakh are free to return as Azerbaijani citizens, despite his own government's institutionalized anti-Armenian hate. Meanwhile, Aliyev is also busy destroying Armenian homes and cultural heritage in the region and has repeatedly said he believes that Artsakh is Azerbaijani historical territory.

Regrettably, due to the hostile political environment for Armenia in the region, there is also hesitancy within Armenia regarding the defense of the rights of Artsakh Armenians. On 9 September 2024, Armenian Parliamentary Speaker Alen Simonyan addressed the Armenian Parliament and called for the dissolution of the inter-parliamentary commission between Armenia and Artsakh, despite the fact that the democratically-elected Artsakh government has reorganized itself as a government-in-exile. Speaker Simonyan has also stated that there is no legal basis for the existence of “Nagorno-Karabakh” [Artsakh], arguing that “[l]egally, Nagorno-Karabakh does not exist as an entity...there are only our [Artsakh] compatriots who were displaced and whose problems the Armenian government is addressing in an excellent way.”

It is important to note that the leaders of the Artsakh Republic signed away Artsakh’s status as an autonomous body under duress and as a consequence of Azerbaijani aggression and threats that resulted in the exodus of all 120,000 Armenians from Artsakh. Members of the Artsakh government who were able to escape capture by the Azerbaijani military at exit checkpoints reorganized themselves once they had reached safety.

The Lemkin Institute stands for the rights of persons displaced by genocidal processes. One of these rights is the right to return to their homes. Another is to demand self-determination for their group in their ancestral lands. We resist the notion that genocidal displacement must be permanent and we reject the emerging consensus among major powers that we must live in a world in which genocidal states and organizations operate with complete impunity. Therefore, on this somber anniversary, we renew our call for international accountability for atrocity crimes, the immediate release of all Armenian detainees in Azerbaijan, and the protection of the political, cultural, and human rights of the Armenian people – from the Republic of Artsakh, in the Republic of Armenia, and in the global Diaspora. Silence and inaction must not prevail. It is crucial for international actors to find the courage to call for an end to the impunity enjoyed by the Republic of Azerbaijan.