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August 14, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

Since I wrote to you on June 8 expressing my deep concern over Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only road connecting Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) to the outside world, the crisis has deteriorated significantly and demands your personal and immediate attention.

Since December 2022, the people of Artsakh have been living under Azerbaijan’s illegal blockade with devastating effects, with 120,000 individuals denied access to food, water, medical supplies and services, gas, and consistent electricity. While previously the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was able to provide limited deliveries of essential food and medicine and facilitate transport in medical emergencies, Azerbaijan weeks ago cut off access to even the ICRC. As ICRC stated, “Tens of thousands of people rely on humanitarian aid reaching them through these routes.”¹ With this lifeline cut off, the population is completely isolated and the toll on civilians is escalating rapidly. There is no question that the situation is now a “dire humanitarian crisis,” as stated by a group of UN experts on August 7.²

The population of Artsakh is in urgent need of assistance, including those most vulnerable – pregnant women, children, and the elderly and disabled. Life-saving medications and baby formula are almost gone. Health authorities in Artsakh have reported a surge in the disease incidence and death rate related to malnutrition, lack of medicines, and lack of emergency medical services/transport. For example, the level of anemia among pregnant women has reached approximately 90 percent and incidents of fainting due to malnutrition have become widely reported. The grave consequence is that innocent civilians are increasingly suffering from malnutrition and facing the imminent threat of starvation – in accordance with Aliyev’s deliberate and strategic design. At this very moment, a convoy of trucks carrying 400 tons of humanitarian aid is blocked by Azerbaijan and not allowed to enter Artsakh. These actions are in clear violation of international law and the 2020 trilateral ceasefire statement. The August 7 statement by UN experts called for Azerbaijan “to uphold its international obligations to respect and protect human rights, including the right to food, health, education and life,” and I join them in that call.

Though the U.S. government, the European Union, UN experts, and Russia have condemned the blockade and called for the corridor to be opened to regular traffic, Azerbaijan has ignored such statements for months. The U.S. Department of State and USAID have tried to use diplomacy to put an end to Aliyev’s blockade of the Lachin Corridor, but the time for statements and such calls has clearly long passed. The United States must

¹ <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/azerbaijan-armenia-sides-must-reach-humanitarian-consensus-to-ease-suffering>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/un-experts-urge-azerbaijan-lift-lachin-corridor-blockade-and-end>

take concrete actions and immediately use other tools to press Azerbaijan to return to compliance with international law and order. **I therefore urge you to take the following steps:**

- **Convene an emergency session of the UN Security Council (UNSC) on the crisis in Artsakh while the United States holds the presidency.** This situation aligns with our country’s intention to focus this session on combating food insecurity and defending human rights and is an urgent matter demanding UNSC attention. UN Secretary-General Guterres voiced deep concern over the ongoing blockade and “the deteriorating situation on the ground” via an August 2 statement, and he and UN special rapporteurs have called for action.³ It is time for the UNSC to engage. I agree, as the Armenian government stated in an August 12 letter, that “the UN Security Council, as a principal body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, to prevent mass atrocities including war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide,” must convene a meeting on this crisis as soon as possible.⁴
- **Direct the U.S. Mission to the UN to lead a UN Security Council resolution** calling on Azerbaijan to immediately comply with the orders of the International Court of Justice, providing for the deployment of a team of UN experts to Artsakh to gather information and produce an independent report on the human rights and humanitarian situation, and sanction Azerbaijan for its flagrant violations of international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **Direct USAID and the Department of Defense to assess options for the United States to assist in the delivery of aid to Artsakh** by land or airlift to prevent the very real threat of starvation and avoid the preventable deaths of innocent civilians.
- **Personally call Aliyev** and urge him to lift the blockade. Warn him that there will be consequences, including the implementation of sanctions, visa restrictions, and cutting off U.S. foreign assistance, should the blockade continue. Many of us in Congress believe that Azerbaijan should have been cut off from U.S. aid a long time ago.

I stand ready to provide any support to your Administration’s efforts to address this crisis, including facilitating a meeting between your administration and national Armenian community stakeholders who can share first-hand accounts of the catastrophic situation in Artsakh.

This inhumane and evil campaign to destroy a people is hauntingly familiar to Armenians, whose ancestors suffered the horror of the Armenian Genocide 108 years ago. In an expert opinion report released August 7, former International Criminal Court prosecutor and international legal expert Luis Moreno Ocampo concluded, “There is a reasonable basis to believe that a Genocide is being committed against Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023.”⁵ He stated, “The blockade of the Lachin Corridor by the Azerbaijani security forces impeding access to any food, medical supplies, and other essentials should be considered a Genocide under Article II, (c) of the Genocide Convention: ‘Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction.’ There are no crematories, and there are no machete attacks. Starvation is the invisible Genocide weapon. Without immediate dramatic change, this group of Armenians will be destroyed in a few weeks.”

We have pledged “never again,” Mr. President, but today the people of Artsakh face the real threat of ethnic cleansing and genocide at the hands of an autocratic Azerbaijani regime. On April 24, 2023, when Armenians around the world were commemorating the 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, you powerfully stated, “Here and around the world, the Armenian people have met the evil of hate with hope. They rebuilt their communities. They nurtured their families and preserved their culture. They strengthened our nation. They also told their stories—and those of their ancestors—to remember and to ensure that genocide like the one that happened 108 years ago is never again repeated. Today, let us renew this pledge. Let us recommit to speaking

³ <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/statement-attributable-spokesperson-secretary-general-lachin-corridor-armenia>

⁴ https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2023/08/12/arm_unsc/12135

⁵ https://luismorenoocampo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Armenia-Report-Expert-Opinion.pdf?utm_source=Web&utm_medium=Landing&utm_campaign=Downloads

out against hate, standing up for human rights, and preventing atrocities.” Mr. President, you have been on the right side of history, have spoken truth to power, and now is the time to uphold this pledge and stand with the people of Artsakh and stop another Armenian Genocide from occurring.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I stand ready to work with your Administration in support of the people of Artsakh.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam B. Schiff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" and last name "Schiff" being more prominent than the middle initial "B".

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Samantha J. Power, Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development

The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Ambassador to the United Nations
U.S. Mission to the United Nations

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense