

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD – Extensions of Remarks

HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, this week marks the one-year anniversary of Azerbaijan’s military assault on the Republic of Artsakh, which began on September 19, 2023, following its long-term blockade of the Lachin Corridor. Their unjustified use of military force resulted in the surrender of the Artsakh government and the unprecedented expulsion of over 100,000 residents from their ancestral homes.

Despite promises and assurances that there would be no such attack, Azerbaijan used the language of “anti-terrorist operations” to justify its military assault on the peaceful inhabitants of Artsakh. Yet, Azerbaijan’s blockade of the region since December 12, 2022 provided a clear warning of what was to come. When Azerbaijan’s military forces closed the Lachin Corridor, the narrow strip of traversable land between Artsakh and Armenia, the United Nations and U.S. officials called on the Azerbaijani government to lift the blockade, which had caused a massive region-wide humanitarian crisis. Azerbaijan refused and the blockade remained in place until September 2023 when Azerbaijan’s military commenced its assault. By then, the blockade had already crippled Artsakh due to the lack of essential goods and services, including food and fuel. The blockade was so devastating in its isolation of Artsakh that its inhabitants suffered from severe malnutrition, including a fourfold increase in the number of recorded miscarriages compared to the previous year. The blockade created such a humanitarian crisis that the International Association of Genocide Scholars warned of the risk of genocide against the Armenian population in the region.

Then came the military assault. After more than nine months of the blockade, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive on September 19, 2023. The following day, the government of Artsakh was forced to surrender to the invading force. Azerbaijan took many of the senior political leadership of the government of Artsakh as prisoners and continues to hold eight high-ranking officials of the former Republic of Artsakh, as well as several other officials and civilians. In November 2023, I introduced House Resolution 861, which calls on Azerbaijan to immediately comply with international commitments regarding the release and treatment of prisoners of war, hostages, and other detained persons. Yet, one year after its military assault, Azerbaijan continues to illegally hold the officials and civilians from Artsakh.

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Additionally, since Azerbaijan’s occupation of Artsakh, the risk of the intentional destruction of Armenian cultural heritage has only grown. There are nearly 500 Armenian cultural heritage sites in Artsakh and the surrounding region that have significant value to not only the global Armenian community, but also to the entire world. Yet, Azerbaijan has now embarked on a campaign to destroy these sites and erase Armenian heritage. To prevent the further destruction of these Armenian cultural heritage sites, I wrote a letter, co-signed by a bipartisan group of 47 fellow Members of the House of Representatives, to urge Secretary of State Antony Blinken to prioritize this issue in bilateral meetings with officials from the government of Azerbaijan.

However, the inescapable tragedy in this sad story is one of human suffering. The tragedy of Azerbaijan’s actions one year ago can be measured in the lives that were inexplicably disrupted – over 100,000 residents who were forcibly displaced from their homes only to become refugees in neighboring Armenia. These displaced persons had homes, jobs, farms, businesses—full lives—in Artsakh. They had the ability to generate a revenue and to live with dignity in their ancestral homeland. Through no fault of their own, the Azerbaijani attack disrupted their lives, forcing them to flee to Armenia and seek shelter as refugees.

The government of Armenia has compassionately and courageously provided assistance to the refugees from Artsakh from a sense of moral duty and obligation to international norms. However, the responsibility to shoulder the costs incurred from the displacement of nearly every resident of Artsakh should fall on the government of Azerbaijan. This liability must include payments for the lost revenue that the residents of Artsakh would have generated had the attack and the subsequent displacement not occurred. To address this tragic situation, I introduced the *Artsakh Revenue Recovery Act*, a bill that not only places the liability for lost revenue on the government of Azerbaijan, but also establishes a mechanism by which those who lost the ability to generate revenue could receive compensation, even if the government of Azerbaijan refuses to do so. This mechanism involves the seizure of Azerbaijan’s sovereign assets in the United States, and then transferring those assets to the Artsakh Revenue Recovery Fund. The Fund will compensate the lost revenue of those who were displaced from Artsakh until Azerbaijan decides to accept the responsibility for paying compensation to these victims. The compensation is for the lost revenue from jobs and property in Artsakh and does not impact the ownership status of any property. The original property owners will continue to have the right to return to their property.

Azerbaijan must accept responsibility for the enormous humanitarian crisis that its blockade and military assault on Artsakh created. It must release the hostages and prisoners and commit to the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage. It must assure those who have property in Artsakh the ability to return to their ancestral home and to

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rebuild their lives and ease the suffering of refugees now. Azerbaijan must accept the responsibility to compensate lost revenue of those who left Artsakh. This compensation cannot fully address the disruption to lives. But, it is an important start to address the current suffering of those who lost so much.

On the one-year anniversary of Azerbaijan's assault on Artsakh, we remember the broken promises, the human suffering, and the continued tragedy that has fallen on those who were displaced from Artsakh. We stand with those who were forcibly displaced from Artsakh. We stand for justice.