

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 21, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

The Republic of Azerbaijan, which has a history of perpetrating grave human rights abuses and war crimes against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, continues to detain and abuse Armenian prisoners of war and political captives. The responsible Azerbaijani officials must be held to account. We write to urge you to demand the release of all Armenian political prisoners, to insist that Azerbaijani authorities open to the press and international observers the legal proceedings against those individuals, and to immediately exercise your authority to impose sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. Continued U.S. inaction in the face of Azerbaijan's authoritarian aggression is unacceptable and will have grave ramifications for U.S. credibility throughout the region, particularly as Armenia seeks to strengthen its ties with the West.

It is now two years since Azerbaijan's blockade and military assault on Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) forcibly displaced the region's 120,000 Christian Armenians in what international legal experts have characterized as ethnic cleansing. Azerbaijan's September 2023 assault on the region marked the culmination of a pattern of aggression following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, during which Azerbaijan perpetrated egregious war crimes. These included the summary execution of civilians; the destruction of schools, homes, and hospitals; the deliberate targeting of churches and other Armenian Christian heritage sites; and the arbitrary detention of dozens of Armenian prisoners of war.

To this day, Azerbaijan continues to illegally detain at least 23 known Armenian prisoners of war captured during and after the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh. Rather than face consequences, Azerbaijan has begun politically motivated sham trials under false pretenses, targeting captives solely based on their Armenian identity. Among those detained are former presidents, foreign ministers, and parliamentary leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh. Reports indicate these political hostages, including former officials Ruben Vardanyan, Davit Manukyan, Davit Babayan, Levon Mnatsakanyan, Arkadi Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan, Arayik Harutyunyan, and Davit Ishkhanyan, have suffered abuse and degrading treatment in custody,¹ while secrecy and irregularities surrounding proceedings in Baku's military court cast significant doubt on the fairness and legitimacy of these proceedings. The Azerbaijani government's recent expulsion of

¹ Ex-Karabakh official held by Azerbaijan was tortured in custody, lawyers say, Reuters (June 14, 2024), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/ex-karabakh-official-held-by-azerbaijan-was-tortured-custody-lawyers-say-2024-06-14/>.

the International Committee of the Red Cross² — the only organization authorized to visit Armenian detainees — further endangers the safety and security of these Armenian political prisoners.

The sham trials of high-profile Armenian figures undermine confidence-building measures necessary for a durable peace. Releasing political prisoners and prisoners of war is a critical step toward achieving a just and lasting resolution. Therefore, we urge you to take the following actions in your engagements with the government of Azerbaijan:

- demand the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian political prisoners and prisoners of war;
- press Azerbaijani authorities to allow international observers and independent media outlets to monitor proceedings against Armenian political figures; and
- impose sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act on Azerbaijan officials responsible for gross human rights violations against Armenian prisoners.

Although we are cautiously hopeful that the recent negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan may usher in a more peaceful future for the region, Azerbaijan's ongoing hostage diplomacy and unreasonable preconditions jeopardize that progress. The draft agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan omits any provision for releasing Armenian prisoners,³ Magnitsky Sanctions remain a critical tool to secure the release of POWs and deter further aggression against Armenia.

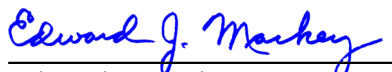
It is both a moral and strategic imperative for the United States to take bold action to compel Azerbaijan to release unjustly detained Armenian prisoners and ensure regional peace is predicated on accountability, justice, and the fundamental right of return for Nagorno-Karabakh's displaced Armenian population.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure that U.S. policy aligns with our country's commitment to justice and stability in the region.

Sincerely,

² *Red Cross says Azerbaijan ordered it to leave the country*, Reuters (Mar. 5, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/red-cross-says-azerbaijan-ordered-it-leave-country-2025-03-05/>.

³ *Agreement on Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (Aug. 11, 2025), <https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2025/08/11/Initialled%20Arm-Az%20Peace%20Agreement%20text/13394>.


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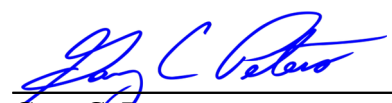

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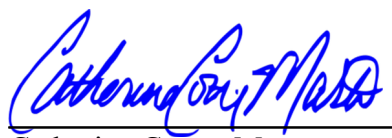

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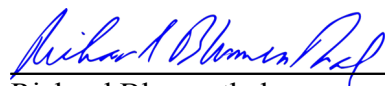
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