

Armenian Assembly of America
Testimony by Mariam Khaloyan, Congressional Relations Director
House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State and
Related Programs

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Frankel, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: On behalf of the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly), headquartered in Washington, DC, and representing thousands of advocates across the United States, we welcome the opportunity to submit testimony regarding U.S. assistance and policy in the South Caucasus—particularly with respect to Armenia and the Armenian people—for Fiscal Year 2027.

The Assembly extends its sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to the Subcommittee and the full Committee for their leadership in shaping policies that have not only saved lives but have also helped ensure the survival of Armenia—the world’s first Christian nation.

While we remain hopeful about prospects for peace following the historic signing of a peace framework at the White House last August between Armenia and Azerbaijan, we are equally mindful of the difficult realities facing Armenia. Negotiations have taken place under extreme duress, with Azerbaijani forces illegally occupying sovereign Armenian territory and Azerbaijan continuing to unjustly detain Armenian hostages. Azerbaijan’s autocratic ruler, Ilham Aliyev, has openly declared that “we have destroyed Armenia” and warned that “the iron fist is in place and always will be.” We are also deeply troubled by the ongoing erasure of Armenian cultural heritage and Christian sites, including reports this week that Stepanakert’s St. Hakob Church and Shushi’s St. John the Baptist Church were demolished.

On August 8, 2025, during US President Donald Trump’s meeting with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the signing in the White House of a peace framework between the two countries, President Trump promised to raise the release of the Armenian hostages with Azerbaijan’s President. Speaking with Armenia’s Prime Minister, President Trump made note of the fact that Baku was holding Armenian hostages: “So you said there’s 23 Christians that you’d like to get out, right? 23? Because I’m going to ask him to do that. I think he’ll do it for me too.” True and lasting peace cannot be achieved without the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian hostages, including the political leaders of Artsakh. We therefore urge Congress and the Administration to use every available tool to secure their freedom.

The Assembly strongly supports the Armenian Caucus Fiscal Year 2027 appropriations request, which calls for \$100 million to assist Artsakh refugees currently residing in the Republic of Armenia—individuals and families forcibly displaced by Azerbaijan’s 2023 campaign of ethnic cleansing—and to uphold their right of return under international guarantees. We also support not less than \$20 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and not less than \$10 million in

International Military Education and Training (IMET) to strengthen Armenia’s defensive capabilities and deter Azerbaijan’s ongoing threats of aggression.

We are encouraged by the deepening U.S.–Armenia security partnership, including recent high-level engagement in the region. However, significantly expanded security cooperation remains essential, particularly in light of Azerbaijan’s continued occupation of approximately 100 square miles of Armenia’s sovereign territory. Moreover, rhetoric from both Azerbaijan and Turkey regarding the destruction of Armenian Christian civilization in Artsakh raises profound concerns. Additional measures are needed to bolster Armenia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We also welcome the Final Statement of the International Conference on the Preservation of Armenian Religious, Cultural and Historical Heritage in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh, held under the auspices of the World Council of Churches in Bern, Switzerland, in May 2025. The statement rightly affirms that protecting heritage is not merely about preserving monuments, but about safeguarding the living expression of faith, identity, and memory. It further calls on governments and international bodies to take concrete diplomatic and legal steps to prevent further erasure, support the return of displaced populations, and work toward the release of Armenian hostages held in Baku. As our Co-Chair Talin Yacoubian stated at this week’s Armenian Genocide Commemoration on Capitol Hill, “when cultural sites are erased, it is not only stones that are lost—it is the visible record of a people.”

Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act

Congress took a principled stand against Azerbaijani aggression with the adoption of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act in 1992, which restricts U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan until it ceases offensive actions against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Although a waiver authority was introduced following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, its use is contingent upon ensuring that it does not undermine peace efforts or enable offensive actions. In light of Azerbaijan’s 2020 war, its failure to uphold international commitments, its 2023 military offensive and ethnic cleansing of Artsakh’s Armenian population, the destruction of cultural and religious heritage, and the continued detention of hostages, the Assembly urges that Section 907 be fully enforced and that no U.S. assistance—including military or security aid—be provided to Azerbaijan.

Humanitarian Assistance to Armenia

In September 2023, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee both warned of an impending humanitarian catastrophe in Nagorno-Karabakh. Expert testimony indicated a credible risk of genocide, including the use of starvation as a weapon.

Despite these warnings, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive on September 19, 2023, resulting in civilian casualties and the forced displacement of approximately 120,000 Armenians, including 30,000 children. This followed the illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor beginning in December 2022, which placed the population under siege. Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act—also known as the Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act—prohibits assistance to countries that obstruct the

delivery of U.S. humanitarian aid. To address the resulting crisis and support the right of return, the Assembly strongly supports the Armenian Caucus request for \$100 million in humanitarian assistance, including funding for Armenian American private voluntary organizations with proven effectiveness. U.S. assistance can play a critical role in preventing further atrocities.

The Right of Return

Azerbaijan’s actions have undermined decades of international peace efforts under the OSCE Minsk Group framework. Following the wars of 2020 and 2023, the entire Armenian population of Artsakh was forcibly displaced from its ancestral homeland. Civilian infrastructure—including hospitals, schools, and churches—was targeted and destroyed. Freedom House’s 2024 report documents a systematic campaign to depopulate Nagorno-Karabakh of its Armenian population through violence, deprivation, and coercion. As former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback stated, the fundamental question is whether Armenian Christians have the right to survive in their ancestral homeland. The Assembly affirms that they do.

In a letter to members of Congress, the Administration reaffirmed its commitment “to encouraging both governments to provide for the return of ethnic Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh in the context of a sustainable peace.” We urge Congress and the Administration to uphold the right of return, the principles of self-determination, and the universal human rights of the people of Artsakh, and to take meaningful steps to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its actions.

Accountability and Sanctions

The Assembly has supported legislative efforts to impose sanctions on individuals responsible for human rights abuses and corruption. Azerbaijan’s record—including widely reported corruption schemes and credible allegations of war crimes—warrants the application of the Leahy Law and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. Azerbaijan must not be rewarded for its violations. We strongly urge the inclusion of report language calling for the immediate release of all Armenian hostages.

Conclusion

Armenia, the world’s first Christian nation, has endured centuries of persecution yet remains resilient. As Ambassador Brownback observed, its perseverance inspires religious minorities worldwide. At a time when Christian communities and other religious minorities face increasing threats globally, the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in 2023 serves as a stark warning.

The Assembly urges Congress and the Administration to stand firmly with the Armenian people and to uphold the enduring principles of freedom, justice, and human dignity.