

## ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICA – FISCAL YEAR 2022

### TESTIMONY BY MARIAM KHALOYAN, CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS DIRECTOR

Chairwoman Barbara Lee, Ranking Member Hal Rogers, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) welcomes the opportunity to provide the following testimony regarding U.S. assistance and policy for Armenia and Artsakh (formerly known as Nagorno-Karabakh).

For the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) appropriations process, the Armenian Assembly urges the Subcommittee to allocate not less than \$100 million in humanitarian, economic development and democracy assistance to Armenia; not less than \$50 million in assistance to Artsakh; not less than \$10 million in military assistance to Armenia for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education Training (IMET); and to rectify the severe military imbalance between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Assembly also urges robust assistance to Christian and other minority communities at risk in the Middle East, as well as to nearly 25,000 refugees from the Middle East currently in Armenia, and urges not less than \$20 million to support Armenia's efforts to serve as a regional safe haven for refugees.

Established in 1972, the Armenian Assembly of America is the largest Washington-based organization promoting public understanding and awareness of Armenian issues. The Assembly's extensive experience in Armenia, working closely with key government agencies, officials, and charitable organizations, provides us with unique insights on how U.S. assistance can best advance policy goals in the region. We seek to maximize the effectiveness of U.S. assistance and strengthen U.S. relations with Armenia and Artsakh.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022

**ASSISTANCE TO ARMENIA** - The Assembly strongly supports the bipartisan letter by 66 of your House colleagues requesting that *“not less than \$100 million shall be made available for security, economic, governance, and rule of law assistance to Armenia.”* As you are aware, on September 27, 2020, during the global pandemic, an unprovoked war was launched against the Armenian people. For six weeks (44 days), the Azerbaijani military, with the full support of Turkey and the use of over 2,500 jihadist mercenaries transported to and deployed in Azerbaijan, attacked and targeted the Armenian people. As a result, Armenians, having already faced a genocide in the 20th century, were forced yet again to rebuild in the wake of serious human and structural devastation. Upwards of 100,000 people - mainly children, women, and the elderly - were forcibly displaced from their homes, while hospitals, schools, and churches were destroyed by missiles, cluster and white phosphorus munitions, and drone strikes. Given these unprecedented

developments, we urge not less than \$100 million in FY22 for Armenia’s development and recovery after Azerbaijan’s ruthless war, which continues today with ongoing border incursions in violation of Armenia’s sovereignty. The Assembly would also like to thank the Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee as well as the full Committee for their support last Congress of legislation (H.Res.1165) introduced by Representative Jackie Speier “condemning Azerbaijan’s military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh and denouncing Turkish interference in the conflict.”

**ASSISTANCE TO ARTSAKH** – The people of Artsakh are facing an ongoing humanitarian crisis resulting from the unprovoked 44-day war last Fall. The support of the Armenian community and organizations in helping the Armenian people is to be commended as are the efforts of the international community, including Samaritan’s Purse; the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (UK), which includes Baroness Cox and Reverend David Thomas; former Foreign Minister of France Bernard Kouchner; the International Committee of the Red Cross; International Christian Concern (ICC); and The HALO Trust. We also extend our appreciation to those journalists who traveled in the middle of a global pandemic to cover the war and thank, in particular, the *Los Angeles Times*, The Christian Broadcasting Network, PBS Newshour supported by the Pulitzer Center, VICE Media Group, and UK-based war correspondent Emile Ghessen, among others.

The Assembly also welcomes the bipartisan support by 66 of your House colleagues calling for “*robust funding to directly aid the Armenian people of Nagorno Karabakh to recover and rebuild from the devastating fall 2020 war, including urgently needed housing, food security, water and sanitation, medical and refugee assistance, rehabilitation, and infrastructure needs.*” The Assembly specifically urges not less than \$50 million in assistance to Artsakh. This direct funding, which we strongly encourage USAID to oversee from Stepanakert, will help empower the people of Artsakh to reconstruct their communities, rebuild their lives, and resettle in their homes. It also serves as an opportunity for the U.S. to have a presence in the region and sends an important message about America’s commitment to democratic governments.

**THE PEACE PROCESS** - The United States, as a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, has a vested interest in advancing peace in and bringing stability to the South Caucasus region. The Assembly appreciates the Administration’s recent statement urging all parties to return to “substantive negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to achieve a long-term political settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.” The governments of Armenia and Artsakh have consistently indicated their desire to peacefully resolve the conflict and have offered confidence-building measures to help reduce tensions and build trust. Azerbaijan, however, chose a different path – one of blockade, bellicose rhetoric, and ceasefire violations, leading to the deadly war it launched last Fall. In the absence of U.S. leadership, the Armenian people found themselves in a dire situation and its democratic government was pressured into a one-sided, Russian-brokered arrangement with the signing of a trilateral (Armenia, Azerbaijan and

Russia) ceasefire statement on November 9, 2020, which negates America's long-standing role as Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group. In a clear sign that Azerbaijan is not serious about establishing peace or respecting international human rights conventions to which it is a signatory, the Aliyev regime has repeatedly violated the November 9, 2020 ceasefire, including the holding of an estimated 200 prisoners of war (POWs) and captured civilians. There is ample reason to believe that the ongoing breaches of the November ceasefire statement, as well as the 44-day war itself, have occurred at the direction of Turkey's dictatorial President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose destabilizing actions in Cyprus, the Mediterranean Sea, and with respect to hostilities in Libya and Syria are well-documented, seeks to further destabilize the South Caucasus region and circumvent the OSCE Minsk Group process. The United States should not allow the corrupt and authoritarian regimes of Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey to sideline U.S. leadership and leave the world's first Christian nation and fledgling democracy in peril. The Assembly urges the U.S. Co-Chair to the OSCE Minsk Group to uphold the fundamental principles of democracy, the right to self-determination, and the universal human rights of the people of Artsakh.

**SECTION 907 OF THE FREEDOM SUPPORT ACT** - In light of the 44-day war, which included the recruitment, transport, and deployment of thousands of jihadist mercenaries to Azerbaijan by SADAT, a Turkish private security firm whose founder, former Turkish brigadier general Adnan Tanriverdi, is a close confidant of Erdogan, the Assembly urges Congress to uphold the fundamental tenets of 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 and needs to do so again. Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act states that U.S. funds "may not be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan until the President determines and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh."

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on American soil, a national security waiver was added to Section 907. The exercise of the waiver is valid so long as it "will not undermine or hamper ongoing efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan or be used for offensive purposes against Armenia." Given last year's 44-day war, which resulted in a death toll of over 4,000 soldiers and civilians (some brutally beheaded according to Human Rights Watch and as documented by Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights and its "Project on Atrocities in Artsakh": <https://humanrightscolumbia.org/peace-building/atrocities-artsakh-nagorno-karabakh>), nearly 10,000 wounded soldiers, upwards of 100,000 Armenians forcibly displaced from their homes, the destruction of vital infrastructure including hospitals, and the deliberate erasure of Armenian cultural and religious heritage sites, providing U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan sends exactly the wrong message.

The America that we know and cherish would not support the recruitment and deployment of jihadist mercenaries, condone ISIS-style beheadings and bodily mutilations, stand for the targeting

of cultural and religious sites, or think that the opening of a “Military Trophy Park” in Azerbaijan’s capital, Baku, replete with Armenian mannequins featured in a dehumanizing manner and an entrance made with helmets of killed and captured Armenian soldiers, is acceptable. It is not. These are practices that we oppose and must denounce because they violate the most basic principles upon which civilized nations stand. We urge you not to allow U.S. taxpayer dollars to be used to support Azerbaijan and that starts with upholding the letter and spirit of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act. We further recommend that Congress ensure that no military assistance be provided to Azerbaijan. In addition, based on credible reports that Azerbaijani forces committed gross human rights violations during and after the 44-day war, the application of the Leahy Law should be seriously considered. Azerbaijan should not be rewarded for its blatant and ongoing violations against the Armenian people, including the holding of an estimated 200 prisoners of war (POWs) and captured civilians. In this regard, the Assembly strongly supports swift passage of H.Res. 240, introduced by Representative Adam Schiff, calling for the immediate release and repatriation of all POWs and captured civilians held by Azerbaijan.

### **ARMENIA IS THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD FACING DUAL BLOCKADES**

A centuries-old nation, Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its official state religion in 301 A.D. Throughout the centuries, Armenians have maintained their faith, even during 70 years of oppressive Soviet rule. Today, despite the dual blockades imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia continues to show its resilience. According to the World Bank, since independence “Armenia’s economy has undergone a profound transformation” and “sustained growth, ambitious growth, as well as inflows of capital and remittances that have created a market-oriented environment.” Imagine the impact of Armenia’s democratic and economic reforms if it was not blockaded by two of its four neighbors. The United States has spoken clearly about the need for Turkey to lift its 3 decades-long blockade of Armenia and establish diplomatic relations, both of which are also required under international treaties. Despite Turkey’s public commitment to normalize relations without preconditions, as evidenced by the signing of the Protocols between Turkey and Armenia under international auspices in 2009, the Turkish government failed to do so. Instead of moving forward, Turkey delayed consideration and sought to add new conditions. Moreover, working in tandem with Turkey, Azerbaijan torpedoed the Protocols signed with Armenia. Azerbaijan also continues its blockade of Armenia and Artsakh in lockstep with Turkey and further escalated with a full-scale war last Fall. The Assembly urges report language requiring a full accounting of the steps that the Administration is taking and will take to end the only blockade in the world of a democratic country. Finally, we believe that the provisions of the Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act should be broadened to preclude assistance to Turkey and Azerbaijan as long as they continue to blockade Armenia.

**U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE** - Given Armenia’s ongoing support to America before and after 9/11, including Armenia’s participation in multilateral peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iraq, Lebanon and Mali, the Assembly supports not less than \$10 million in military

assistance to Armenia for FMF and IMET. Such assistance not only further strengthens Armenia's NATO Partnership for Peace activities, but also supports NATO interoperability and modernization of Armenia's Peacekeeping Brigade. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the partnership between the Alliance and Yerevan during a meeting at the UN General Assembly and thanked Prime Minister Pashinyan for Armenia's strong contributions to NATO's training mission in Afghanistan and peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. The Assembly also urges Congress to address the significant imbalance in U.S. security assistance provided to Azerbaijan compared to Armenia (over \$100 million in security assistance was provided to Azerbaijan in fiscal years 2018 and 2019) and prevent any further misuse of U.S. funds.

**ASSISTANCE TO MINORITIES AT RISK IN THE MIDDLE EAST** - The Assembly has consistently sounded the alarm on this issue and remains deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in Syria, Iraq, and across the region, and its impact on minority populations caught in the middle, fleeing for their lives, and seeking refuge in new lands. The Assembly strongly believes that Christian and other minority communities must be afforded protection and safeguarded wherever they happen to reside. The specter of another genocide today is a very real concern for the Armenian people who were targeted for annihilation in the twentieth century. In this regard, the Assembly is deeply grateful for the historic passage of Armenian Genocide resolutions in the House and Senate in 2019 and President Biden's affirmation of the Armenian Genocide this April 24, 2021. President Biden's affirmation of the Armenian Genocide along with Congress, marks a pivotal milestone in the arc of history in defense of human rights. By standing firmly against a century of denial, the President and Congress have charted a new course. Affirmation of the Armenian Genocide enhances America's credibility and recommits the United States to the worldwide cause of genocide prevention. We commend Administration officials for publicly acknowledging the Armenian Genocide and urge Congress to ensure that no U.S. funds will be used to deny the Armenian Genocide.

**CONCLUSION** - Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member Rogers, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Armenian American community, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Congress for its assistance to Armenia and Artsakh. Armenian Americans gratefully remember the support that the U.S. provided after the 1988 earthquake in Armenia, as Armenia moved boldly toward independence in 1991, during Artsakh's struggle for freedom and democracy, through America's proud record of humanitarian intervention during the 1915 Armenian Genocide. The enduring and natural bonds that exist between the United States and Armenia are readily apparent in Armenia's ongoing support for America. This is a relationship that spans families and generations across the three countries. Given its central location, Christian heritage, entrepreneurial spirit, and western value system, Armenia is poised to play a pivotal role in helping the United States achieve its stated policy objectives in the region. The Armenian Assembly of America greatly appreciates your attention to these policy matters and looks forward to working with you.