

**Remarks by Nagorno Karabakh Republic Foreign Minister Karen Mirzoyan
at the Capitol Hill Celebration of Artsakh Independence**

December 5, 2012
Russell Senate Office Building, Rm. 385
Washington, DC

Your Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian ,
Reverend Fathers,
Your Excellency Ambassador Markarian,
Honorable Members of Congress,

Dear compatriots, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank the organizers of this event - members of the Armenian Caucus, especially the Caucus Co-Chairs - Representatives Frank Pallone and Ed Royce, as well as the Armenian Embassy, personally Ambassador Markarian, Office of Artsakh in the USA, and all the Armenian-American organizations who facilitated the celebration.

This is my first public appearance in Washington in my new capacity as foreign minister; and I am glad that such gatherings to celebrate Artsakh's freedom on Capitol Hill have become a tradition. This is important for Artsakh; for all of us, who share the common values that our countries are based on.

In a few days, on December 10th, the Republic of Artsakh will mark the 21st anniversary of the Referendum of Independence and the 6th anniversary of Adopting our Constitution. For us, independence is not just an ultimate goal, but also means by which the Nagorno Karabakh Republic can take its rightful place as a responsible member of the international community; by which our people can best fulfill their potential, realize their aspirations, and enjoy all their rights and freedoms everyone deserves.

It was not accidental that our people chose December 10 to hold those two referenda. December 10 is the International Human Rights Day; the day, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted outlining those very same principles that serve as a basis of our statehood.

Since the adoption of the independence declaration that following the free expression of popular will, the Nagorno Karabakh Republic has been steadfast in building a state based on democratic values, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Today, we can state with confidence that we do have certain achievements: free, fair and competitive elections have become an inseparable part of Artsakh's political culture.

Since 1991, our republic went through five presidential, five parliamentary and as many local administration elections. Our political transitions have always been legal and orderly. All the elections, including the most recent Presidential elections of July 19, 2012 were assessed by international observers, foreign parliament members, journalists and public figures from 22 countries as free and transparent.

A few words about Artsakh's economy:

Despite all the challenges imposed by historic legacies and our "tough neighborhood", the Republic's economy has enjoyed steady growth, which positively reflects on our people's living standards. Artsakh today is a place with favorable business environment. Along with traditional agricultural sector and mining, our republic explores new directions, such as IT sphere and tourism. One of the government's priorities is electricity production using the rich water resources of Artsakh. With current pace, we plan to become electricity exporters by 2015.

Our government has been doing its utmost in eliminating the consequences of the devastating Azerbaijani aggression of 1991-1994. Here, allow me, on behalf of our people and government, express our profound gratitude to the US Government, all Americans for the crucial humanitarian assistance my people have been thankfully accepting for more than a decade now. We are grateful to the US Congress, Co-Chairs and all members of the Armenian Caucus, our compatriots living in the United States, who spared no effort to make sure Artsakh remains safe, regional stability is maintained, and freedom-loving Artsakhts is have a chance to improve their daily peaceful lives.

Dear Friends,

Our young republic still faces many challenges, among them – legacies of the authoritarian Soviet past, and the conflict with Azerbaijan being one of the tragic manifestations of those.

We are allied with the international community in our commitment to finding a peaceful resolution to the existing problem with Azerbaijan. At the same time, we are confident that effective negotiations require restoration of Artsakh's immediate participation at all stages of the negotiation process – from exchange of opinions around the philosophy of settlement up to the discussion of practical steps and their implementation.

I want to use this opportunity and thank the American government for its mediating efforts within the OSCE Minsk group, along with Russia and France. Nagorno Karabakh authorities appreciate the active U.S. involvement in the negotiations, and hope that the incumbent Administration will continue efforts towards peace and regional stability.

Regrettably, we are still far from a final settlement of the conflict. In continuation of its policy of military threats and terror, Azerbaijan is not implementing the commitments it undertook regarding the peaceful settlement of the conflict within the OSCE Minsk Group.

Moreover, the Azerbaijani government continues to spread the most malicious rhetoric about all Armenians raising young Azerbaijanis with hatred towards people most of them never met.

A culmination of such policy could be seen just a few months ago in the pardon, promotion and nationwide glorification of an Azerbaijani military officer, who was convicted to life imprisonment in Hungary for perpetuating a brutal hate crime in the most barbaric and cowardly way – attacking a fellow Armenian student with an ax while he was asleep in his unlocked dormitory room. Let me be clear, in addition to all of the political and legal consequences of this crime, the attitude of the Azerbaijani government reflects a type of moral weakness that is humiliating to the nation it claims to represent.

I would like to note that President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reacted swiftly and clearly in condemning Azerbaijan, as did many members of Congress.

Another obstacle to the peace process is Azerbaijan's efforts to completely isolate the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and the Republic of Armenia. A clear manifestation of that policy is the creation of all sorts of problems for the reopening of Stepanakert airport, including threats to shoot down civilian aircraft.

It is worth mentioning, that a reopening of the Stepanakert airport pursues solely civilian and humanitarian objectives, including realization of such basic human right as freedom of movement. It could also serve as a confidence building measure contributing towards progress in the negotiation process under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs that was also noted in our letter the UN General Secretary that was circulated in the UN this November.

Unfortunately, this is the type of security environment we live in today; our nation and the international mediators must deal with these callousness and these threats with utmost seriousness. That is why we believe that a stronger and unequivocal reaction from the international community to Azerbaijan's destructive stance could ultimately decrease tensions, and facilitate a climate that is more conducive to peace.

Dear Friends,

Artsakh remains convinced that the recent political trends on the world arena, particularly emergence of new democracies and reinforcement of human rights, will only facilitate further international efforts for finding a solution that would ensure a safe and prosperous

development of the two neighbors - the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and Azerbaijani Republic.

In the meantime, we will remain on path towards a type of statehood that will be able to provide all the rights and freedoms any people deserve. We will make sure Artsakh continues to strengthen, both institutionally and socially.

Here, the international community has a role to play. The current international status of NKR should not be a barrier for our cooperation. Moreover, ignoring the fundamental rights of our people can be and often is interpreted in Baku as an indirect support to its policy of imposing a collective punishment on the people of Nagorno Karabakh. We believe that an unimpeded involvement of NKR in international processes would not only ensure implementation of the concept of equal and comprehensive security, based on our shared values, but it would also send an appropriate signal to Azerbaijan to abandon its revanchist aspirations, and show political will for the sake of a stable and predictable South Caucasus, for the sake of our children's future.

In recent years, the events and developments worldwide come to prove that implementation of the right of peoples to self-determination remains the most optimal way to resolve international disputes. And this inspires us; inspires us to overcome all the hardships on our path to the logical outcome of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Initiatives around the globe in support of Nagorno Karabakh's right for self-determination, such as the resolutions adopted in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, in Australia's New South Wales and elsewhere, demonstrate that the people of Artsakh should remain convinced that the universal values of human rights and liberties will ultimately prevail over tyranny and aggressive militarism, bringing about our shared vision of peace and stability to the region of South Caucasus.

Artsakh is 21 years old. 21 years of ordeals and achievements. We have done a lot, but, of course, we understand that more remains to be done. The NKR authorities will continue addressing the most pressing economic and political challenges. And we hope that the United States will remain by our side in our efforts and aspirations.

I thank you for your attention.