

Remarks by Mrs. Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte  
at the Capitol Hill Celebration of Karabakh Independence

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Russell Senate Office Building, Room 385

My name is Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte.

I would like to begin by thanking the Nagorno-Karabakh Representative Robert Avetisyan for inviting me and the Armenian National Committee for hosting me today.

It's an honor to be here celebrating Nagorno-Karabakh's 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of freedom and independence

It's humbling for me to speak to you about my personal experience, here, in the heart of this amazing country.

I was born an Armenian, in Baku Azerbaijan.

I had a happy, sunny childhood in a beautiful city.

But things changed in 1988 soon before I turned 10.

Life as we knew it for myself, my family and hundreds of our friends ceased to exist as the gangs and violent riots stormed our streets and attacked us as Armenian citizens of Azerbaijan.

Not only was I confused as a child watching this sudden surge of violence around me against innocent people but my parents were as well.

"This cannot be happening in this day and age," we thought.

My grandmother, a very wise woman, told me to start keeping a diary, "because things like this don't happen every day, and you must never forget," she said.

This diary turned into my book, "Nowhere, a Story of Exile."

Through glimpses of news and my parents' fearful talks, I understood that Artsakh as we call it, beautiful Armenian land, was fighting for its liberation.

This was the reason we were hated.

The months spent surrounded by Russian tanks never offered any security.

We never knew when we could be attacked, when the demonstrations against us would resume.

When thousands of Armenians died during the 1988 earthquake in Armenia, we received festive cards of Congratulations from random Azeri citizens, congratulating us on the deaths of Armenians.

Going to school became terrifying.

My face and my name being so very Armenian became terrifying.

The security and stability of the life my parents worked so hard to build for my brother and I disappeared.

I witnessed violence and the intolerance toward innocent Armenians with my own eyes and with my own body, the body of a child.

**This was no longer our home.**

This was a place we had to flee like hundreds of thousands of other Armenian citizens of Azerbaijan.

Some left bruised, beaten, with nothing, in the middle of the night in their nightgowns, boarding ships to nowhere.

Others leaving hurriedly to distant places away from everything they knew, and everyone they loved.

We didn't just lose our belongings, our homes and our security. So many Armenians lost their lives.

The graves of my grandparents in Baku are no longer there because they were demolished, as were all of the Armenian cemeteries in Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan.

The Armenian Church I treasured visiting as a child was set ablaze.

Now, as an adult and as a mother, I fully comprehend the suffering my parents had endured in Baku and later as refugees.

And only for being born Armenian.

Due to the earthquake, the blockade and the war with Azerbaijan, Armenia's lack of resources to provide for the flood of hundreds of thousands of Armenians from Azerbaijan contributed to long, cold, difficult years as a refugee.

During this time in my family's life, the Karabakh Armenians were suffering conditions far worse

They were fighting a brutal war for independence and decolonization of their ancestral lands.

And we supported them and we must support them in their decades' long struggle.

I could not wish for my experience on anyone, let alone a fellow Armenian.

**Nagorno-Karabakh must be recognized as an independent state.**

Despite the historical evidence that Karabakh, or as we call it Artsakh, is an ancient Armenian land.

The reality of today and the last 24 years since 1988, is that Armenians there are no more safe under Azeri rule than we were in Baku.

The anti-Armenian rhetoric and propaganda plagues its policies.

Artsakh Armenians could and should never be subjected to the Azeri government.

Artsakh Armenians are peace loving people, full of love for their history and land.

They have the right to self determination, through democratic processes such as referendums, and their government's resolutions to be independent from the often violent and intolerant Azeri rule.

The hope for a peaceful resolution of this conflict is vulnerable but everlasting.

It is my dream that in my lifetime, Artsakh is free, and is formally recognized by the world, affirming its right to self-determination within its own sovereign and secured borders.

This process toward freedom and independence can start here and now, in the heart of the free world, United States of America.

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