

Armenian National Committee of America

*"The Armenian American Community and  
U.S. Foreign Assistance Policy"*

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## Armenian National Committee of America

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today on behalf of the Armenian National Committee of America, the nation's oldest and largest Armenian American grassroots political organization.

The Armenian American community has concerns on a variety of issues dealing with U.S. foreign assistance policy. These concerns range from the future of USAID and our overall foreign aid policy, to the assistance appropriated to the New Independent States, and in particular, the nature and level of assistance to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

### **Support for U.S. Foreign Assistance Programs**

The Armenian American community is among the nation's strongest and most vocal advocates for the use of foreign assistance to meet pressing humanitarian needs and as an effective diplomatic tool for the advancement of American values and interests abroad. Along with the Jewish American and Greek American communities, Armenian Americans represent one of the key voices in the political system who believe that foreign assistance represents among the most effective international investments we can make as a nation. The relatively small investment we make in foreign assistance pays tremendous dividends in terms of promoting regional stability, creating trading opportunities, and advancing the cause of democracy and human rights around the world.

The ANCA, along with the other members of the Freedom Support Coalition, calls on the Congress to continue to appropriate sufficient levels of foreign assistance to stimulate and accelerate the movement to democracy, market economics, and human rights that is taking place in the NIS and around the world. We also support the application of a consistent set of conditions on foreign aid recipients regarding their commitment to democratic principles, economic reform and, above all, respect for human rights. The United States should not provide aid to a nation, regardless of its strategic significance, which violates the rights of its own citizens or initiates aggressive actions against neighboring states.

### **U.S. Aid to Armenia**

The ANCA supports a hard-earmark of at least \$75 million for Armenia for fiscal year 1996 to help offset the devastating effects of the Turkish and Azerbaijani blockades and to help the Armenian people overcome the many serious obstacles they face on the road to democracy.

The blockades of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan have caused severe shortages of basic necessities throughout Armenia, stunted economic development and caused over 800,000 Armenians to leave their homeland out of desperation. The mortality rate among the very young and the elderly has increased dramatically as Armenians are forced to endure winter after winter without sufficient heating fuel, electricity, food or medicine.

Over the past several years, the United States has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance to meet desperate humanitarian needs in Armenia. USAID, under the effective leadership of Brian Atwood, deserves credit for administering this assistance and for reaching out to indigenous groups in Armenia, such as the Armenian Relief Society. These

groups are working in partnership with the U.S. government on humanitarian, developmental and democracy building projects. The USAID effort in Armenia, and in particular the hard work and vision of Tom Dine, are deeply appreciated by the people of Armenia and by the Armenian American community.

The ANCA welcomes the increased attention that the State Department and USAID has placed on democratic development in Armenia, following the Armenian President's December 28th decree banning the leading opposition party and closing a dozen independent newspapers. The State Department, on January 18th, described these actions as "counter to established principles of democracy and free speech." Since that time, many human rights and press freedom organizations have sharply criticized the Armenian government's undemocratic behavior.

It is clear from the events of the past three months that democracy has suffered several serious setbacks in Armenia. Unfortunately, the current Armenian government has, all too often, sought to silence dissent and limit freedom of expression in Armenia. The Armenian American community, which fought tirelessly for the freedom of their homeland for seven decades, is deeply concerned to see the Armenian government adopt measures which limit liberty, and which draw criticism from the international community. They see the promise of freedom for Armenia being threatened by political forces who, on the eve of Parliamentary elections, seem intent on using the power of the state to perpetuate their own rule. For these reasons, the ANCA believes that USAID should initiate extensive democratic development programs in Armenia.

### **The Restriction on U.S. aid to Azerbaijan**

As Members of Congress are well aware, current law prohibits U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan until it has ended its aggression and lifted its blockades against Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh. The restriction, which was passed by Congress in October of 1992 as section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, enjoys strong, bipartisan support in both houses of Congress.

As indicated previously, the Azerbaijani blockade of Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh, coupled with Turkey's obstruction of humanitarian assistance to Armenia, has led to a chronic lack of heating fuel, shortages of electricity, and severe shortages of food, fuel, medicine and other desperately needed supplies. To date, the successive Azerbaijani leaderships have steadfastly refused to lift their blockade or to abandon a military solution to the conflict over Nagorno Karabagh. Any efforts to weaken or eliminate this restriction, particularly during the current negotiations, would be viewed in Baku as a green light from the U.S. to continue their aggressive policies.

Unfortunately, both the Bush and Clinton Administrations have opposed the restriction on U.S. aid to Azerbaijan. While both presidents have had the authority to waive the restriction, they have instead sought to eliminate the restriction by asking Congress to repeal the law. Both Administration's have been met with strong Congressional and Armenian American community support for maintaining the restriction until Azerbaijan has lifted its blockade and ended its aggression against Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh. It should be noted that the United States has provided tens of millions of dollars in assistance directly to non-governmental organizations in Azerbaijan. This assistance is not prohibited by section 907 and has not been opposed by the Armenian American community.

The ANCA remains firmly committed to section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. The language of the prohibition clearly states the terms under which the U.S. can provide assistance to the government of Azerbaijan. When these conditions are met, namely lifting of the blockades and the cessation of aggression, the President can make the necessary certifications to Congress and Azerbaijan will be eligible for U.S. assistance. The ANCA strongly supports the law restricting U.S. aid to Azerbaijan and actively opposes any effort, within Congress or by the Administration, to weaken or eliminate this prohibition.

## **Turkey**

The Armenian American community has long held serious reservations about the high levels of U.S. foreign assistance to Turkey. For decades, Turkey has consistently failed to meet even basic international standards for human rights and humanitarian practices, yet it has received billions in U.S. aid. First and foremost among these shortcomings, in the eyes of the Armenian American community, is Turkey's blockade of U.S. and international humanitarian assistance to Armenia. This blockade, now entering its third year, is one of a range of issues which should lead Members of Congress to initiate a careful review of our relationship with Turkey, particularly in terms of the allocation of increasingly scarce foreign aid dollars.

The U.S. Congress must seriously consider if it wants to continue subsidizing a nation which obstructs U.S. relief supplies, systematically violates the human rights of its own citizens, denies the existence of 15 million Kurds, unfairly restricts the rights of Christian communities, invaded and occupies portions of Cyprus and which recently invaded northern Iraq with close to 40,000 troops.

The inability of the United States, which provides hundreds of millions of dollars to Turkey each year, to lift the blockade on our own humanitarian aid to Armenia, represents a serious failure in U.S. policy. It is clear from this example that the rules by which we designate recipients must be reviewed and amended to ensure that any nation which obstructs U.S. humanitarian relief programs should not receive U.S. assistance. The Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act, which was reintroduced recently in Congress, does exactly this.

The ANCA believes that the Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act represents sound policy and will help to restore credibility to our foreign aid programs. By amending the rules of the game in this manner, we can be sure that the recipients of our foreign assistance, at the very least, do not block our own efforts to meeting pressing humanitarian needs in other nations. We call upon the Congress to enact this legislation as soon as possible.

At the same time, the United States must also specifically address a number of pressing issues directly with the Turkish government. Among these are Turkey's blockade of Armenia, its worsening human rights situation, its treatment of the Kurds, its continued occupation of Cyprus, and the unfair restrictions it places on Christian communities. These issues, and others, have historically been explained away by successive Administrations seeking to maintain close ties with Turkey. Decades of "quiet diplomacy" have not led to any progress in these areas. In fact the situation is growing worse every day.

With the end of the Cold War, we can no longer ignore Turkey's record as among the world's worst violators of human rights or its aggression against neighboring states. The Turkish Human

Rights Compliance Act, which was recently introduced in both houses of Congress, would link Turkey's behavior on these issues to the level of assistance provided to the Turkish government. For each day that Turkey fails to meet these basic requirements, \$500,000 in U.S. aid would be withheld. The ANCA fully endorses this legislation and calls on Members of Congress to support its passage.

Finally, we call for closer Congressional oversight of the increasing number of U.S. military sales and transfers to Turkey. In particular, the Congress must accept responsibility for carefully reviewing the sale or transfer of lethal weaponry or force-multipliers. Special attention must be given to any U.S. military hardware which will likely be used by the Turkish armed forces in Cyprus, against Kurdish civilians, in the recent invasion of Iraq, or which will be transferred to Azerbaijan for use against Nagorno Karabagh. Two recent examples which deserved closer Congressional scrutiny were the proposed sale of CBU-87 cluster bombs in December of last year, and the the proposed transfer of ten KC-135 in-air refueling aircraft in June of 1994.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and to reaffirm the support of the Armenian American community for our nation's foreign assistance program.