



# Armenian National Committee of America

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## **The U.S. Congress and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh):** **Working for Peace, Standing Up for Democracy**

Condemning Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian violence on the 30th anniversary of the Baku Pogroms will help prevent renewed Azerbaijani aggression, underscoring the vital necessity of Artsakh living in peace, freedom, and security – far from the grasp of Azerbaijan's military and security services. (In addition to the Baku Pogroms (1990), Azerbaijani committed similar atrocities in Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Maragha.)

By speaking out publicly against these atrocities - and Azerbaijan's shameless efforts to erase them from the history books - you help reaffirm America's commitment to an enduring, peaceful and democratic resolution of the Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) conflict.

### **Key Points**

- ◆ Condemn Azerbaijan's pogroms, and demand a firm response - by the Trump Administration and Congress - to Azerbaijan's escalating threats and acts of aggression.
  - ◆ Call for the implementation of the Royce-Engel Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) peace proposals, including 1) the withdrawal of snipers along the line of contact; 2) the placement of OSCE-monitored gunfire-locator systems to determine the source of attacks along the line of contact; and, 3) the deployment of additional OSCE observers to better monitor cease-fire.
  - ◆ Encourage Congressional appropriators to allocate at least \$10 million in U.S. aid to Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) in the FY21 Foreign Aid Bill, including support for the life-saving de-mining work of the HALO Trust, and the Lady Cox Rehabilitation Center, a regional clinic serving children and adults with physical and mental disabilities.
  - ◆ Call for official U.S. recognition and support for the security and self-determination of the independent Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).
  - ◆ Strengthen Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act by removing the President's authority to waive the U.S. law prohibiting aid to Azerbaijan because of its aggression and blockades against Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).
  - ◆ Cut all U.S. military or security aid to Azerbaijan until it ceases acts and threats of violence, and commits to a purely peaceful resolution to its conflict with the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).
  - ◆ Prohibit the U.S. sale or transfer of potentially dual-use materials to Azerbaijan, including satellites and aerial drones.
  - ◆ Support the reinstatement of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) as a full participant in all discussions and deliberations by the OSCE Minsk Group.
  - ◆ Request a State Department inquiry into its failure to adequately protest and investigate the Azerbaijani government's December 2005 videotaped, systematic desecration and destruction of an ancient Armenian cemetery and thousands of intricately-carved grave stones in Djulfa, Nakhichevan.
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## **FACT SHEET**

### **Azerbaijani Massacres Against Armenians of Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku: 1988 - 1990**

#### **Government-Sanctioned Pogroms Set Stage for Azerbaijan's War and Ongoing Aggression**

From 1988 to 1990, the Armenian population in Soviet Azerbaijan was the target of racially motivated pogroms against Armenians in the cities of Sumgait (February 27-29, 1988), Kirovabad (November 21-27, 1988) and Baku (January 13-19, 1990).

At the time, Members of Congress condemned these premeditated and officially-sponsored attacks against Armenian civilians and passed amendments and resolutions demanding respect for the democratic aspirations of the people of Nagorno Karabakh.

These pogroms set the stage for two decades of aggression by Azerbaijan, during which it launched and lost a war against Nagorno Karabakh, and later used its oil wealth to buy a massive military arsenal that its leaders, to this day, vow to use to renew their attempts to conquer a Christian people that has lived on these lands for thousands of years and, after great challenges, has flourished in freedom from Soviet oppression for more than 20 years.

#### **Pogroms in Sumgait – February 27-29, 1988**

Organized anti-Armenian violence - aimed at killing and driving Armenians from their homes - began on the evening of February 27, 1988 in Sumgait, Soviet Azerbaijan, and, within hours, turned into a series of well-documented pogroms during which Sumgait's Christian Armenian residents were indiscriminately murdered, raped, and maimed by Azerbaijanis.

Despite Sumgait's 30-minute proximity to Baku, police allowed the pogroms to go on for 3 days, during which Armenians were burned alive and thrown from windows.

Credible sources report that hundreds of Armenians were murdered. Soviet authorities, who blocked journalists from the area, estimated that over 30 were killed and 200 injured. The New York Times reported Armenians being "hunted" down and an account of a pregnant Armenian woman, who had been disemboweled. The U.S. Senate passed an amendment in July of 1989, noting that even the Soviet government had termed the murder of Armenians in Sumgait a "pogrom."

Less than a week before the Sumgait massacres, the Armenians of Nagorno Karabagh, an autonomous region that Stalin had arbitrarily severed from Armenia and forced under Soviet Azerbaijani administration, had begun peacefully protesting against decades of repression and discrimination. Azerbaijani authorities rejected these calls for self-determination, responding with a sweeping, but ultimately failed, military crackdown to kill this democracy movement.

Many believed the massacres were officially sanctioned to send a message to Armenians to stop challenging Soviet Azerbaijani authorities.

The people of Nagorno Karabakh - in the face of massacres and deportations - played a historic role in sparking the democracy movement that ultimately brought down the Soviet Empire.

### **Pogroms in Kirovobad – November 21-27, 1988**

Despite vocal U.S. and international protests over the Sumgait Pogroms, renewed anti-Armenian pogroms were launched in Kirovabad on November 21- 27, 1988.

In December of 1988, twelve members of the U.S. Senate and House sent letters to Soviet Premiere Gorbachev and Soviet Ambassador Yuri Dubinin, expressing concerns about the safety of Armenians in Azerbaijan in the days leading up to Gorbachev's historic trip to the United States. Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI) wrote, "News reports say that organized mobs [in Soviet Azerbaijan] have been killing and maiming members of the Armenian minority and have been looting and burning their homes. I urge your government to take necessary steps to ensure the well-being of the Armenians in Azerbaijan."

### **Pogroms in Baku – January 13-19, 1990**

Less than 14 months later, starting on January 13, 1990, Azerbaijanis committed yet another anti-Armenian pogrom, this time in the capital Baku. As a result, on January 18, 1990, Senators John Kerry (D-MA), Claiborne Pell (D-RI), Larry Pressler (S-SD), Paul Simon (D-IL), and Pete Wilson (R-CA) sent a letter to Soviet Premier Gorbachev stating, "we are deeply concerned about the murders, tortures, and property destruction that the Armenian community of Baku has suffered over the past six days as a result of attacks by organized groups of Azerbaijanis." They continued, "The horrifying upsurge of violence in Azerbaijan only dramatizes the need for the Soviet Government to insure that the 160,000 residents of the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh can exercise their autonomy by reuniting with Soviet Armenia."

Thousands of Armenians fled the systematic violence and refugees from Baku included World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov's family.

Azerbaijan later instigated an outright war against Nagorno Karabakh, during which Armenian civilian population centers were routinely shelled and indiscriminately attacked.

### **U.S. Media/Academic Coverage**

- ◆ Reports from the *Financial Times* (March 16, 1988) and *New York Times* (May 22, 1988) noted Armenians being "hunted" down and killed in their homes.
- ◆ *The Washington Post* reported accounts of an Armenian being skinned alive before he was murdered and an Armenian woman being raped and killed after her breasts had been cut off. The director of the press agency *Novosti* explained that the over 30 officially reported deaths "were not merely 32 deaths," but were the result of "religious fanaticism with a sadistic touch to it." *Washington Post*, April 5, 1988.

- ◆ *The Washington Post* (March 9, 1988), *New York Times* (March 11, 1988), and *Financial Times* (March 12, 1988) all reported accounts of a pregnant Armenian woman being disemboweled and her unborn baby being mutilated.
- ◆ Thomas de Waal, in his book *Black Garden*, described the massacres of Sumgait as:

“Gangs, ranging in size from about a dozen to more than fifty, roamed around, smashing windows, burning cars, but above all looking for Armenians to attack. The roving gangs committed acts of horrific savagery. Several victims were so badly mutilated by axes that their bodies could not be identified. Women were stripped naked and set on fire. Several were raped repeatedly.”

### **U.S. Government Response**

- ◆ Official U.S. legislative appeals were directed to Mikhael Gorbachev, starting on March 18, 1988, when Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Claiborne Pell (D-RI), Ranking Republican Jesse Helms (R-NC), Senators Larry Pressler (R-SD) and Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) sent a letter expressing concern about the "brutal killings of hundreds of Armenians in Sumgait." Sen. Bob Dole (R-KS) sent a letter the very next day stating that he is "deeply concerned about widespread violence recently directed against Armenians in the Soviet Union."
- ◆ On July 27, 1988, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed Amendment 2690 to H.R.4782 - the FY1989 Commerce, Justice State Appropriations Bill. This measure, introduced by Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) along with Senator Pete Wilson (R-CA) and Bob Dole (R-KS), called on the Soviet Government to "respect the legitimate aspirations of the Armenian people" and noted that "[d]ozens of Armenians have been killed and hundreds injured during the recent unrest."
- ◆ Between December 1st and 7th of 1988 - in the days leading up to Gorbachev's historic trip to the United States - 12 members of the U.S. Senate and House sent letters to Soviet Premiere Gorbachev and to Soviet Ambassador Yuri Dubinin. Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI) wrote:
 

"News reports say that organized mobs [in Soviet Azerbaijan] have been killing and maiming members of the Armenian minority and have been looting and burning their homes. I urge your government to take necessary steps to ensure the well-being of the Armenians in Azerbaijan."
- ◆ A letter, spearheaded by Senators Paul Simon (D-IL), Claiborne Pell (D-RI), John McCain (R-AZ) and Pete Wilson (R-CA), was sent on May 1, 1989, co-signed by 57 Senators, expressing concern about the arrest of Armenian leaders of the Nagorno Karabagh movement for self-determination.
- ◆ Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI), in July of 1989, introduced Senate Resolution 178, "To express United States Support for the Aspirations of the People of Soviet Armenia for a Peaceful and Fair Settlement to the Dispute over Nagorno-Karabagh." This resolution makes specific reference to the atrocities in Sumgait:

"Whereas the Soviet Government has termed the killings of Armenians on February 28-29, 1988, in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, 'pogroms.'"

The resolution, which was adopted by the Senate as a stand-alone measure on November 19, 1989, included a provision to:

"encourage Soviet President Gorbachev to engage in meaningful discussions with elected representatives of the people of Nagorno-Karabagh regarding their demands of reunification with the Armenian homeland and with the leadership of Armenia's pro-democracy movement, which includes the Karabagh Committee.

- ♦ As the violence against Armenians continued and spread to pogroms in Baku, a bi-partisan group of 28 House Members, led by Rep. Rick Lehman (D-CA) sent a letter to Gorbachev on January 24, 1990 stating:

"We are appalled and deeply concerned about the murders, tortures, and property destruction that the Armenian community of Baku has suffered over the past six days as a result of attacks by organized groups of Azerbaijanis."

- ♦ On May 17, 1991, the Senate again condemned the ongoing violence against Armenian civilians, passing a S.Res.128, which stated:

Whereas the Government of the Soviet Union and Government of the Azerbaijan Republic have dramatically escalated their attacks against civilian Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, and Armenia itself.

Whereas Soviet and Azerbaijani forces have destroyed Armenian villages and depopulated Armenian areas in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in violation of internationally recognized human rights;

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Resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that the Senate --

(1) condemns the attacks on innocent children, women, and men in Armenian areas and communities in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and in Armenia;

(2) condemns the indiscriminate use of force, including the shelling of civilian areas, on Armenia's eastern and southern borders;

(3) calls for the end to the blockades and other uses of force and intimidation directed against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and calls for the withdrawal of Soviet forces newly deployed for the purpose of intimidation;

(4) calls for dialogue among all parties involved as the only acceptable route to achieving a lasting resolution of the conflict; and

(5) reconfirms the commitment of the United States to the success of democracy and self-determination in the Soviet Union and its various republics, by expressing its deep concern about any Soviet action of retribution, intimidation, or leverage against those Republics and regions which have chosen to seek the fulfillment of their political aspirations.

- ♦ Azerbaijan's indiscriminate attacks against civilians continued unabated, prompting the U.S. Congress, in 1992, to enact Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act. Section 907 prohibits

assistance 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.”

### **U.S. Academic and Civil Society Leaders' Response**

On July 27, 1990, over 100 leading academics and human rights advocates placed an advertisement in *The New York Times* titled: "An Open Letter to International Public Opinion on Anti-Armenian Pogroms in the Soviet Union." The letter, which was signed by professors from Johns Hopkins, Princeton, Brown, Wesleyan, William and Mary, New School for Social Research, Berkeley, UCLA, University of Vienna, and University of Paris and included the Executive Director of the NAACP and Elie Wiesel, urged the international community to take action to protect the Armenian community in Azerbaijan.

The signatories noted that the “pogroms of Sumgait in February 1988 were followed by massacres in Kirovabad and Baku in November 1988” and Baku again in 1990. “The mere fact that these pogroms were repeated and the fact that they followed the same pattern lead us to think that these tragic events are no accidents or spontaneous outbursts,” but that “crimes against the Armenian minority have become consistent practice – if not official policy – in Soviet Azerbaijan.” The letter concluded, “The international community of states . . . must prove the authenticity of its commitment to human rights in order to ensure that, due to indifference and silence bordering on complicity, another genocide does not occur.” *New York Times Advertisement*, July 27, 1990, pg. A 10.

### **International Response**

On July 7, 1988, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning the Sumgait massacres, supporting the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh with the Republic of Armenia, and expressing concern for the safety of Armenians living in Azerbaijan.

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