

**The Armenian American Community & U.S. Foreign Assistance Policy  
For Fiscal Year 2016  
U.S. Department of State – Funding for Europe & Syria  
Presented by Kate Nahapetian - Government Affairs Director  
Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA)**

The Armenian American community requests:

- 1) At least \$5 million in U.S. developmental aid to Nagorno Karabakh.
- 2) Zero-out U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan until it agrees with OSCE Minsk Group calls to pull back its snipers, ceases its aggression, renounces violence, and commits to a purely peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.
- 3) At least \$40 million in U.S. economic assistance to Armenia.
- 4) A special focus on addressing the difficulties in providing humanitarian and resettlement aid to Armenian, Assyrian and other at-risk minorities in Syria, as well as targeted aid to help Armenia settle thousands fleeing from Syria.
- 5) At least 10% of U.S. assistance to Georgia to be used for job creation programs in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of that country.
- 6) Language strengthening Section 907 restrictions on U.S. aid to Azerbaijan.
- 7) Ending the Exclusion of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh from the peace process

**1) At least \$5 million in development assistance for Nagorno Karabakh:**

Since FY 1998, direct U.S. aid to Nagorno Karabakh has represented a powerful investment in peace and an enduring expression of America's leadership in supporting a negotiated and democratic resolution of security and status issues related to the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh. This direct aid has met pressing humanitarian needs, providing, most recently, desperately needed clean water to families and the clearing of villages and farmlands of mines and unexploded ordnance. According to the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, the war caused an estimated over \$5 billion in damages. More than twenty years since the cease-fire established in 1994, Karabakh is still suffering from significant infrastructure damage, including the shortage of safe drinking water. In addition, Nagorno Karabakh continues to suffer one of the highest per capita landmine accidents in the world.

We urge the Subcommittee to expand this vital assistance program, to support a needy population that has strived mightily, against aggression and blockades, to build a strong democracy, develop a free market economy, and work toward an enduring peace for all the peoples of this region. Since 1991, Nagorno Karabakh has successfully conducted five parliamentary and five presidential elections - that have been praised by international observers

as free, fair and transparent. The most recent presidential election held in July 2012 was favorably received by more than 80 international observers from two dozen countries, including the United States.

We specifically encourage the Department of State and USAID to fund, at the earliest opportunity, a comprehensive humanitarian and development needs assessment for the coming five years.

## **2) Suspension of U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan:**

The Azerbaijani government of Ilham Aliyev neither needs nor deserves American military aid. It does not serve our national interests or advance our values to provide aid to a military whose leadership frequently threatens to start a new war and regularly launches cross-border attacks not only into Nagorno Karabakh, but also Armenia, a NATO Partnership for Peace country, where border villages report being under siege by growing sniper fire from Azerbaijan.

In addition to threatening to renew full-scale hostilities, President Aliyev refuses U.S. and international calls to pull back snipers, has made land claims on all of Armenia, and openly incites anti-Armenian hatred, including against Americans of Armenian descent. Our State Department warns that not all Americans are safe in Azerbaijan, noting that Americans of Armenian heritage will likely be denied a visa, because Azerbaijan cannot guarantee their safety.

As was widely reported in the international media, on August 31, 2012, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev personally pardoned an unrepentant, convicted axe-murderer for killing a NATO Partnership for Peace participant (while he slept) because he was Armenian. Immediately after his pardon, this convicted killer received a promotion in the Azerbaijani military, an apartment, and years of back pay for his prison time. The pardon was condemned around the world, including by President Obama, Members of Congress, the European Parliament, OSCE, Council of Europe, and NATO.

Azerbaijan's regional aggression is closely tied to its pattern of domestic abuse, including its brutal crack-down on dissent. As is well known by this panel, government forces have raided and shut down the offices of U.S.-supported Radio Free Europe, unjustly imprisoned a Radio Free Europe reporter, as well as several other civil society leaders, including Arif and Leyla Yunus, who supported U.S. calls to promote Armenia-Azerbaijan Track II dialogue and have been denied medical care during their pretrial detention.

We respectfully call upon the Subcommittee to suspend the appropriation of Fiscal Year 2015 U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan until its government agrees to pull back its snipers, ceases cross-border attacks, ends its threats of renewed war, and agrees to a settlement of regional conflicts through peaceful means alone.

## **3) At least \$40 million in Assistance to Armenia:**

As members of the Subcommittee know, Armenia, a crucial ally in a strategic region of the world, has extended robust support for U.S.-led peace-keeping deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq,

and Kosovo, and is cooperating with the U.S. on a broad range of regional and security challenges. In June 2011, as countries were pulling out of Afghanistan, Armenia actually tripled its troop deployment there. In February 2014, Armenia pledged to keep its military contingent in Afghanistan even after NATO's mission is concluded in order to support the U.S.-led alliance to train and assist the Afghan army. Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian stated that Armenia is committed to "continuous contribution to coalition efforts to establish lasting security in Afghanistan." In addition, Armenia is regularly ranked highly by the Wall Street Journal/Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom.

At the same time, the people of landlocked Armenia, the world's first Christian state, continue to face the devastating impact of Turkey and Azerbaijan's dual economic blockades. Our assistance has played a vital role in helping alleviate these blockades (among the longest in modern history) and promoting Armenia's free market system and democratic development. It is for this reason that we ask the Subcommittee to appropriate no less than \$40 million in overall FY15 economic aid (including Economic Support Fund, International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement, and Global Health Programs) for Armenia.

#### **4) Assistance to Christian and other minority communities in and from Syria:**

As has been widely reported, more than ten thousand from Syria have sought safe-haven in Armenia, a state, which despite being one of the poorest nations accepting Syrian refugees, has only received very modest levels of U.S. and international relief and resettlement assistance. Armenia has generously provided full citizenship rights to Armenian Syrian refugees.

We ask the Subcommittee to instruct the State Department and USAID to ensure the allocation to Armenia of a proportional level of the U.S. and international aid supporting the efforts to regional states to resettle those fleeing from Syria.

We remain troubled that distribution gaps in need-based international aid deliveries to Aleppo and throughout Syria have resulted in desperately needed food, medicine, and other relief supplies not reaching Armenians, Christian communities, and other at-risk and vulnerable minorities. We ask the Subcommittee to formally call upon the Administration to put in place policies and practices to ensure that need-based aid reaches all at-risk populations.

#### **5) Assistance to the Javakhk Region in Georgia:**

We join with the Congressional Armenian Caucus in encouraging the Subcommittee, as part of a robust U.S. aid package to Georgia, to ensure that 10% of U.S. assistance to Georgia is targeted to the largely Armenian-populated region of Samtskhe-Javakheti (Javakhk) in south-central Georgia, including funding for badly-needed job-creation programs and ongoing improvements to transportation and communication infrastructure.

#### **6) Strengthening Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act:**

Enacted in 1992, Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act stands as a statutory expression of U.S. opposition to Azerbaijan's blockades and other aggressive uses of force against Armenia

and Nagorno Karabakh. Since its enactment, Azerbaijan has not lifted its illegal blockades and has ignored Appropriations Committee Report language opposing its destabilizing threats. The Congress should limit the President's waiver authority in the face of these provocations by Baku by adding the following certification requirement, effectively narrowing the President's waiver authority: ***"In the last fiscal year, Azerbaijan has not taken hostile action, either through military force or incitement, including but not limited to threatening pronouncements by government officials toward Armenia or Nagorno Karabakh, and has both stated and demonstrated its commitment to pursuing a lasting peace with Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh through solely non-violent means."***

### **7) Ending the Exclusion of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh from the Peace Process:**

The best and most sustainable path to peace requires direct engagement with the people and government of Nagorno Karabakh, whose fate and future are the subject of ongoing talks and whose security will rest on the outcome of these negotiations. As is well known, the Nagorno Karabakh Republic was one of the three parties to the 1994 cease-fire, which ended military hostilities between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan. In its aftermath, Nagorno Karabakh participated in the OSCE Minsk Group peace process as a partner, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Since 1998, however, at Baku's insistence, Nagorno Karabakh has been excluded from the peace process. Nagorno Karabakh should, in the interests of peace and common sense, be a full participant in all talks regarding its very future.

In addition to these seven specific priorities, we would like, in closing to add a final thought about the future of the U.S.-Armenia economic relationship. In light of the downward trend in U.S. economic aid to Armenia, we encourage the Subcommittee to encourage the Administration to prioritize bilateral U.S.-Armenia trade and investment promotion, including through the negotiation of a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, a Double Tax Treaty, and other economic accords. The American Chamber of Commerce in Armenia and the ANCA have formally called for expanding economic relations through such agreements, as have U.S. businesses operating in Armenia, among them Microsoft, FedEx, NASDAQ and Marriot.

The ANCA, as always, looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to strengthen the U.S.-Armenia alliance and to promote stability in the region.