

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 11, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

In light of Azerbaijan's ongoing detention and abuse of Armenian prisoners of war and political captives, we are writing to urge you to immediately exercise your authority to impose sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act on Azerbaijani officials responsible for the perpetration of grave human rights abuses and war crimes against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Over a year has passed since Azerbaijan's blockade and military assault on Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) forcibly displaced the region's 120,000 Christian Armenians in what has been characterized by international legal experts as ethnic cleansing. Azerbaijan's assault on the region in September 2023 marked the culmination of a pattern of aggression following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War during which Azerbaijan perpetrated egregious war crimes, including the summary execution of civilians; the destruction of schools, homes, and hospitals; the deliberate targeting of churches and other Armenian Christian heritage sites; and the arbitrary detention of dozens of Armenian prisoners of war.

To this day, Azerbaijan continues to illegally detain at least 23 known Armenian prisoners of war captured during and following the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh. Having faced no accountability for its continued detention of Armenian prisoners, Azerbaijan has recently commenced politically motivated trials under false pretenses, targeting captives based on their Armenian identity. Among those detained are former presidents, foreign ministers, and parliamentary leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh's government. Reports further indicate that these political hostages, including former State Minister Ruben Vardanyan, have been subject to abuse and degrading treatment in custody, while secrecy and irregularities surrounding proceedings in Baku's military court cast significant doubt over the fairness and legitimacy of these proceedings. In light of the Azerbaijani government's recent decision to order the removal of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the only organization authorized to visit Armenian detainees, we are deeply concerned about the safety and security of Armenian captives.

The sham trials of high-profile Armenian figures undermine confidence-building measures necessary for a sustainable peace. Releasing political prisoners and prisoners of war is a critical step toward achieving a just and lasting resolution. Therefore, we urge you to take the following actions in your engagements with the Government of Azerbaijan:

- Demand the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian political prisoners in all future engagements with the Government of Azerbaijan;
- Press Azerbaijani authorities to allow international observers and independent media outlets to monitor proceedings against Armenian political figures; and
- Impose sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act on Azerbaijan officials responsible for gross human rights violations against Armenian prisoners.

While we are hopeful that the conclusion of negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan will usher a more peaceful future for the region, we remain deeply concerned about Azerbaijan’s participation in hostage diplomacy and efforts to impose unreasonable preconditions on the Armenian government. Furthermore, given reports that the proposed agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan does not include any provision regarding the release of Armenian prisoners, we believe Magnitsky Sanctions are a critical tool to leverage the release of POWs and deter further aggression against Armenia.

Continued inaction in the face of Azerbaijan’s authoritarian aggression will have grave ramifications for U.S. credibility throughout the region, particularly as Armenia seeks to strengthen its ties with the West. As such, we believe it is a moral and strategic imperative for the U.S. to take bold action to compel Azerbaijan to release unjustly detained Armenian prisoners and ensure regional peace is predicated on accountability, justice, and the fundamental right of return for Nagorno-Karabakh's displaced Armenian population.

We look forward to your response and stand ready to work with you to ensure that U.S. policy aligns with our country’s commitment to justice and stability in the region.

Sincerely,



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



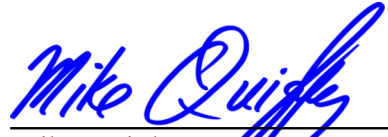
Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress



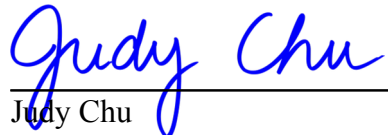
Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
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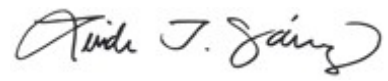
Dan Goldman
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Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
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Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



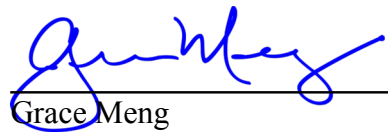
Seth Magaziner
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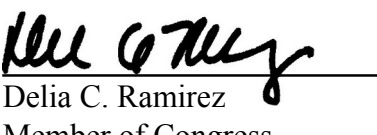
David G. Valadao
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Gabe Amo
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Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
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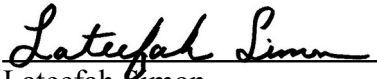
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Paul D. Tonko
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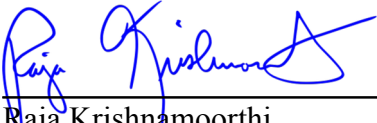
Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress



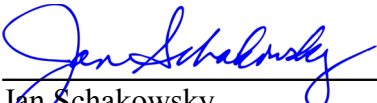
Eric Swalwell
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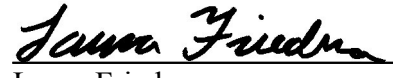
Raja Krishnamoorthi
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Donald S. Beyer Jr.
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Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Laura Friedman
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Jake Auchincloss
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Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress



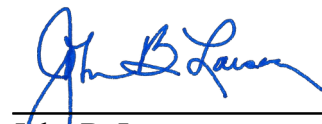
Thomas H. Kean, Jr.
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Danny K. Davis
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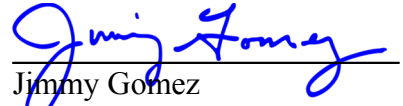
Zoe Lofgren
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Robert J. Menendez
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