

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 21, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express our concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation caused by Azerbaijan's extended blockade of the Lachin Corridor, especially amidst ongoing peace talks that could greatly impact the lives of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh). We urge the Administration to cease further military assistance to Azerbaijan pursuant to Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act while this blockade remains in effect and President Aliyev continues to use human rights abuses for his negotiating purposes.

As you know, since December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan has enforced a blockade along the Lachin Corridor – preventing the transport of food, fuel, medicine and other essential goods to Nagorno-Karabakh's 120,000 Armenians. As a result, the population is facing critical shortages of basic necessities – with gas and electricity also routinely interrupted.

In recent weeks, Azerbaijan has tightened its blockade by establishing a military checkpoint on the corridor – a major escalation that was rightly criticized in a statement by the State Department. Since the imposition of this checkpoint, Azerbaijan has interrupted the ICRC's ability to deliver vital humanitarian supplies, and transport patients in critical condition to the Republic of Armenia for treatment.

Azerbaijan's blockade is both a violation of international humanitarian law and of the November 9th agreement that put an end to active hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. It also stands in opposition to calls from this administration – as well as international entities including the International Court of Justice – to ensure the free flow of commercial traffic along the Lachin Corridor.

Amid ongoing peace talks that have regularly been held by the U.S. and our allies, Azerbaijan's prolonged blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh and its continued occupation of Armenian sovereign territory not only threatens to jeopardize tenuous conflict resolution efforts, but gravely endangers the security and welfare of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population.

Azerbaijan's behavior has undoubtedly been emboldened by the impunity it has been afforded since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War – during which Azerbaijani forces perpetrated horrific human rights abuses including the ongoing detention and torture of Armenian prisoners of war, and the deliberate targeting of homes, schools, churches and medical facilities with prohibited weapons. These abuses have been widely documented by international human rights organizations, as well as the State Department in its most recent Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor report into Azerbaijan's human rights practices.

On May 28, Azerbaijan's President Aliyev made new threats against Republic of Artsakh authorities: "Either they [Artsakh] will bend their necks and come themselves or things will develop differently now. If I say that amnesty can be an option, they should not miss this opportunity. They have

missed many opportunities, a number of opportunities, and each time, as they say, we had to knock them over to bring them to their senses."

We are dismayed to learn that the State Department has not more forcefully rejected this rhetoric, especially ahead of reported further peace discussions in Washington, D.C. President Aliyev's May 28 threat is an affront to our democratic and humanitarian values, and is even more shocking coming from a nation that receives generous U.S. military assistance.

In the context of this ongoing blockade and President Aliyev's continuing threats, extending the Presidential waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act would send a dangerous message to Azerbaijan's government – that there will be no repercussions for its attempts to impose its will on the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh by intimidation, starvation and deadly force.

We have disagreed with this administration's decision to waive Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act even in the wake of Azerbaijan's assault on Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020. Last year, the U.S. Government Accountability Office determined successive administrations had failed to meet statutory reporting requirements as to the impact of providing security assistance to Azerbaijan. This is despite a recent declassified finding by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence that found Azerbaijan was the "country most likely to renew large-scale conflict in an effort to consolidate and expand the gains it won in its 2020 military action against Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh."

As long as Azerbaijan's blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh is in effect, we should not be sending security assistance to Azerbaijan. Doing so would only encourage and enable Azerbaijan's aggression, and further set back the prospects of a durable peace that ensures the fundamental rights of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

As such, as we approach the reauthorization window for the Presidential waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, we urge the administration to enforce restrictions on military assistance to the country.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further, and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



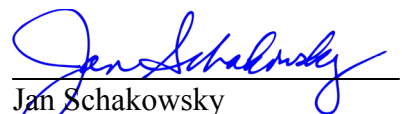
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



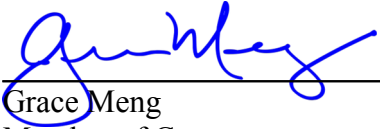
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Brad Sherman
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Jan Schakowsky
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Grace Meng
Member of Congress



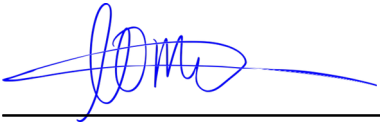
Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Chris Pappas
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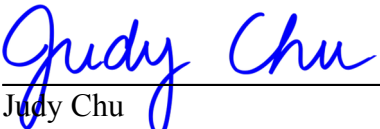
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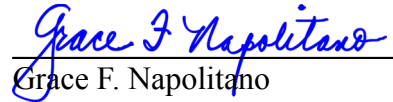
Ilhan Omar
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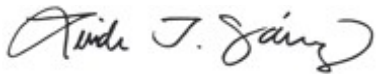
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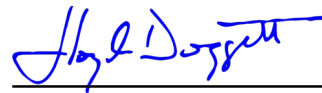
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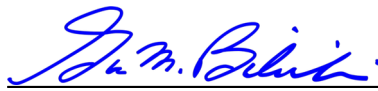
Seth Magaziner
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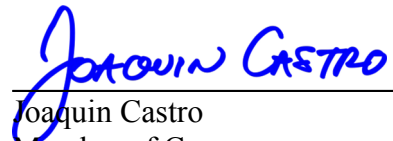
Christopher H. Smith
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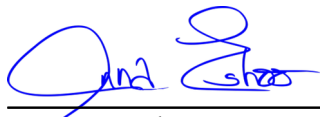
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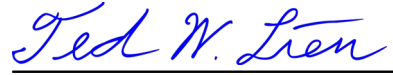
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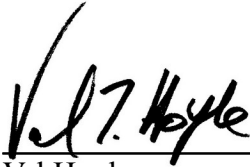
Rashida Tlaib
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Adam B. Schiff
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Ted W. Lieu
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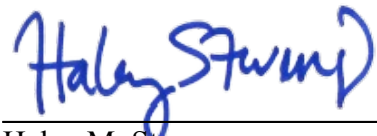
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Adriano Espaillat
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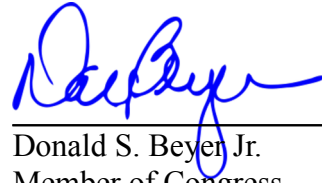
Katie Porter
Member of Congress



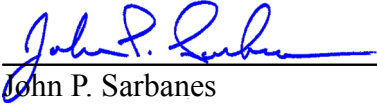
Susie Lee
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Ro Khanna
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Member of Congress



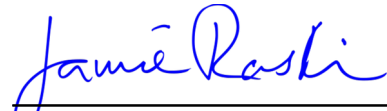
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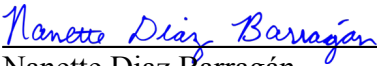
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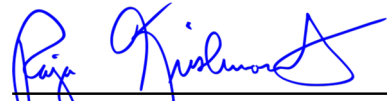
Nanette Diaz Barragán
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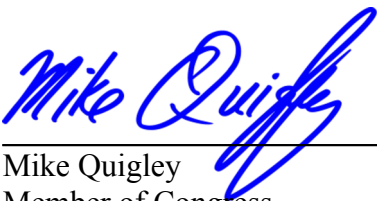
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