



September 10th, 2024

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Crowfoot:

As Members of the California Armenian Legislative Caucus, we are writing with grave human rights concerns regarding the government of Azerbaijan, host of the 2024 COP29 Climate Summit. As COP29 delegates prepare to attend talks in Baku, the international community must use the opportunity to shine a spotlight on Azerbaijan's human rights record, particularly in light of the blockade and ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population last year, and amid the government's escalating crackdown on freedom of speech, assembly and the press.

Not only is California home to the largest population of Armenians outside of Armenia, we are a global leader on human rights and the environment. As such, California must condemn efforts to use COP29 and the presence of participating governments to greenwash Azerbaijan's repressive regime and urge world leaders not to allow this vital climate forum to be derailed by those seeking to obfuscate Azerbaijan's egregious human rights record. Instead, COP29 must be an opportunity to condemn human rights violations in Azerbaijan – particularly the ongoing arbitrary detention and torture of Armenian prisoners of war, the systematic destruction of Armenian cultural heritage, the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population, and the repression of civil society activists through violent crackdowns – and beyond.

COP29 must also be used as an opportunity to highlight how the energy industry in petro states like Azerbaijan, in collusion with international oil companies and industrialized countries, have contributed to rampant corruption and the consolidation of authoritarianism in said countries.

At COP29 and beyond, we must reiterate our call that there can be no climate justice without human rights, and there can be no human rights without climate justice. In that regard, we urge you to take the following immediate steps to address the ongoing human rights crisis and to ensure that COP29 climate negotiations produce the ambitious commitments necessary to address global climate change:

1. Demand the Release of Prisoners of War, Civilian Captives and Political Prisoners

Azerbaijan's regime continues to arbitrarily detain over 23 Armenian prisoners of war (POWs), who have been subject to abuse and torture, and denied a right to legal representation, fair trial, and access to their

families. Azerbaijan also detains over 250 Azerbaijani civil society activists including journalists, academics, and opposition activists – also subject to the deprivation of fundamental rights, and subject to abuse in custody. Azerbaijan has routinely used Armenian POWs as bargaining chips, refusing to comply with their obligations under international law to ensure their immediate and unconditional release in order to extract concessions from Armenia in the ongoing peace process. In fact, Azerbaijan secured the privilege of hosting COP29 only after Armenia dropped its veto in exchange for the release of POWs. Participating governments must reject Azerbaijan's hostage diplomacy, and call for Azerbaijan to uphold its obligations under international law by demanding the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners of war and civilian captives, and all Azerbaijani political prisoners and prisoners of conscience ahead of COP29.

2. Demand Action on Azerbaijan Human Rights Abuses

Azerbaijan has engaged in a consistent pattern of human rights abuses at home and abroad, including during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, and the recent humanitarian blockade and ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023. We call on participating governments to investigate widely documented abuses of international law, including the abuse and torture of prisoners of war, the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure including schools and hospitals, the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh, the denial of humanitarian access to the 120,000 Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh from December 2023 to September 2023, and the forced displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's entire Armenian population in September 2023. We urge participating governments to take action to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its abuses and suspend all forms of military assistance and cooperation with Azerbaijan.

3. Call for the Right of Return for Armenians Forcibly Displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh

Following the forced displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's indigenous Armenian population last year, participating governments must ensure the return of the region's Armenian population under safe and secure conditions as required under international law by a provisional ruling of the International Court of Justice and take tangible steps to establish an international mechanism to support the return of Armenian residents that would guarantee their fundamental right to self-determination.

4. Urge Participating Governments Not to Visit Territories Captured by Force

Participating governments must not allow COP29 to be used as an opportunity to greenwash and legitimize Azerbaijan's forced displacement from areas captured by force in Azerbaijan's military operations against Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, and following its subjugation of the region in September 2023. We condemn efforts to use COP29 to normalize the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh and urge delegates not to visit territories in Nagorno-Karabakh that Armenians had inhabited until Azerbaijan's September 2023 military operation.

5. Publicly Repudiate Azerbaijan's Greenwashing

Azerbaijan must end its greenwashing campaign and abandon its plans to dramatically increase state oil and gas production. International governments and energy stakeholders participating in COP29 negotiations must make meaningful and material commitments at COP29 to phase out all fossil fuels, fossil fuel subsidies, and new investments in fossil-fuel production in Azerbaijan and beyond. Additionally, delegates must forcefully reject Azerbaijan's efforts to use new investments in renewable energy as a vehicle to consolidate its military subjugation of Nagorno-Karabakh – including the development of new

infrastructure in territories forcibly depopulated last year. COP29 must produce a global commitment to phase out all fossil fuels and fossil fuel subsidies at the speed needed to keep global average temperature increases below 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

The entire world will be impacted by the agreements reached during the COP29 negotiations. Unfortunately, the legitimacy of the conference and the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is at risk if human rights and civic space aren't protected in Azerbaijan and across the world, and if major polluters and rich countries allow this summit to be used as a forum to greenwash war crimes and sideline the urgent need to act on global climate commitments.

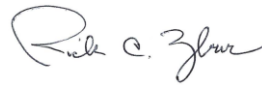
We greatly appreciate your leadership and collaboration with my office as we work to build a more sustainable and climate-resilient world. Given our significant role on the world stage, California should reiterate our deepest concern and urgent call for both human rights and climate justice to be at the center of the COP process this year and always – and warn that the failure to do so will risk setting the precedent of impunity that would only encourage fossil-fueled corruption, authoritarianism and human rights abuses across the world.

We look forward to working with you as you prepare for COP29 and respectfully request a meeting with you and your staff to discuss the concerns outlined in this letter and opportunities for the California delegation to serve as a leading voice on human rights and climate justice during COP29 and into the future.

Sincerely,



LAURA FRIEDMAN
Assemblymember, 44th District



RICK CHAVEZ ZBUR
Assemblymember, 51st District



BOB ARCHULETA
Senator, 30th District



ANTHONY PORTANTINO
Senator, 25th District



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MIKE FONG
Assemblymember, 49th District



LUZ RIVAS
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WENDY CARRILLO
Assemblymember, 52nd District