

Where is the international will to respond to the ethnic cleansing taking place in Artsakh?



Photo: Siranush Sargsyan, September 27, Twitter

As a community of critically engaged scholars and global citizens, we are shocked by the belated and insufficient response of the international community to the ethnic cleansing of what was, until weeks ago, the Armenian-populated enclave of Karabakh/Artsakh, located within the internationally recognized boundaries of Azerbaijan.

The precarious conditions of the local population were alarming enough for former International Criminal Court Chief Prosecutor **Luis Moreno Ocampo** to declare on multiple occasions that Azerbaijan's actions in Artsakh are in violation of the United Nations Genocide Convention. He stated in unwavering terms that "we cannot accept a new Armenian genocide in 2023," a statement that recalls how only a century earlier the Ottoman Empire erased its indigenous Armenian inhabitants.

During the recent Azerbaijani campaign, more than 100,000 Artsakh Armenians who were ethnically cleansed from their homes were subject to dehumanizing epithets, including that of being labeled "terrorists," in a climate of inflammatory rhetoric that usually accompanies state violence, or worse, genocide. Caravans of Armenians were expelled from the mountainous enclave to safety in Armenia, forcibly displaced by legitimate fears of atrocities, state-sanctioned ethnic hatred and the suppression of their cultural rights. For the first time in the recorded history of the region, this majority ethnic Armenian enclave is depopulated of Armenians. They were ethnically cleansed while the world stood by and watched.

In 2020, Azerbaijan invaded the self-proclaimed Artsakh Republic, and has since committed horrific crimes against both military personnel and civilians. Documented by international human rights groups and openly shared on Azerbaijani social media, Armenians were decapitated, mutilated and raped in the course of the invasion, which largely reduced the Artsakh Republic's territorial holdings. In addition, the Lachin Corridor that connected non-

contiguous Artsakh to its Armenian neighbor has been blocked since December 2022, placing the territory under siege, an action that the International Court of Justice ruled was a “real and imminent risk” to the population. Siege, a technique used in mass atrocities in Tigray and Syria, starved the population of medical, food and life-saving supplies, producing a classic case of ethnic cleansing by attrition.

Leading up to the military campaign to disarm and dismantle Artsakh in late September, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan (a close ally of both the U.S. and Russia), has used a new single lettered slogan mimicking Russia’s fascist Z symbol that propagandizes its genocidal campaign in Ukraine. Baku has already signaled that the conquest of Artsakh will not be enough, having renamed neighboring Armenia “Western Azerbaijan” and giving parts of sovereign Armenia Azerbaijani place names in media broadcasts and speeches.

Currently, Armenians of Artsakh have been reliant on Russia, whose role as peacekeeper in the region is in name only. Azerbaijan, a country given the status of “not free” by Freedom House, is not a place where the Armenians of Artsakh can live freely without persecution, a status that even Azerbaijani citizens do not receive from their own government.

As scholars and concerned global citizens, we urge the international community to place pressure on Azerbaijan and to establish guarantees and mechanisms for the safe return of Armenians to the region, including the protection of their inalienable property and right to live in their ancestral homeland. We ask that the United Nations deploy peacekeepers to protect the safe passage for all remaining refugees and heed warnings about the destruction of Armenian heritage that is sure to follow the evacuation of Armenians from the region. Azerbaijan’s pattern of targeting Armenian churches, monasteries and cemeteries is well-documented by monitoring agencies. We urge the international community to take action to protect some of the world’s oldest Christian heritage from established patterns of destruction. Lastly, we call for Armenia’s beleaguered democracy and civil society—and, indeed, its sovereignty and territorial integrity—to be ensured and its people assured that they have not been abandoned by the international community. Only with guarantees that international law and treaties will be upheld in the troubled region can the cycle of violence finally be broken.

Signed,

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