



---

## **Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region**

104 North Belmont Street, Suite 200, Glendale, California 91206

[818.500.1918](tel:818.500.1918) · [media@ancawr.org](mailto:media@ancawr.org) · [www.ancawr.org](http://www.ancawr.org)

PRESS RELEASE +++ PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: December 18, 2013

Contact: Elen Asatryan

Phone: 818.859.2421

Email: [elen@ancawr.org](mailto:elen@ancawr.org)

### **City of Highland Reaffirms Its Commitment to its Sister-City Partnership with Berdzor Despite Attempts by Azerbaijan**

HIGHLAND, CA — Under outside pressure from the Consulate of Azerbaijan, City of Highland Councilmember Jody Scott unsuccessfully attempted on December 10, 2013, to overturn a previous unanimous Council decision to establish a sister-city partnership with Berdzor, Nagorno Karabagh. Her failed effort was overcome by the unwavering leadership displayed by Mayor Pro Tem Larry McCallon and the remaining councilmembers who valiantly stayed on course with the partnership despite Azerbaijan's improper attempt to exert undue foreign influence over our democratic principles and practices.

“Agents of foreign governments such as the Azeri Consul General have no business meddling into the affairs of our local governments here in the United States. The fact that the Azeri Consulate is trying to exert its influence to thwart our democracy is absolutely unacceptable to us as Americans, and the fact that a sitting local elected official can succumb to such foreign pressures is even more disconcerting,” stated ANCA Western Region Government Affairs Director Tereza Yerimyan. “Fortunately, democracy prevailed as our grassroots base in the area responded to our Action Alert and mobilized itself. We were proud to have been able to work with Mayor McCallon and the councilmembers in putting this issue to rest, and we look forward to providing the necessary assistance and resources to help their sister-city partnership with Berdzor grow and prosper in the years to come,” added Yerimyan.

Mayor McCallon presented the resolution after personally traveling to NKR and witnessing first-hand the commitment of the local Berdzor government and people to peace, democracy, and economic freedom and development. The resolution was approved by the Council with a 4-0 unanimous vote on November 26, 2013, which included Councilmember Scott before she changed her mind under Azeri influence.

In a scathing letter addressed to City of Highland Councilmembers on November 27, 2013, the Consulate of Azerbaijan criticized the Council's decision and attempted to cast doubt by falsely accusing Armenia of ethnic cleansing against the entire population of Lachin (Berdzor).

Additional letters from the Youth Wing of the New Azerbaijan Party and other citizens of Azerbaijan also flooded the councilmembers with similar false propoganda. However, Azerbaijan's attempt failed as councilmembers learned more about Azerbaijan's past and current human rights violations and bullying tactics against Armenia and Artsakh.

With less than a day's notice of Councilmember Scott's intentions to overturn the previous decision, the ANCA Western Region notified residents in the area of the foreign pressures and activated its base with an Action Alert that encouraged community members to voice their support for the sister-city.

The Republic of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) is an integral part of historic Armenia that was arbitrarily carved out in 1921 by Joseph Stalin and placed under Soviet Azerbaijani administration, but with autonomous status, as part of the Soviet divide-and-conquer strategy in the Caucasus. The City of Berdzor serves as a corridor between Armenia and Artsakh and thus is strategically vital to the preservation and protection of the Armenian Nation. Nagorno Karabakh has never been part of an independent Azerbaijani state, and even declassified Central Intelligence Agency reports confirm that Nagorno Karabakh is historically Armenian and maintained even more autonomy than the rest of Armenia through the centuries. On September 2, 1991, the people of Nagorno Karabakh declared independence from the Soviet Union and became the Nagorno Karabakh Republic. On December 10, 1991, Nagorno Karabakh held an independence referendum in which 82% of all voters participated and 99% voted for independence. In response, Azerbaijan launched an all-out war against the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, targeting civilians and recruiting Islamic extremist mujahideen from Afghanistan and Chechnya to join the Azerbaijani army against Christian Armenians.

Prior to Azerbaijan's declaration of Independence from the Soviet Union, from 1988 to 1990, it targeted the Armenian population in racially motivated pogroms in the cities of Sumgait (February 27-29, 1988), Kirovabad (November 21-27, 1988) and Baku (January 13-19, 1990). At the time, Members of Congress condemned these premeditated and officially-sponsored attacks against Armenian civilians and passed amendments and resolutions demanding respect for the democratic aspirations of the people of Nagorno Karabakh.

Despite these irrefutable facts, the Consulate of Azerbaijan and its agents made false statements about Berdzor and omitted any mention of the history which led to the declaration of independence by Armenian citizens from Soviet Azerbaijan. The Azeri agents also failed to disclose that in August of 2012, the President of Azerbaijan pardoned Ramil Safarov from his life sentence in prison, for axing to death an Armenian soldier during a NATO Peace and Partnership training mission in Budapest, hailing his return to Azerbaijan as a national hero.

These facts were not lost upon Mayor McCallon and his councilmembers, as they admirably chose, true to fundamental American ideals, to support the aspirations for self-determination by the people of Nagorno Karabakh by offering sister-city assistance to the democratically elected local government in Berdzor.

The Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region is the largest and most influential Armenian American grassroots advocacy organization in the Western United States. Working in coordination with a network of offices, chapters, and supporters throughout the Western United States and affiliated organizations around the country, the ANCA-WR advances the concerns of the Armenian American community on a broad range of issues.

###