

Written Statement of
Elen Asatryan
Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY, &
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, &
CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

February 12, 2014, 8:30AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 312

IN OPPOSITION TO:

H.R. NO. 13 Recognizing February 26, 2014, as the 22nd Anniversary of the Khojaly Tragedy in Azerbaijan.

To: Chair Takai, Vice Chair Ito, and Members of the Committee
Re: **Testimony in Opposition to H.R. NO. 13**

Aloha Honorable Chair, Vice-Chair, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following comments reflecting my **strong opposition** to **H.R. NO. 13**.

The assertions made within this **resolution include blatant misrepresentations and false statements** regarding the historical background of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the circumstances surrounding the events at Khojaly. The resolution attempts to portray the aggressor of the Nagorno-Karabakh War—Azerbaijan—in the most favorable light, with no regard for the truth.

The Khojaly tragedy was the unfortunate consequence of a horrific war started by Azerbaijan against the civilian population of the independent republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. **This conflict was initiated by Azerbaijan in response to the peaceful demands of the people of Karabakh for the right to self-determination.** Azerbaijan's response to this peaceful referendum was to indiscriminately massacre the Armenian population in Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad, and elsewhere from February 1988 through 1991. These orchestrated and barbaric massacres, during which thousands of Armenians were maimed, raped, mutilated, and killed as Azerbaijani police stood by and watched, created over 500,000 Armenian refugees

Azerbaijan was its own aggressor in Khojaly. The Armenians chose to defend themselves, rather than die in the mercy of those that so viciously annihilated their people from 1988-1991. The Armenians were outnumbered, they were outgunned, and they were out-maneuvered. In 1991 and early 1992, Azerbaijan used the Azeri inhabited village of Khojaly in Nagorno Karabakh as a launching pad for indiscriminate artillery and rocket fire on Stepanakert, the capital of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). By the end of February 1992, intensive fire from Khojaly

and other Azeri military strongholds in Karabakh had killed 243 people, including 14 children and 37 women, and wounded 491, including 53 children and 70 women.

Systematic and intense artillery and rocket fire against civilian targets in Stepanakert paralyzed the city, destroying hospitals, administrative buildings, schools, and homes. By controlling Khojaly, Azerbaijan also prohibited access to Karabakh's airport, the only link with the outside world, which was used to bring food and medical aid. Furthermore, Khojaly was also used as a staging area for military offensives on Stepanakert and nearby Armenian-populated villages. Thus, Khojaly became a legitimate military target for Self-Defense Forces of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic.

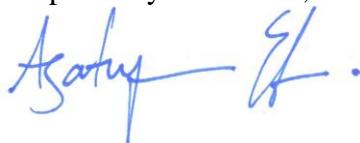
The operation to neutralize Khojaly base of the Azeri armed forces began on February 25 and was successfully completed within five hours. Nagorno Karabakh forces took full control of the area, killing dozens of military personnel during the operation. Unfortunately, 11 civilians became unintended victims. About 700 civilians and military surrendered to NKR Self-Defense Forces. The captured civilians were returned to Azerbaijan in the following days, while the military personnel was later exchange for the Armenian military prisoners and civilian hostages held by Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan continues to be the aggressor to this day by refusing to negotiate a settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and by continuously violating the cease-fire order by the U.N. Security Council. Azerbaijan most recently violated the cease-fire February 8th of this month, after having shot and killed an Armenian man earlier this year on January 28th in another cease-fire violation. Just days earlier, Azerbaijan had launched sporadic attacks in the direction of several village in the Tavush Region, seriously wounding a 16-year-old Lianna Anikyan while she was studying in her room.

I ask that you please vote in opposition to this resolution, as it severely misrepresents documented historic fact, presents only Azerbaijan's alleged narrative of what happened in Khojaly, and presents a narrow view of the past.

On behalf of the Armenian-American community of Hawaii, I ask that you please oppose this resolution. The sides should not be busy re-writing history or using politics to gain an advantage, but instead should be focusing on ways to achieve lasting peace and security in the region. Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully Submitted,



Elen Asatryan
Executive Director