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## Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region

Written Statement of  
**Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region**  
*January 26, 2015*

### IN OPPOSITION TO:

**SJR15-006 Concerning Recognition and Support for the Strategic Partnership between the United States of America and the Republic of Azerbaijan.**

To: Senator Bill Cadman, President of the Colorado Senate  
Representative Dickey Lee Hullinghorst, Speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives  
All members of the Colorado General Assembly

On behalf of the Armenian National Committee of America, I submit the following testimony to voice my **strong opposition** to **SJR15-006**. We are opposed to the resolution because it misrepresents the truth with respect to the Republic of Azerbaijan, U.S.-Azeri relations and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

This resolution's stated purpose is to recognize and support the strategic partnership between the United States of America and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The truth is that Azerbaijan has demonstrated itself to be one of the most intolerant and corrupt regimes in the world. The only value which Azerbaijan offers to any other nation is its oil reserves. Similarly, other despotic regimes in the region have had substantial oil resources, yet this does not serve to render those nations as peace-loving nations, or worthy of such accolades by the State of Colorado.

Earlier this month, the Wall Street Journal published a scathing review of Azerbaijan's gross human rights violations, referencing a statement by State Department Assistant Secretary Tom Malinowski who "warned the government of Azerbaijan that its 'crackdown on civil society' risked damaging relations with the U.S. Eight days later, prosecutors and police in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku raided the office of RFE/RL." A few days later, the New York Times published a piece criticizing Azerbaijan's threats and attempts to blackmail the United States. The Times went on to urge the U.S. to stand up to Azerbaijan regarding the raiding of its own RFE/RL and other human rights violations.

Resolutions such as SJR15-006 are being introduced in many states throughout the nation, not because of their veracity or because of deep ties between Americans and Azerbaijanis but rather, due to the well-financed and influential lobby which has emerged in light of Azerbaijan's growth as an oil-producing nation. Influence peddling for the benefit of Azerbaijan is rampant as a result



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of the millions of dollars which have been spent by Azerbaijan in recent years in Washington and state capitals, in conjunction with the junkets to Baku which have been provided to numerous Members of Congress over the past several years.

In 2005 and 2006, 100 members of Congress agreed that “The Republic of Armenia is a valued ally of the United States and democratic countries throughout the world. The United States continues to value the strong bond that exists between Armenia and the United States. The [Baku-Tbilisi-Kars] railroad specifically bypasses Armenia and serves to isolate Armenia from East-West commercial corridors. The exclusion of Armenia from regional economic and commercial undertakings in the South Caucasus undermines the United States policy goal of promoting a stable and cooperative environment in the region. Azerbaijan's leading role in developing the proposed Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad and other similar actions by Azerbaijan serve to undermine and avoid a just solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and potentially destabilize the region.”

In February of 2012, president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev—in a sweeping and hateful indictment of an entire ethnic group, chillingly similar to Hitler’s attempts to demonize all Jews—publicly announced that “our main enemies are Armenians of the world,” and also said that “Armenia is a country of no value.” As recently as July of 2012, officials of Aliyev’s government have threatened to shoot down civilian airplanes flying between Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Since the cease fire began between the Armenians and Azeris, more than 100 Armenian soldiers have been killed by Azeri soldiers in unprovoked attacks. Azeri snipers seriously wounded a 16 year-old civilian girl in addition to killing three Armenian soldiers in recent weeks.

In August of 2012, in an act condemned by President Obama and leaders worldwide, Aliyev pardoned, praised and promoted an unrepentant axe-murderer, who was convicted in a Hungarian court for murdering an Armenian NATO Partnership for Peace participant in his sleep in Budapest.

In February of 2013, Aliyev stripped an Azerbaijani writer, Akram Aylisli, of his state honors and pension (and also caused Aylisli’s relatives to be fired from government jobs) because he wrote sympathetically about Armenians in his recent novel. A political ally of Aliyev had offered a bounty of \$12,000 for Aylisli’s ear. In March of 2013, U.S. Ambassador to Baku Richard Morningstar criticized Aliyev’s crackdown on dissenters, and publicly called on Azerbaijan to respect the right of peaceful protest, promote the rule of law, and engage in a meaningful dialogue with citizens to address legitimate public concerns.

This resolution continues to make reference to Azerbaijan’s rapidly growing economy as an asset to the United States. In reality, Azerbaijan remains one of the most corrupt and despotic countries in the world. According to independent reports by international human rights watch-



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dogs including Transparency International, despite its massive oil resources, “Azerbaijan is plagued by endemic corruption that prevents ordinary Azerbaijanis from sharing in their country’s natural wealth and is a significant barrier to Azerbaijan’s development.” In light of this reality this resolution or others are unlikely to foster a partnership between Azerbaijan and Colorado and its people in any way.

This resolution is flawed in so many ways that it should be opposed if not because of its misinformation, but for its inherent connection to a despotic regime. Azerbaijan continues to acquire weapons and continues its threats to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh to restart the war. Azerbaijan is the main impediment to the region’s security, peace, cooperation, and to the settlement to this conflict.

**On behalf of the Armenian-American community of Colorado, 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