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## Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region

Written Statement of  
Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region  
Armenian National Committee of America – Dallas  
Armenian National Committee of America - Houston  
*May 5, 2015*

### IN OPPOSITION TO:

**HR 2309 Commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Black January events in Azerbaijan.**

To: Representative Dwayne Bohac, Texas House of Representatives

On behalf of the Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region, I am writing to voice our **strong opposition** to **HR 2309**. We oppose HR 2309 because it is factually inaccurate and misleading with respect to the events which led to Azerbaijan’s independence, as well as its policies regarding people’s rights to self-determination and independence.

The resolution gives the impression that Azerbaijan was invaded in retaliation for its independence movement. However, the truth is that troops were sent to Azerbaijan in order to protect the nearly half million Christian Armenians who were being subjected to violent pogroms and massacres throughout the nation in a campaign of ethnic cleansing. Azerbaijan’s hostility was its response to the calls for independence by the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR), which was an autonomous region at the time, thereby demonstrating its repressive policies, which are contrary to the claims made in the language of the resolution.

One of the catalysts of the breakup of the Soviet Union was the demand for freedom and self-determination by the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the NKR. Azerbaijan’s calls for independence did not begin until it became apparent to the authorities in Baku that its violent response to the Armenians’ calls for liberty would not be tolerated and its eventual independence was prompted primarily by the breakup of the Soviet Union, rather than “an inspiring example of the quest for freedom.”

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has the dubious honor of being selected as the most corrupt person by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). The NGO’s finding is based on extensive reports and well-documented evidence that the Aliyev family has been systematically grabbing shares of the most profitable businesses in Azerbaijan for many years. Earlier this week, the Committee to Protect Journalists concluded that Azerbaijan is the fifth most censored and repressive country in the world, out of nearly 200 countries in the world. In its report the CPJ concluded that the “main sources of information in Azerbaijan are broadcasters which are owned and controlled by the state or its proxies.” The report also noted that



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independent media outlets are subjected to harassment and prosecution by officials, and that at least ten journalists and bloggers are currently in Azerbaijani jails on fabricated charges.

Moreover, the Azerbaijani government seeks to pressure the U.S. and the international community to ratify Joseph Stalin's divide-and-conquer gerrymandering by returning to a failed system of foreign rule over free peoples.

In pursuit of this policy, Azerbaijan has taken reckless steps that have contributed to instability in a region of strategic and economic importance to the United States including:

- Declaring a complete blockade against NKR for the past 27 years, which isolates the citizenry of NKR from the international community and creates unbearable and inhumane living condition. (In 1992, the U.S. passed Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which limits assistance to Azerbaijan until it takes steps to “cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and NKR.”)
- Threatening to commit terrorist acts and shoot down civilian aircraft flying to NKR.
- Repeatedly threatening to renew aggression, with President Ilham Aliyev stating on numerous occasions that “only the first stage of the war is over.”
- Pardoning and promoting an axe-murderer in 2012, because he killed an Armenian NATO Partnership for Peace participant in his sleep in Budapest; this was roundly criticized around the globe including by President Obama.
- Repeatedly rejecting the United States and OSCE Minsk Group’s calls to pull back snipers, even though Armenia and NKR have agreed to do so.
- Attacking and killing soldiers on the internationally recognized border between Armenia and Azerbaijan on numerous occasions, hundreds of miles away from the NKR border.
- Obstructing the peace process by walking away from their agreements at the 2001 Key West Summit, undermining the hopes for a settlement at the 2006 Rambouillet Summit, and insisting on nine last-minute amendments to the proposed agreement which sabotaged the Kazan Summit in June 2011.

HR2309 ignores all of these facts and the oppression of Azerbaijan’s Christian Armenian minority, which were all forced to flee as a result of the violence perpetrated against them. The scope and scale of Azerbaijan’s ongoing ethnic cleansing of Armenians is further apparent in its ISIS-like targeting of Armenian medieval monuments. In December of 2005, the Azerbaijani Army desecrated an ancient Armenian cemetery and destroyed approximately 2,000 medieval khachkars (cross-stones) in Julfa, in an attempt to erase all traces of Armenians which had lived in the region for more than two millennia. This crime of cultural genocide against Armenians was condemned by the United States, the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, among others. Although international observers and inspectors were routinely denied access to the region, the destruction of cultural heritage was well documented as can be observed at



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([djulfa.com/film](http://djulfa.com/film)) and ([aaas.org/page/high-resolution-satellite-imagery-and-destruction-cultural-artifacts-nakhchivan-azerbaijan](http://aaas.org/page/high-resolution-satellite-imagery-and-destruction-cultural-artifacts-nakhchivan-azerbaijan)). Additional information including fact sheets about NKR, Azerbaijan and the region may be found online at <http://www.ancawr.org/media-resource-center/nkrfact/>.

**Again, I ask that you please stand on the right side of history by not allowing Azerbaijan to distort its human rights record and to glorify its stance with respect to freedom and self-determination.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Elen Asatryan  
Executive Director