



Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region

Written Statement of
Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region
February 19, 2016

IN OPPOSITION TO:

Proclamation Praising the Dictatorial Republic of Azerbaijan

To: Senator Wayne L. Niederhauser, President of Utah Senate
Representative Greg Hughes, Speaker of the Utah House of Representatives
All members of the Utah state legislature

On behalf of the Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region (ANCA-WR), I **voice my strong opposition to the proclamation that was introduced and passed in the Utah Legislature yesterday praising the brutal dictatorship of Azerbaijan.** We are outraged that some Utah lawmakers are reportedly commending the [Aliyev regime](#), which sponsors these resolutions to legitimize his despotic rule and justify anti-Armenian assaults. This regime has [destroyed](#) more Christian monuments than ISIS, is being considered for US [sanctions](#), and has the world's second-largest per capita population of [jailed journalists](#). Pew Research Center ranks Azerbaijan among the world's [top restrictive countries](#) on religious practice. International Christian Concern describes Azerbaijan as “**notorious for religious persecution.**”

Just two days ago the Idaho legislature [withdrew](#) a resolution praising Azerbaijan after **hearing testimony from their constituents, including Armenian refugees** from Azerbaijan. In the past few years, we have successfully opposed misleading [resolutions](#) that appear innocuous but are, in fact, **carefully-crafted attacks against your Armenian-American constituents**, as well as Azerbaijan's Christian neighbors Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Those resolutions' 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 Utah.

Utah's legislature was not created to offer praise to dictatorships that have created refugee populations that now reside in Utah. **Your state is home to hundreds of productive**

Christian Armenians who have been wiped out from Azerbaijan and are not allowed to return there. Ironically, in their meetings with American officials, representatives of Azerbaijan absurdly refer to Christian Armenian refugees as “Azerbaijani constituents,” concealing the fact that the very citizens they pretend to represent are not allowed to exist in Azerbaijan. Moreover, 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.

Last year, 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 in praise of Azerbaijan 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 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 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 200 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.

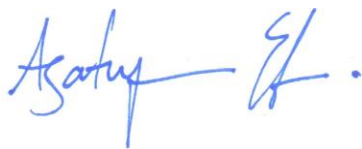
Aliyev's lobbyists often reference Azerbaijan's rapidly growing economy as an asset to the United States. In reality, Azerbaijan remains one of the most corrupt and despotic countries in the world. According to independent reports by international human rights watch-dogs including Transparency International, 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, resolutions are unlikely to foster a partnership between Azerbaijan and Utah and its people in any way.

On behalf of the Armenian-American community of Utah and of the western region of the United States, **I urge you to revoke the absurd praise offered to Aliyev's dictatorial Azerbaijan.**

To review fact sheets, reports, and recent news coverage about Azerbaijan, please visit <http://www.ancawr.org/utah>. For additional information, please contact the ANCA-WR Government Affairs Director Tereza Yerimyan at Tereza@ANCAWR.org or [818.500.3333](tel:818.500.3333)

Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully Submitted,



Elen Asatryan
Executive Director