

Remember Me

[Albuquerque Journal](#)

Azerbaijan is anything but tolerant country

By [Rima Sarian / Albuquerque Resident](#)

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Thank you to the Albuquerque Journal for reporting that New Mexicans of Armenian heritage are disappointed with the state Legislature for passing a memorial praising Azerbaijan for “tolerance and interfaith harmony.”

The facts show Azerbaijan has a history of anything but “interfaith harmony and tolerance” especially when it comes to its neighbor Armenia, a small Christian country facing constant threats of war and harassment from the Azerbaijan government and military.

Armenia recently commemorated the 100th anniversary of the genocide of 1.5 million of its people by Ottoman Turks, and Azerbaijan’s anti-Armenian rhetoric encourages another genocide against the native Armenian people of the Caucasus.

Despite lobbyists’ claims of Azerbaijan being a secular Muslim country, reality is since its independence from the USSR in 1991 it is no longer secular.

Pew Research Center says Azerbaijan is the world’s 13th most restrictive country on religious practice. International Christian Concern calls Azerbaijan “notorious for religion persecution.”

Azerbaijan’s Armenian hate was on full display when Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev freed and promoted in rank an Azerbaijani soldier who beheaded his sleeping Armenian roommate, Army Lt. Gurgen Markaryan, in Hungary during a NATO Partnership for Peace program.

This barbaric soldier was sentenced to life in prison in Budapest, but in 2012 Azerbaijan spent a fortune to extradite this cold-blooded murderer. Azerbaijan promised Hungary he would serve the rest of his sentence in their country, instead he was pardoned and elevated to national hero status even receiving a parade for killing an Armenian.

In 2005 Aliyev deployed 100 of his soldiers to remote borderland with Iran conducting an operation to destroy 2,000 Armenian medieval hand-carved Christian cross-stones. Within a week, Azerbaijan managed to erase centuries of Armenian historical and cultural treasures. Afterwards Azerbaijan claimed these monuments never existed.

Since Azerbaijan’s existence, it’s apparent its desire is to wipe the smaller ancient Christian country of Armenia off the map. It’s not just a crazy cleric saying this; it’s the official policy of the president who inaccurately proclaimed Armenia exists on Azerbaijan land when in fact, Azerbaijan did not even exist until 1918.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union in late 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh, with an overwhelmingly ethnic-Armenian population, declared itself an independent republic. The people of this ancient part of Armenia, forcefully annexed to Azerbaijan by Stalin against the will of its people, desired its sovereignty and to live in peace.

However, in reaction to this decision Azerbaijan sent its army – along with Taliban and Chechen mercenaries – to squash Armenian independence. Azerbaijan aggression resulted in the death of 30,000

people and displaced hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis as refugees, prompting Russia to broker a cease-fire in 1994.

Today, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh are free and prospering under a democratic government, even though they are under constant harassment and threat from Azerbaijan.

Lastly, to the contrary of lobbyists' claims that Azerbaijan is threatened by Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan actually has good relationships and does business with both of these countries. It is a ploy to gain support from European and American legislators while distracting from reality that it is Azerbaijan engaging in aggression toward Armenians.

I believe most New Mexicans, not just Armenians, would be wholeheartedly against their state bestowing an honor on a country like Azerbaijan. While we want to work towards peace and democracy, the Azerbaijan memorial in New Mexico dishonors those suffering from this oppressive government. It also does not help the cause of bringing stability to the region, it only empowers a dictatorial regime.

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