

## **A Statement in Support of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and Armenia from UK Academics**

26th September 2023

As British academics we are dismayed and concerned about the silence in the United Kingdom on the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, also known to Armenians as Artsakh.

For nine months, this enclave's 120,000 Armenians lived under siege. The only road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to the Republic of Armenia, the Lachin Corridor, has been under an illegal blockade imposed by the government of Azerbaijan. Deprived of food, medicine, and fuel, the population were brought to the brink of starvation. Access by humanitarian agencies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, was severely restricted.

The UN, international institutions, and human rights organisations have been raising warnings for months about the situation. Writing in *The Telegraph* on 4<sup>th</sup> September, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams warned that 'Armenians are facing genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh. The world must not sit idly by'. The former chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno Ocampo, accused the Azerbaijani government of genocide, saying 'we cannot accept a new Armenian genocide in 2023' in a 28-page report on the Lachin corridor blockade, published on 7 August.

Yet, beyond scant reports, there has been almost no media coverage of this humanitarian crisis in the British press during these nine months.

On September 19<sup>th</sup>, with the tacit approval of Russia and the unqualified support of our NATO ally, Turkey, the world watched Azerbaijan bomb Nagorno-Karabakh, as it had in 2020. After the loss of scores of lives, the authorities of the isolated enclave had no option but to submit to a ceasefire agreement brokered by Russian 'peacekeepers' the following day.

Information from the region is tightly controlled by Azerbaijan, and much about the evolving situation remains opaque. Forcefully displaced from their homes, men, women and children remain without food, shelter or medical supplies. Azerbaijan's official statements on 'reintegration' of these Armenians into Azerbaijan obfuscate a long

tradition of armenophobic racism and cultural-historic erasure, promoted by the Aliyev regime over decades. After using starvation as a weapon for nine months and then waging war, the Azerbaijani state's statements cannot be accepted at face value.

The Aliyev regime's repression of dissent among its own citizens is coupled with a record of violent rhetoric and action which has sought to erase Karabakh's Armenian past and deny the right of Armenians to exist in the region: the longstanding, state - orchestrated dehumanisation gives ample indication of what their 'reintegration' may mean in reality. The record of atrocities committed by Azerbaijani troops during and since the war in 2020 also gives good cause to fear for any Armenians who might remain in Karabakh. As we write, 13,000 of them have already been 'evacuated' or sought safety in the Republic of Armenia in fear of their future security.

Since the violence began on 19<sup>th</sup> September, British press coverage has expanded somewhat to include depictions of displaced Armenians, but the lack of critical analysis remains deeply problematic. Repeated references to the Armenians of Karabakh as 'separatists', for example, reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of regional dynamics, dehumanising a population facing ethnic cleansing. Coverage has also been characterised by a failure to grapple with the realities of the Azerbaijani state. Meanwhile, endowments from the Aliyev regime accepted by our academic and cultural institutions provide a useful veneer of 'respectability' to the laundering of funds, and history.

There are growing fears about the security and territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia, which the Azerbaijani president regularly refers to as 'western Azerbaijan'. The Aliyev regime cannot be allowed to interpret the inaction of the international community in preventing this war and the subjugation of Karabakh Armenians as a *carte blanche* to continue its campaign of expansionism and ethnic cleansing.

The British government has demonstrated little understanding of the seriousness of the situation. Lord Ahmad's call at the United Nations Security Council for all parties to respect the ceasefire, 'to end the violence, and to engage in urgent, open dialogue' suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the conflict and its dynamics in recent years. His suggestion that the UN and ICRC may be able to provide for humanitarian needs makes sense, but underestimates the urgency of the situation and the restrictions Azerbaijan has placed on access.

We are dismayed that our government's policies have been shaped by years of 'caviar', 'gold', and 'oil' diplomacy. That Britain's economic and business interests influence its foreign policy is no new development, but aligning ourselves to regimes like Aliyev's is something that diminishes our nation and our standing on the global stage. More widely, our lack of response to the violent takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh sends a dangerous message to both Azerbaijan's dictatorship, and the wider world. What message does our passivity send to those fledgling democracies, such as Armenia, that deserve our support?

We stand in solidarity with the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and all those affected by the recent violence. We implore the UK government and civil society to work towards the protection and safety of the 120,000 Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, most of whom will become refugees in Armenia. The provision of humanitarian aid is necessary, but it is not a substitute for proper political engagement. We emphasise the importance of the international community taking a stand for peace, justice, and the protection of the Armenian religious and cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh. Finally, Armenia's beleaguered democracy and civil society – including the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity - must be supported and its people must be assured that they have not been abandoned by humanity, so that the region's cycle of violence may finally be broken.

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