

# DON'T JUST REMEMBER. ACT!

Today marks the 109th anniversary of Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, observed around the world to commemorate the brutal killing of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians under the Ottoman Empire – a fate that my own grandfather narrowly escaped.

But here is the Armenian tragedy: Even as we mourn the past, history is repeating itself. Armenians are once again the target of ethnic cleansing, political leaders are unlawfully held as hostages, and the country of Armenia faces existential threats to its sovereignty and self-determination.

A busy world has been looking the other way. So it's not widely understood that since last September, Azerbaijan has driven 120,000 Armenians—the entire population of Artsakh, the Armenian enclave also known as Nagorno Karabakh—from their ancestral homeland.

Azerbaijan also continues to unlawfully hold Armenian hostages, including my friend and colleague Ruben Vardanyan, a businessman and philanthropist who briefly served as state minister of Artsakh. Meanwhile, escalating clashes on Armenia's border continue to fuel growing fears that Azerbaijan may be planning to invade Armenia itself.

Three years ago, President Biden became the first U.S. president to officially recognize what is often called the “forgotten genocide” of 1915, joining dozens of other nations and global organizations. But what's the value of acknowledging forced migration and death if we allow the same events to happen again? “Armenian genocide” isn't a slogan—it's a real, desperate threat.

The U.S. and E.U. are actively pursuing peace and a new order in the South Caucasus. Russia, Turkey, and Iran should each have interests in the same outcome. However, as the current war in the Middle East reminds us, peace is difficult to achieve or maintain if it is not fundamentally based on justice. Prioritizing an imposed peace will only prolong the conflicts and keep the region from developing further.

This is one nightmare that the world can end. Azerbaijan today should find no grounds for conflict with Armenia. After last year's invasion, Armenia relinquished efforts at self-governance in Nagorno-Karabakh. For Azerbaijan to now insist that peace must be premised on Armenia accepting incursions on its own internationally recognized border to enable a corridor connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan and Turkey is both unlawful and unjust.

If Azerbaijan doesn't change its hostile position, the international community must act to protect Armenians' human rights and recognize Armenia's sovereignty and right to self-determination. Azerbaijan must also release all Armenian hostages unlawfully detained in recent years.

Azerbaijan wants to be a global leader, but that brings responsibilities. This year, Baku is slated to host COP 29, the United Nations' climate summit. The choice of Azerbaijan was controversial, because of its oil-and-gas driven economy and its appalling record on human rights. Azerbaijan must prove itself worthy of this trust.

The Armenian Genocide was the first genocide of the 20th century – indeed the term genocide itself was coined by Polish-Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin, whose thinking was profoundly shaped by what he'd learned as a law student about this dark chapter. Now, on the cusp of a new genocide, there's far too little action. Today, we must do more than mourn the massacres of the past. It's time to step up to prevent the massacres of the future.

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