

Over 150 Global Humanitarian, Business and Political Leaders Demand Freedom of Armenian Prisoners

After implementing an illegal nine month-long blockade of fuel, medicine and food, on September 19th, Azerbaijan launched a bloody military offensive invading the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of casualties. This invasion led to the forced displacement of virtually all of the 120,000 ethnic Armenians from the region. This is indisputably ethnic cleansing; much of the world agrees. Human rights groups have labeled the Azeri actions as a genocide.

As he sought to leave for Armenia, Ruben Vardanyan, leading Armenian philanthropist, humanitarian, and former State Minister, was illegally detained. His arrest is particularly concerning as his high-profile international support of Nagorno-Karabakh has made him a target of the Baku government. Ruben is among the latest residents of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh arbitrarily arrested for political reasons and illegally detained. Others include three former presidents of the Republic, Arayik Harutyunyan, Bako Sahakyan, Arkadi Ghukasyan, and other former officials, David Babayan, Levon Mnatsakanyan, David Ishkanyan, and Davit Manukyan. Many other Armenians continue to be illegally imprisoned. The negligible information on the health and well-being of these individuals is deeply concerning.

These individuals are being detained in clear violation of domestic and international law, including UN and European human rights conventions to which Azerbaijan is a party. The conditions of their detention are deeply concerning, including inadequate communications with their families, an absence of regular independent monitoring or consular access, and the denial of access to local and international lawyers. Azerbaijan must respect international legal standards and human rights on which peace and stability depend.

Every day matters for the lives of these prisoners. Any peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan must include their release.

We call on President Ilham Aliyev to release all these illegally detained individuals immediately.

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