



Lemkin Institute
*for Genocide Prevention
and Human Security*

Statement in Support of the International Women's Humanitarian Delegation to Baku

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention welcomes and fully supports the initiative announced by Veronika Zonabend, the wife of imprisoned humanitarian Ruben Vardanyan, to organize an international women's humanitarian delegation to Baku, Azerbaijan in order to meet with the Armenian hostages there, including her husband. Ruben Vardanyan is the former State Minister of the Republic of Artsakh, the de facto state in Nagorno-Karabakh that was attacked by Azerbaijan in 2023 leading to the total displacement of the population, which was over 99 percent Armenian. Vardanyan is being illegally and arbitrarily held in Baku with other former Artsakh officials as well as Armenian prisoners of war (POWs), some of whom have been held since 2020 despite a Ceasefire Agreement that required the exchange of all prisoners.

After gaining full control over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh through aggression and genocide, Azerbaijan took dozens of Armenians hostage, most of them officials in the government of the Republic of Artsakh. These hostages were falsely charged with terrorism and other high crimes. They have since been held in deplorable conditions, subjected to torture, and forced to undergo show trials. Azerbaijan additionally closed the office of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Baku, leaving the Armenian hostages and POWs without international humanitarian support and monitoring. A May 2026 report from the International Commission of Jurists stressed that the ongoing trials of Armenian hostages do not comply with international human rights standards or law. In general, Azerbaijan has failed to meet the demands of international organizations to release the hostages. Azerbaijan is among the least democratic countries in the world with ever deteriorating human rights conditions. The Lemkin Institute considers Azerbaijan to be a genocidal state.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev harbors a unique hatred of Armenians, which he has institutionalized across the government and within the education system. This adds to the precarity of the Armenian hostages being held in Baku.

It is within this context that Ms. Zonabend has initiated a humanitarian mission to Baku in the hopes of meeting with her husband and other captives. Ms. Zonabend and her husband have dedicated their lives to various international humanitarian projects, one of the most prominent of which is the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. It is time for the international community to extend its full humanitarian support to them.

The Lemkin Institute urges the governments of the US, Canada, the UK, the EU, and EU member states to support this humanitarian mission by using their diplomatic presence in Azerbaijan to guarantee the safety and security of Ms. Zonabend and other women visiting Baku.

We further urge human rights advocates, influential individuals, political figures, and all relevant international organizations, particularly those involved in human rights and genocide prevention, to join in supporting the the wives and family members of the imprisoned Armenians to accomplish their basic rights to visit their beloved ones in Baku.

The world must act to save the Armenian hostages. Demonstrations of humanity in this case will amplify efforts to combat the accelerating evil in the world during such challenging times.