

August 29, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
Washington, DC

Subject: Call for urgent action to end the soft genocide of the people of Artsakh

Dear President Biden,

We write as leaders of Christian communions and agencies in the United States with grave concerns over the continuing blockade of the people of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabagh. Through our ecumenical and global ecclesial partnerships and ties, we have long and deep connections with the Armenian people, especially through the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Evangelical (Protestant) Church. These relationships have intensified our awareness of the crisis in Artsakh over these past two years, and particularly the immediate crisis of recent days and weeks. **We urge you to use the influence of your good offices to seek an immediate end to the devastating Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin Corridor, which is the only point of access to more than 120,000 Armenians who live there and whose families have resided there for centuries.** Of the 120,000 Armenians at risk, 9,000 of them are people with disabilities, 20,000 of them are elderly, and 30,000 of them are children, particularly vulnerable to the effects of starvation.

A [report released on August 8](#) by Mr. Luis Moreno Ocampo, former prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, concluded that “There is a reasonable basis to believe that a genocide is being committed.” The report continued, stating that “Starvation is the invisible genocide weapon. Without immediate dramatic change, this group of Armenians will be destroyed in a few weeks.” The blockade prevents the delivery of food, water, medical supplies, fuel, and other essentials for the population there to survive. It also has cut off internet access for communications. Further, there is no access into or out of the area, including for international agencies like the Red Cross.

Well-respected international figures and organizations such as [UN Special Rapporteurs](#), [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#), [Freedom House](#), and the [Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention](#) have all spoken in support of the people of Artsakh, decrying their plight, and urging action.

The National Council of Churches in the USA has spoken of the urgency of this issue as well. In a [November 2020 statement](#) lamenting the continuing military assault in Artsakh, US church leaders wrote, “Leaders of the nation of Armenia have appealed to regional and global powers to use their leverage to bring peace and relief. The militarization of the area has only served the interests of outside powers, and not the interest of the people who live there.”

Paul writes in the first letter to the people of Corinth, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” We are acutely aware of the suffering of the Christian Armenian community in Artsakh. We must stand in solidarity with the people there, and it is our duty to advocate for their rights and their lives.

We therefore implore you to take urgent action to end the blockade of Artsakh, to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance that is needed to sustain life and to ensure that such supplies can be delivered, and to end the suffering of the people of Artsakh so that the soft genocide we are witnessing is averted. We also urge you to do all that you can to seek an immediate diplomatic solution – including working with international partners and the governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey - to find a resolution to this continuing political crisis and humanitarian disaster.

We offer our prayers and our voices to prevent further harm, and for your strength and courage to dedicate the necessary efforts to work for peace with justice in the midst of this tragedy.

In Christ’s name,

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie
President and General Secretary
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith
World Council of Churches President from North America

Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce
Executive Director
Christian Churches Together in the USA *

Rev. Eddy Alemán
General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

Bishop Mar Awa III
Catholicos-Patriarch
Assyrian Church of the East

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian
Ecumenical Director and Diocesan Legate
Armenian Church of America (Eastern Diocese)

Rev. David E. Bennett
President
Moravian Church, Northern Province

Bishop Thomas Bickerton
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United Methodist Church

Rev. Bronwen Boswell
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Metropolitan Saba
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Dr. C. Jeff Woods
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cc: Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken