

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2015

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Room HT-2, The Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Lowey:

We are writing to underscore the importance of strengthening our ties with Armenia and empowering American diplomacy through continued U.S. assistance for Armenia, Nagorno Karabakh, the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, and at-risk minorities in the Middle East. Given recent events, U.S. support in the region is critically important.

As you work with your colleagues in preparing the Fiscal Year 2016 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill, we respectfully ask that you consider the following requests:

Assistance to Nagorno Karabakh:

Direct U.S. aid to Nagorno Karabakh has, for more than a decade and a half, represented a powerful investment in peace and an expression of America's leadership in support of a negotiated and democratic resolution of security and status issues related to the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh. This direct aid has met pressing humanitarian needs such as the clearing of mines and unexploded ordnance from villages and farmlands. We thank the Subcommittee for its longstanding leadership in support of this aid program and for consistently including language in its report calling for U.S. assistance in Nagorno Karabakh.

We request that the Subcommittee include language directing USAID to spend at least \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2016 for humanitarian and development programs in Nagorno Karabakh.

Suspension of U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan:

The oil-rich government of Azerbaijan, which routinely threatens to start a new war with Armenia, is listed as one of the most corrupt in the world, and has been ruled by the Aliyev

family for much of the past half-century. Azerbaijan neither needs nor deserves American military aid.

Azerbaijan continues to launch cross-border attacks not only into Nagorno Karabakh, but also Armenia, a NATO Partnership for Peace country with troops that have served in both Afghanistan and Kosovo. The President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, regularly threatens to renew full-scale hostilities, refuses U.S. and international calls to pull back snipers, has made land claims against Armenia, and openly incites anti-Armenian hatred, including against Americans of Armenian descent.

In November of 2014 the Azerbaijan government shot down a Nagorno Karabakh helicopter that was carrying out a routine test flight. This is one of the most atrocious examples of Azeri aggression to date and represents their willingness to escalate violence and destabilize the region.

We request that the Subcommittee suspend the appropriation of Fiscal Year 2016 U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan until its government ceases cross-border attacks, ends its threats of renewed war, and agrees to a settlement of regional conflicts through peaceful means.

Assistance to Armenia:

Armenia, a crucial ally in a strategic region of the world, has extended robust support for U.S.-led peace-keeping deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo, and is cooperating with the U.S. on a broad range of regional and security challenges. Armenia is regularly ranked highly by the Wall Street Journal/ Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom, and met the Fiscal Year 2014 eligibility criteria for the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

At the same time, the people of landlocked Armenia continue to face the devastating impact of Turkey and Azerbaijan's dual economic blockades. Our assistance has played a vital role in helping alleviate these blockades and promoting Armenia's free market system and democratic development.

We respectfully request that the Subcommittee include language within the Assistance for Europe, Eurasia and Central Asia Account ensuring that not less than \$40 million in overall Fiscal Year 2016 economic aid (including Economic Support Fund, International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement, and Global Health Programs), is appropriated for Armenia.

Assistance to Christian and other minority communities in the Middle East:

Distribution gaps in need-based international aid deliveries to Aleppo, Syria and other areas of the country have resulted in desperately needed food, medicine, and other relief supplies not reaching Armenians, Christian communities, and other at-risk and vulnerable minorities.

At the same time more than ten thousand people from Syria, including many Christians, have sought safe-haven in Armenia. Armenia, a majority-Christian state, has received very modest U.S. and international relief and resettlement assistance, particularly compared with the per-capita level of such aid provided to Turkey, Jordan, and other regional countries.

We request that the Subcommittee instruct the State Department and USAID to put in place policies and programs to close gaps in the distribution of need-based aid to at-risk minority populations in Syria, including Armenians and other Christians.

We further ask that the Subcommittee instruct the State Department and USAID to ensure the allocation to Armenia of a proportional level of the U.S. and international aid supporting the efforts to regional states to resettle those fleeing from Syria.

Assistance to the Javakhk Region in Georgia:

We encourage the Subcommittee, as part of a robust U.S. aid package to Georgia, to expand on U.S. assistance previously targeted to the largely Armenian-populated region of Samtskhe-Javakheti in south-central Georgia, including funding for job-creation programs and ongoing improvements to transportation and communication infrastructure.

Over the past decade, USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) have expanded their presence in Samtskhe-Javakheti in an effort to address core humanitarian and economic difficulties that face the population. Over the past several years, Americans of Armenian heritage have worked with USAID to leverage existing U.S. aid programs and to pursue public-private partnerships.

We request that the Subcommittee include language directing USAID to target at least 10 percent of Fiscal Year 2016 aid to Georgia to fund sustainable job-creation programs in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Enhancing Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act:

Enacted in 1992, Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act stands as a statement of U.S. opposition to Azerbaijan's blockades and other aggressive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Since its enactment, Azerbaijan has not lifted its illegal blockades and has ignored U.S. calls to cease its destabilizing threats.

In light of Baku's actions, we urge the Subcommittee to add the following language narrowing the President's waiver authority and requiring the following additional certification requirement: *"In the last fiscal year, Azerbaijan has not taken hostile action, either through military force or incitement, including but not limited to threatening pronouncements by government officials toward Armenia or Nagorno Karabakh, and has both stated and demonstrated its commitment to pursuing a lasting peace with Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh through solely non-violent means."*

Ending the Exclusion of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh from the Peace Process:

The Nagorno Karabakh Republic was one of the three parties to the 1994 cease-fire, which ended military hostilities between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan. In its aftermath, Nagorno Karabakh participated in the OSCE Minsk Group peace process as a partner, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Since 1998, however, at Baku's insistence, Nagorno Karabakh has been excluded from the peace process. Nagorno Karabakh should, in the interests of peace and basic fairness, be permitted to fully participate in all talks regarding its future.

We respectfully request that the following report language be included: *“In the interest of promoting a lasting and durable peace in the South Caucasus, the Nagorno Karabakh Republic must be reinstated into the OSCE Minsk Group peace process as a full negotiating partner.”*

Thank you for your leadership on the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs. We are grateful for your role in strengthening the relationship between the U.S. and Armenia, supporting aid to Nagorno Karabakh, and on all the issues we have raised.

We appreciate your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,


FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress


ROBERT J. DOLD
Member of Congress



JACKIE SPEIER
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress


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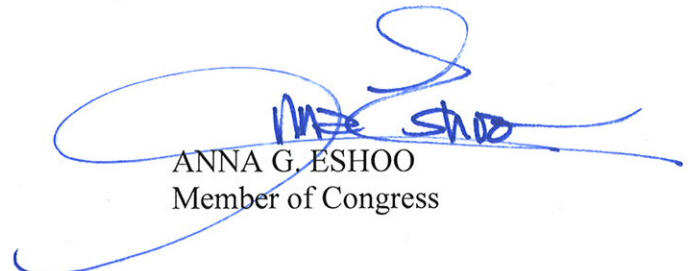

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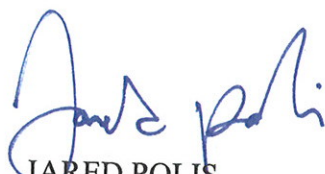

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