

Honoring Nagorno Karabagh's Democracy Movement

Marking 20 Years of Freedom

Request to Members of Congress:

Please offer public remarks in honor of the 20th anniversary of the 1988 Nagorno Karabagh democracy movement.

Key Points:

After nearly 70 years of foreign tyranny, in 1988, the people of Nagorno Karabagh asserted the right that we cherish as Americans: To live in freedom under a government of our own choosing. Through peaceful means, they sought self-determination and voted for independence in a legal referendum.

The Soviets, in Moscow and Baku, responded with violence and ethnic cleansing, including massacres in Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990), intended to derail this popular movement. Nearly all the Armenians in Azerbaijan (350,000) were driven from their homes and farms, reinforcing within Nagorno Karabagh the belief that self-defense represented their only hope for survival.

Over the past 20 years, Nagorno Karabagh has built a democratic society, held free elections, developed a free market system, and sought peace in the region.

The Nagorno Karabagh democracy movement inspired peoples throughout the Soviet Union to stand up against Communist tyranny – eventually leading to the end of the threat the Soviet Empire posed to world peace.

Benefits:

Public statements regarding the Nagorno Karabagh democracy movement:

Reaffirm America's belief in democracy and self-determination.

Support Nagorno Karabagh for building a free, democratic society.

Honor a popular movement that helped bring down the Soviet Union.

Expanding Dialogue with Nagorno Karabagh

Communication: The key to lasting peace

Request to Members of Congress:

Support the establishment of normal diplomatic relations with Nagorno Karabagh by adopting legislative language lifting outdated restrictions on the free exchange of ideas with its democratically elected government:

"The [Appropriations] Committee directs the [State] Department to move in the direction of diplomatic relations with Nagorno-Karabakh. An open dialogue between the United States and the people of Nagorno-Karabakh will serve to alleviate international threats to Nagorno-Karabakh and aid in a peaceful resolution to regional conflicts."

Key Points:

An array of outdated restrictions - first put in place by the State Department more than 15 years ago - stand in the way of U.S.-Nagorno Karabagh dialogue.

These restrictions prevent meetings, block travel, prohibit exchanges, and bar cooperation on public health, environmental, counter-proliferation, anti-narcotics, and other issues, artificially limiting our understanding of the region, hindering our diplomatic efforts, and undermining our promotion of democracy. They even prevent direct oversight of U.S. aid programs in Nagorno Karabagh. The only narrow channel left open is through the OSCE Minsk Group, which is working on the peace process.

Benefits:

Opening up direct lines of communication with Nagorno Karabagh will:

Foster a direct dialogue toward peace and in support of democracy

Ensure hands-on monitoring of U.S. aid programs

Facilitate cooperation on U.S. regional priorities

Promoting Development in Nagorno Karabagh:

An investment in peace and democracy

Request to Members of Congress:

Please encourage your colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to allocate \$10 million in FY09 developmental aid for Nagorno Karabagh to support democracy, public health, economic growth, and regional peace.

Key Points:

For more than a decade, the U.S. Congress has played a unique and vital role in providing direct aid to meet pressing humanitarian needs in Nagorno Karabagh, helping its people rebuild their lives after years of Azerbaijani aggression. It is a tribute to these programs that they successfully leveraged local efforts to nearly eliminate Nagorno Karabagh's once-daunting humanitarian challenges.

Retargeting U.S. aid to development programs will help Nagorno Karabagh build upon its strong democratic track record, since 1991, of holding 4 parliamentary and 3 presidential votes, all praised by international monitors as free and fair. Development aid will also promote economic reforms and reinforce Nagorno Karabagh's commitment to a fair and lasting peace.

The Congress should add, as part of the FY09 State-Foreign Operations bill, a development component to the Nagorno Karabagh aid package, with a special focus on the construction of a new National Adult Hospital, personnel training, and the procurement of medical equipment and supplies for this facility.

Benefits:

Providing development aid to Nagorno Karabagh will:

Promote democracy and market reforms

Foster peace and regional stability

Provide a desperately needed medical facility

Holding Azerbaijan Accountable

Deterring Aggression and Preserving Stability

Request to Members of Congress:

Please zero out all U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan as long as its government continues to threaten renewed aggression against Nagorno Karabagh.

Key Points:

The leadership of Azerbaijan, most notably its President Ilham Aliyev, continues to threaten to restart its war against Nagorno Karabagh.

On February 15, 2008, 52 U.S. Representatives called upon the Secretary of State to challenge Azerbaijan's threats of renewed war, and to take steps to hold leaders in Baku accountable for undermining the long-standing U.S. policy of fostering peace and stability in the South Caucasus region. Since then, Azerbaijan has launched two separate attacks on Nagorno Karabagh.

Azerbaijan should not receive U.S. military aid as long as it threatens to use its large and growing arsenal in offensive actions against Armenians. We should not, in any way, add to Baku's military capabilities until Azerbaijan's leaders cease their threats of violence, renounce aggression, and affirm their commitment to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabagh issue.

Sending military aid to Azerbaijan – either appropriated or non-appropriated – in the face of these threats only emboldens Baku to continue its belligerence, while, at the same time, undermining the U.S. role as an impartial mediator.

Benefits:

Holding Azerbaijan accountable will encourage its leaders to:

Cease their threats of renewed aggression

Openly renounce war as a means of resolving conflicts

Affirm their commitment to a peaceful resolution of regional issues