

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

January 18, 2023

Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Honorable Samantha Power  
Administrator  
USAID  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power:

We write to urge the American Government to use maximum pressure on Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to end his month-long blockade of the 120,000 people in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). The Lachin Corridor should be opened for unimpeded movement before the current humanitarian crisis becomes catastrophic. If the United States and our international partners fail to act immediately, there is no doubt that President Aliyev will continue to escalate his deadly aggressions against the Armenian people in Artsakh.

This is a man-made humanitarian crisis. In recent days, Azerbaijan has taken dangerous steps that prove the current deterrence strategy used by the United States and others in the international community is wholly insufficient. Reports from this week indicate that Azerbaijan sabotaged and continues preventing the repair of a high-voltage power transmission line that provides much of the Republic's energy.<sup>1</sup> This has caused rolling blackouts and electricity rationing.<sup>2</sup> Further reports indicate that Azerbaijan has also cut the fiber-optic cable that provides most of the fixed-line internet to the region.<sup>3</sup>

These escalatory actions are taking place under the guise of an environmental protest. However, this is clearly a deliberate attempt to severely worsen the quality of life for the people living in Artsakh, including 30,000 children, 20,000 elderly and 9,000 people with disabilities. Children and adult patients, many in critical medical condition, suffer in local hospitals from the lack of access to required medical supplies and services outside of the Republic. Individuals have died as a result. Additionally, a shortage of food and other necessary essentials has resulted in the closure of 120 schools and other educational institutions throughout the region.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32219156.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/blackouts-and-food-rationing-as-karabakh-blockade-enters-second-month>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32220896.html>

We fear these actions and the lack of civilian access to water, food, and medical care caused by the blockade are a precursor to even worse human rights abuses. A recent report from the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention shares our deep concerns about the deteriorating quality of life and what it might mean for the future.<sup>4</sup>

The current international strategy to reopen the Lachin Corridor is simply not working. Despite clearly documented evidence of the blockade and the tragic impact it is having on innocent civilians, President Aliyev continues to lie to the United States and the international community by stating that there is no blockade.<sup>5</sup> Alarming, Aliyev has also stated that the road is open to leave for all those in Artsakh who do not want to become Azerbaijani citizens.<sup>6</sup> The Aliyev regime is taking premeditated steps to remove the indigenous Armenian population from Artsakh and deprive them of the opportunity to live freely, democratically, and with dignity in the land of their ancestors – a clear sign of ethnic cleansing that must not be ignored. Meanwhile, the Russian peacekeepers stationed in the region have done little to disperse the Azerbaijanis blocking the corridor or deescalate the situation.

We appreciate the statements coming from the State Department and USAID and the efforts of our diplomats, in line with the U.S. Co-Chairmanship in the OSCE Minsk Group, as well as our commitment to protect and advance global human rights and democracy. Yet, the Aliyev regime's blatant disregard for these calls to immediately reopen the corridor is deeply concerning and demonstrates the need to urgently increase international pressure.

Without immediate action by the United States, there is little doubt that conditions in Artsakh will further deteriorate – Aliyev's deliberate and planned design. The people of Artsakh need the international community to immediately intervene and avert this potential humanitarian catastrophe. We urge you to work swiftly with our partners, including authorities in Artsakh, and use whatever diplomatic tools necessary to compel Azerbaijan to reopen this vital lifeline, as well as send international observers to the Lachin Corridor and Artsakh to explore opportunities for more effective and sustainable guarantees of security and peaceful development for the people of Artsakh. The United States must also consider all available options to provide humanitarian aid to Artsakh, including a potential airlift of supplies to prevent the very real threat of starvation.

Additionally, we believe that the threat of sanctions such as Magnitsky Sanctions against the authorities behind this blockade is warranted and appropriate given the grave threat the people of Artsakh are currently facing.

We appreciate your consideration of these requests and look forward to your timely reply.


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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/red-flag-alerts-1/red-flag-alert-for-genocide---azerbaijan---update-5>

<sup>5</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijans-president-makes-first-remarks-on-karabakh-blockade>

<sup>6</sup> <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58555>

Sincerely,

  
FRANK PALLONE, JR.  
Member of Congress

  
ADAM B. SCHIFF  
Member of Congress

  
ANNA ESHOO  
Member of Congress

  
GUS M. BILIRAKIS  
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