

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

As the State Department prepares its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2025, I ask that you closely consider and include Azerbaijan's well-documented and continuing human rights abuses. I also urge the Department to prioritize efforts to identify, call out, and press Azerbaijan to end these abusive practices.

Today marks the 1,000<sup>th</sup> day that Azerbaijan has unlawfully held Artsakh Armenians as prisoners of war following the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. In those 1,000 days, Azerbaijan has subjected Armenian detainees to torture and abuse in custody and held them in conditions that State has previously suggested violate the Geneva Conventions. In February 2026, Azerbaijan sentenced POWs to between 15 years and life in prison on politically motivated grounds following sham trials. Azerbaijan has engaged in a consistent pattern of gross human rights violations during and since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, including the deliberate targeting of civilian populations and the summary execution of prisoners of war.

State was direct and clear in its Country Report on Azerbaijan last year, writing:

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest and detention; transnational repression against individuals in another country; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and serious restrictions on internet freedom; prohibiting independent trade unions or significant or systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and the significant presence of any of the worst forms of child labor.

Your Department also noted that Azerbaijan "did not take credible steps or action to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses. There was no reported progress on government investigations of alleged abuses committed by armed forces or individuals during hostilities in 2020." This lack of meaningful change has persisted through the past year.

Azerbaijan is not just violating the rights of Armenians; it has accelerated its attacks on domestic political opponents and journalists. Earlier this month, Azerbaijan sought sentences of up to 16 years against journalists and extended the detention without trial of Ali Karimli, the leader of the opposition party. In 2023, Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu, an academic, was arbitrarily detained and still faces house arrest and medical challenges as a result of his detention. Since his arrest, the number of people arbitrarily detained has ballooned to the hundreds. This latest crackdown follows numerous other examples of the

arrests, sham trials, and imprisonment of peaceful activists, journalists, and opposition figures in a years-long escalation of authoritarian practices.

Previous State Department reports and credible contemporary press and advocacy organization reporting indicates that Azerbaijan's behavior is worsening. Civil institutions are under attack. Ethnic cleansing against Armenian populations has been followed by destruction of Armenian property, cultural heritage and religious sites, including reports of the destruction of two Armenian Christian holy sites, all of which attempt to preclude the possibility of the forcibly displaced Armenians returning to their homes as guaranteed under international law. Further, Azerbaijan escalated its transnational repression this year, including on the streets of Washington, D.C., where President Aliyev's security forces attacked peaceful protestors.

It is clear that President Aliyev feels emboldened by his visit to the White House last year to sign the Joint Declaration committing to achieve peace, a document that neglects humanitarian issues and entirely fails to address Azerbaijan's human rights abuses. Ensuring that the State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices accurately reflect internationally recognized individual, civil, and political rights is both a duty and a diplomatic tool to encourage accountability and change. It is critical that the State Department continue its record of calling out these abuses and to press Aliyev to change course.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator