

At the UN, Vartan Oskanian calls for Right of Return to Nagorno Karabakh

Christian Solidarity International hosts representatives of displaced Karabakhi Armenians in Geneva

ZURICH, SWITZERLAND, July 10, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "Justice for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and durable, lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan are inextricably interconnected," said Vartan Oskanian, Armenia's former foreign minister, at the UN on Tuesday.

Oskanian led a delegation of prominent Armenians in Geneva this week to advocate for justice for the Armenian Christians of Nagorno Karabakh, all of whom were driven from their homeland by an Azerbaijani military operation last September. Oskanian was accompanied by Armine Aleksanyan, the former deputy foreign minister of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh (or Artsakh), and Karnig Kerkonian, a human rights lawyer.

The three are members of the Committee for the Defense of the Fundamental Rights of the People of Nagorno Karabakh, which was established by the parliament of Nagorno Karabakh in December, and which is headed by Oskanian. Christian Solidarity International sponsored the delegation's visit, which included meetings with major international organizations, diplomatic missions, and local Swiss politicians and activists.

Last September, the dictatorship of Azerbaijan launched an unprovoked attack on the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh, following a nine-month long siege of its civilian population. The attack killed hundreds and drove the entire Armenian Christian population – over 100,000 people – out of their homeland, destroying the millennia-old Armenian community there.



The Armenian delegation took part in a panel discussion on the sidelines of the 56th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council. csi

Today, many Western officials claim that Azerbaijan and Armenia have “never been closer” to a peace treaty. But in Geneva, the delegation argued that a treaty that does not include three elements - 1) the safe return of Karabakh Armenians to their homes 2) freedom for Armenian hostages being held by Azerbaijan and 3) protection for Armenian cultural heritage in Azerbaijan – will not lead to sustainable peace.

“A fragile notion of stability, achieved through coercion and force, is inherently impermanent,” Oskanian said.

The centerpiece of the delegation’s visit was a side event at the UN Human Rights Council hosted by CSI, an NGO with consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council. The event was livestreamed, and a recording is [available online](#).

Armine Aleksanyan, the former deputy foreign minister of Nagorno Karabakh, who herself comes from Nagorno Karabakh, said its Armenian residents were faced with a stark choice when Azerbaijan attacked: to leave or to die.

And she warned that they would not return if there was a risk of further attack from Azerbaijan. “There needs to be solid international guarantees and mechanisms in place and guarantees that Azerbaijan will comply with its international obligations.”

For his part, Karnig Kerkonian, a human rights lawyer, argued that Azerbaijan’s actions in Nagorno Karabakh demonstrated an “intent to destroy” the Armenian population. “As long as Azerbaijan continues to pursue this intention, peace will not be possible,” he concluded.

Because of this, Kerkonian continued, three conditions are necessary for the right of return of Karabakh’s Armenians to be meaningful: the return must be collective, the return must take place under international protection, and the Armenians must have their fundamental rights guaranteed after their return – including the right to self-determination.

Referring to the 23 Armenians known to be held in Azerbaijan, Aleksanyan called for international pressure on Baku to release the hostages and prisoners of war.

“I think this is the right place to call on international lawyers, international human rights organizations to advocate for these people to be released immediately,” she said.

Regarding Nagorno Karabakh’s cultural and religious heritage, Vartan Oskanian said international monitors should be sent to the region to conduct an audit of the cultural monuments and ensure their protection.

Referring to satellite images showing the destruction of Christian churches, he warned: “There’s a clear intent not only to destroy the entire population but also its culture.”

Oskanian also [delivered a statement](#) on the floor of the UN Human Rights Council, during an interactive dialogue with Ashwini K. P, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism. Oskanian stated that the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh were driven from their homeland “on the basis of their ethnicity,” and cited the International Court of Justice’s November 17 ruling that Azerbaijan must “ensure that persons who have left Nagorno Karabakh are able to return in a safe, unimpeded and expeditious manner.”

Oskanian urged Ashwini “to undertake a fact-finding visit to the displaced people of Nagorno Karabakh, and submit a report on the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno Karabakh to the Human Rights Council.”

In its response on the floor, [Azerbaijan called CSI](#) an “unscrupulous NGO” and accused it of “distort[ing] the situation regarding the voluntary departure of the Armenian population from the Karabakh region.”

Dr. John Eibner, the president of CSI, commented that Azerbaijan’s response, “by calling the ethnic cleansing of Karabakh’s Armenians ‘voluntary,’ makes a mockery of the UN human rights system and reveals the mindset of a regime that remains intent on destroying the Armenian nation. It suggests that Azerbaijan is a dubious partner for peace.”

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