

# ANCA Calls for Expanded U.S. Efforts to Secure Azerbaijan's Release of Remaining Armenian POWs

*Armenian advocacy groups and Congressional leaders press for action following hostage swap*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, January 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) is calling for increased U.S. efforts to secure the immediate and unconditional release of at least 19 Armenian prisoners of war and captives who remain in Azerbaijani detention, following the January 14th release of four Armenian prisoners in exchange for two Syrian nationals.



**END HOSTAGE DIPLOMACY**  
**DEMAND AZERBAIJAN FREE ALL ARMENIAN PRISONERS**

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Since 2020, Azerbaijan has illegally detained and tortured Armenian prisoners of war in direct violation of international law and human rights norms.

#FREEARMENIANPRISONERS

The ANCA is calling for Azerbaijan's release of all Armenian hostages, and expanded U.S. leadership to end Aliyev's hostage diplomacy.

The ANCA characterized the exchange as continued "hostage diplomacy" by Azerbaijan to extract political concessions from Armenia. "At least 19 Armenians remain captive in Azerbaijan, where

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*ANCA Statement on Azerbaijan's hostage swap*

they continue to face torture and abuse, are denied their fundamental legal rights, and are subjected to sham trials based on their Armenian identity," the ANCA stated. "Azerbaijan must not be granted cover or impunity for its ongoing detention and abuse of Armenian prisoners."

The four released Armenian prisoners – Vagif Khachatryan, Vigen Euljekjian, Gevorg Sujyan, and Davit Davtyan – were non-combatants held by Azerbaijan on politically motivated charges. Khachatryan had been detained since

2023 after being taken during an ICRC medical evacuation from Nagorno-Karabakh. Euljekjian, a Lebanese national, had been held since 2020 after being captured while transiting through the Lachin Corridor. Sujyan and Davtyan, both founders of a charitable NGO, were captured one day after the 2020 ceasefire agreement was signed.

In exchange, Armenia released two Syrian nationals – Muhrab Muhammad al-Shkheri and Yusef Alabed al-Hajin – who were captured by Armenian forces in November 2020 and sentenced to life imprisonment by an Armenian court in 2021 for serving as mercenaries during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Ken Hachikian, Chairperson of the Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights, welcomed the return of the four Armenians while emphasizing that their release does not resolve ongoing violations. "These Armenians should never have been detained—and selective releases are no substitute for justice," said Hachikian. "Despite clear

obligations affirmed by the European Parliament, the U.S. Congress, and the November 9, 2020 declaration, Azerbaijan continues to hold Armenians as leverage. The demand is simple: free everyone still unlawfully detained, disclose the fate of the missing, and stop using human beings as bargaining chips."

The Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights is a legal and advocacy organization dedicated to protecting Armenian rights and pursuing accountability for human rights violations through domestic and international legal mechanisms.

Following the hostage swap, Congressional leaders have called on the Trump Administration to increase pressure on Azerbaijan to release all remaining Armenian prisoners.

"I welcome the release of four Armenian civilians who were unlawfully detained by Azerbaijan—but it is not enough. At least 19 Armenians remain wrongfully held. The State Department must intensify pressure on Azerbaijan. I will continue pushing until every last Armenian detainee is free," stated Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) in a statement posted to social media.

"I'm very glad to see the release of these Armenian prisoners from Artsakh after YEARS of Azerbaijani captivity. @StateDept must work harder to ensure that Azerbaijan releases the remaining prisoners—and I will not stop fighting until they are free," stated Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Co-Chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus.



In November 2025, twenty-seven U.S. Senators, led by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and supported by Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), sent a [letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio](#) calling on the Trump Administration to demand the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners of war and political prisoners held by Azerbaijan. The letter called for international monitors to access trials in Baku and the imposition of Global Magnitsky sanctions on Azerbaijani officials responsible for human rights violations.

In July 2025, Representative Pallone and Congressional Armenian Caucus leadership led a [bipartisan call by eighty-seven U.S. Representatives](#) from across twenty-four states, prioritizing Azerbaijan's release of Armenian prisoners and calling for the return of forcibly displaced Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).

At least nineteen Armenian prisoners of war remain in Azerbaijan's detention, including eight former Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) officials: Ruben Vardanyan, former State Minister (2022-2023); Arayik Harutyunyan, former President (2020-2023); Bako Sahakyan, former President (2007-2020); Arkadi Ghukasyan, former President (1997-2007); Davit Ishkhanyan, Speaker of the National Assembly; David Babayan, former Foreign Minister; Levon Mnatsakanyan, former Minister of Defense; and Davit Manukyan, former Deputy Minister of Defense.

In September 2025, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced it had ended its operations in Azerbaijan at the request of the country's government. The ICRC was the only entity authorized to visit Armenian prisoners.

Under international law, and as ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Azerbaijan is obliged to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining Armenian prisoners, hostages, and civilian captives.

The ANCA supports passage of the bipartisan [ARMENIA Security Partnership Act \(H.R.6840\)](#), which would strengthen U.S.-Armenia security ties and prohibit U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan until it releases Armenian prisoners and withdraws from Armenian territory, as well as the Azerbaijan Sanctions Review Act (H.R.5369), which would direct review of targeted sanctions against Azerbaijani officials responsible for war crimes.

Elizabeth S. Chouldjian  
Armenian National Committee of America  
+1 703-585-8254

[anca@anca.org](mailto:anca@anca.org)

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