



STATEMENT ON CONTINUED INHUMANE AND ILLEGAL DETENTION OF ARMENIAN POWS

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The Iraq Project for Genocide Prevention strongly condemns Azerbaijan for not fulfilling its obligations under the 1949 Geneva Conventions regarding the treatment of Armenian prisoners-of-war. We urge its government to immediately release all remaining Armenian POWS still in custody. Based on international reporting and video footage shared on social media, the treatment to which many of these individuals were subjected amounts to the most serious crimes under international law.

Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh stretches back many decades. The region has been majority Armenian throughout its history, though it was granted to the new state of Azerbaijan by Josef Stalin in 1923. After a referendum in 1991, when the territory declared independence from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a three-year war that resulted in Armenia's victory in 1994 and occupation of Nagorno Karabakh. Apart from a brief armed engagement in 2016 and frequent Azerbaijani violations of the 1994 ceasefire, it was not until September 2020 that armed conflict was renewed between the two countries over the territory, resulting in Armenia's loss of much of the territory. In a cease-fire agreement reached in November 2020, and brokered by Russia, both countries agreed to return any detainees they had in custody.

Armenia returned the Azerbaijani POWs in its custody by December 15, 2020. Azerbaijan has yet to return the majority of Armenian POWs.

Since the ceasefire agreement, there has been a total lack of transparency on the part of Azerbaijan, with the Azerbaijani government only partially following through on its obligations and insisting that any remaining detainees are terrorist suspects rather than POWs. Moreover, many POWs are being subjected to trials under the charges of terrorism, participation in a conflict as a mercenary, and illegally crossing of the state border of the Republic of Azerbaijan. *The Azerbaijani government seems to be using these trials, as well as the illegal detention of Armenian POWs, as a political negotiation tool.* The world community has been largely silent.

In this context, it is impossible to know exactly how many POWs are missing, how many are still alive, and what conditions they are being subjected to. It has been reported that Armenian civilians are also being held captive, but as yet there is no confirmation of this. Such lack of information following a mutually agreed upon cease-fire is unacceptable and must be addressed immediately by Azerbaijan.

Those POWs who have been released relay torture that included “electric shock devices, clubs, and batons” as well as Azerbaijani soldiers inserting their hands into one prisoner’s “wound in their stomach” and tying another to a radiator for an entire evening. According to reports, these same POWs fear that those left behind will be executed in custody if international actors do not step in. There is evidence that Azerbaijani forces humiliated and executed Armenian POWs after capture in 2020.

Azerbaijan is flagrantly violating international law, specifically the third Geneva Convention, which protects POWs “against acts of violence or intimidation,” and the November 2020 Tripartite Agreement signed by its own government. Thus, it must return the remaining POWs still under its custody to Armenian officials immediately. Any country which believes the law does not apply to it is a country that threatens the international community’s commitment to upholding peace, human rights, and justice. Silence in the face of such illegality only encourages further lawlessness in the region and globally.