



Statement on Threats to Border Communities in Armenia and the June 7 Armenian Elections

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“In Yerevan people call us crazy for staying here, but they don’t understand that if we leave this place, they’d be next”. - Anonymous (Syunik Villager)

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security is seriously concerned for the sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia, which has once again come under threat from Azerbaijan and its allies, this time ahead of the Armenian parliamentary election on June 7, 2026. On May 10, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev directly threatened Armenian voters, warning that “it is the Armenian people who will suffer” if any candidate other than incumbent Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan were to come to power. President Aliyev implied that in such a scenario Azerbaijan would invade Armenia, a threat he has made consistently since 2020. Prime Minister Pashinyan has been echoing this coercive electoral ultimatum as part of his campaign portraying himself as the only alternative to war. We affirm that Armenia’s sovereignty is non-negotiable and appeasement may not be the best approach to protecting it. Whatever happens with Armenia’s election on June 7, the international community must

apply a genocide prevention mechanism to economic and diplomatic relations in the South Caucasus.

Armenia's upcoming elections have attracted unprecedented international attention that appears to be driven less by concern for Armenia's democracy than by ulterior geopolitical interests. This interest has vastly exceeded the negligible attention that was devoted to Azerbaijan's genocide of Artsakh Armenians in 2023, which occurred against a backdrop of international silence and complicity.

Western interest in Armenian elections has been growing since the Trump-brokered Washington declaration signed in August 2025, which was centred around the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP). Under the banner of peace, the declaration and its subsequent agreements rebrand Azerbaijan's long-standing territorial expansionist claim over Armenia's southern province of Syunik as a beneficial development project and grant a U.S. company a 74 percent stake in managing the proposed transit route linking mainland Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhichevan and further into Turkey through sovereign Armenian territory.

The declaration has opened the door to a range of prospective economic and strategic initiatives in the region, facilitating foreign investment and extractive initiatives, including the recently signed framework governing the future extraction and export of Armenia's critical minerals and rare earth resources to the United States. It also reinforced a broader trend toward the normalization of international economic and energy interests in Azerbaijan amid documented cases of several European companies investing in Azerbaijan-occupied Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), the de facto Armenian state that Azerbaijan emptied of its indigenous Armenian population in 2023 through a process that many organizations, including the Lemkin Institute, identified as genocide.

In opposition to Armenia's attempt to break from its Russian orbit in favour of a Western one, Russia has increasingly used economic pressure through its energy and trade leverage over Armenia. In the run-up to the elections, Moscow has been accused of electoral interference in support of Russia-aligned opposition candidates. At the same time, similar accusations have been directed at Azerbaijan and Western actors in support of Prime Minister Pashinyan. In fact, several EU leaders, the United States, Turkey, and Azerbaijan have publicly endorsed Pashinyan's re-election despite his increasingly repressive domestic policies and his attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church. Clearly Armenia has taken on a new geopolitical importance, but this does not necessarily protect Armenian sovereignty and could in fact threaten it.

Armenia's elections should not be reduced to a geopolitical binary in a way that obscures the governing record and policy decisions of the ruling Civil Contract Party that has been in power since 2018. Armenia's Prime Minister has been criticized for appeasing Aliyev's pan-Turkic ambitions to the extent of echoing revisionist narratives denying Armenian indigeneity in Artsakh, downplaying the intensification of the "Western Azerbaijan" movement that seeks to settle hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis in Armenia, removing Armenian national symbols from public institutions, and agreeing to constitutional amendments at Baku's demand. Meanwhile, the right of return for Artsakh refugees and the release of Armenian hostages held in inhumane conditions in Azerbaijan remain entirely absent from the agenda.

In this critical political juncture oversaturated by an aggressively enforced "peace" agenda predicated solely on Prime Minister Pashinyan's permanent re-election and continued appeasement of Azerbaijani, Turkish, European, and U.S. demands, the Lemkin Institute has been made aware of several alarming allegations drawn from testimonies from Armenia's frontline communities and Artsakh refugees. Their testimonies reveal a starkly different reality from the one being presented by the Armenian government at their expense. Given allegations of misuse of administrative resources by the current Armenian government, and a striking number of government critics subjected to politically-motivated arrests, prosecutions, and pre-trial detention, testimonies have been anonymized to protect respondents' identity and security.

We urge international observers, media outlets, and civil society organizations to investigate the following allegations with the utmost urgency:

- I. State Practices: Censorship and Structural Pressure on Border Communities amid Continued Azerbaijani Aggression
 - Village mayors are apparently being pressured by the Armenian government to suppress reports of Azerbaijani gunfire targeting civilian homes from illegal Azerbaijani outposts established inside Armenian sovereign territory. According to a number of respondents, the shootings have continued well after the August 2025 peace process declaration. While reports documenting the shootings and resulting property damage exist, they are routinely disputed or dismissed by Armenia's Ministry of Defence.
 - The responsibility for repairing property damage caused by Azerbaijani fire is left to villagers, many of whom state they are financially unable to do so.

- Armenia's National Security Service (NSS) officers are reportedly threatening border villagers with arrest warrants over the phone should they continue criticizing Pashinyan on social media.
- Civil society initiatives to build protective bunkers in border villages were prevented by the government, while the state has failed to construct such defences itself. Respondents argue that the few Armenian military posts facing Azerbaijani ones are exposed and highly vulnerable to drone attacks.
- No village in these highly sensitive areas has civilian bunkers. Locals assert that the illegal Azerbaijani outposts surrounding their village can monitor all of their movements, suggesting that constructing bunkers at this point may be impossible.
- The government plans to shut down schools in some border villages and consolidate education in a single neighbouring village. Respondents strongly oppose this plan and state that they will refuse to send their children outside the village. They argue that the plan would not only worsen an already precarious demographic situation but also provide no meaningful security benefit, as the receiving border village is equally unsafe.

II. Discrimination against Artsakh Refugees

- Artsakh refugees in these regions report systematic discrimination and state-backed hate speech.
- Refugees also describe significant barriers to obtaining Armenian citizenship and, in turn, participating in elections.
- Respondents further report very limited welfare support, with some claiming that single individuals receive no assistance at all from the Armenian government.

III. Azerbaijani Occupation and Coercive Pressure

- Available demographic data indicate that Syunik has experienced substantial depopulation by approximately 15 percent between 2020 and 2025—roughly 20,000 people. Respondents attribute this decline to Azerbaijan's systematic hostility, violence, and continued territorial encroachment, with some villages now entirely surrounded by illegal Azerbaijani outposts and subjected to routine surveillance by Azerbaijani drones. They describe living under constant uncertainty and anxiety,

particularly regarding the younger generation and the long-term future of their communities.

- Following the 2020 war, Armenia began constructing fortified underground military positions along the border, built on exposed mountain slopes and in many cases facing illegal Azerbaijani outposts. These bunker-like sites are accessible via public roads and remain fully visible to anyone passing through. Several respondents who work on or near them claimed that third country nationals are employed in these sensitive military zones, with some alleging that Azerbaijani nationals are among the workers. If true, this raises serious questions about the security and effectiveness of these fortifications, which are said to have replaced Armenian military personnel previously stationed in the vicinity of border villages.
- Azerbaijani control over communications has repeatedly left border communities without network connectivity, sometimes for weeks at a time, creating serious risks during emergencies when evacuation orders or other critical information must be communicated.
- In some villages, locals reported that Azerbaijani troops occupy the village's main water source, forcing them to use river water with higher contamination risks.
- Since Azerbaijan's occupation of Mets Ishkhanasar inside Armenia and the surrounding elevated terrain overlooking critical routes and military positions, Armenian servicemen have reportedly been left with no choice but to pass through Azerbaijani outposts to reach their military positions and are allegedly inspected by the occupying forces regarding the weapons they carry. The testimony of several respondents contradicts the Minister of Defence of Armenia's denial of the claims.
- Respondents report that in recent months they have regularly spotted Turkish and Azerbaijani military aircraft flying directly over their villages, though these aircraft have generally avoided Armenian airspace in the past.

As the majority of media, NGOs, and INGOs depict tomorrow's elections as an oversimplified binary between competing geopolitical forces (Europe and Russia), with one side (Europe) rebranding the threat of pan-Turkic expansionism for its own short-term gains and the other (Russia) attempting to maintain its imperial grip, it is clear that these elections are less about the democratic will of the Armenian people and more about which external power has been more successful in securing its influence over Armenia's future.

Nevertheless Armenia's elections also carry an unprecedented existential significance, as the balance of influence at stake may reshape the very foundations of Armenia's statehood. History has shown repeatedly that appeasing the aggressive impulses of a genocidal expansionist state like Azerbaijan does nothing to ensure the protection of a nation in its crosshairs. In fact, appeasement has generally only contributed to radicalization and catastrophe.

It is worth reminding readers that the regime in Baku referred to Armenia as a "fascist threat" to be eradicated just a few months before the Washington declaration. As history has shown, a single handshake does not erase a supremacist ideology or the power of the often far-flung economic interests that benefit from it.

The Lemkin Institute aims to use our platform to amplify the silenced voices of threatened communities who are living in the space of genocide. We urge the international community to finally take seriously the threats faced by Armenians in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan committed genocide in 2023 and will not stop at that single instance of the crime. Similar to the outcome of the world's passivity towards Israel, the impunity that has been granted to the current genocidal Azerbaijani regime by international actors, especially in the West but also including Russia and many states in the so-called Global South, is a major threat to peace and security in the South Caucasus region. Should this fragile peace gamble collapse, the first victims will be the displaced residents of Artsakh and the Armenians in Syunik whose voices have been deliberately suppressed by Azerbaijan, Turkey, the U.S., and the Armenian government with its many supine benefactors.