

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE VISITS ARTSAKH AND ARMENIA

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By Arus Karapetyan, Ontario, 11 December 2020

[One Free World International](#) (OFWI), a Canadian NGO, promptly mobilized in support of Armenians when on Sept. 27, Armenian-inhabited Artsakh was invaded by Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey and Syrian mercenaries. The 44-day war ended on Nov. 9 when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Ilham Aliiev of Azerbaijan agreed on a ceasefire that was brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin. The OFWI launched its humanitarian project by embarking on a fact-finding mission to Artsakh. OFWI will investigate war crimes, humanitarian aid, and the possibility of international recognition of Artsakh. People interested in supporting OFWI should sign up at the [organization's site](#).

I interviewed human rights advocate Majed El Shafie, founder of OFWI, in Toronto. With roots in a prominent legal and political family in Egypt, El Shafie started his public service work to reform human rights in his native country. However, he was forced to flee Egypt when he was tortured and sentenced to death for converting to Christianity. Since relocating to Toronto, Majed has founded OFWI which champions religious minorities. He has helped establish 28 branches around the world.

KEGHART: Mr. El Shafie, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. What is OFWI's mission and how does it operate?

MAJED EL SHAFIE: *OFWI is an international human rights organization dedicated to being a voice for the voiceless, for persecuted religious minorities, and victims of human rights violations. We advocate on behalf of persecuted minorities to governments around the world, raise awareness about people who are persecuted for their beliefs, conduct daring rescue missions and build bridges between communities. OFWI is a non-for-profit organization. Our work is wholly supported through the voluntary donations of our friends, members, and supporters.*

KEGHART: When did OFWI become involved in Artsakh and the conflict with Azerbaijan?

MAJED EL SHAFIE: *OFWI has had close relations with Armenia and has always stood by the Armenian people. Our involvement started by advocating in the Canadian Parliament to recognize the Armenian genocide. OFWI led a fact-finding mission to Nagorno Kharabakh in 2017 with two members of the Canadian parliament. We then started working on a documentary ("We Are Our Mountains") about Artsakh. On our second fact-finding mission to the region in November 2020 we were joined by an Icelandic Member of Parliament Birgir Thorarinsson, to witness firsthand the effects of the war, assess the damage, and investigate reports of human rights abuses.*

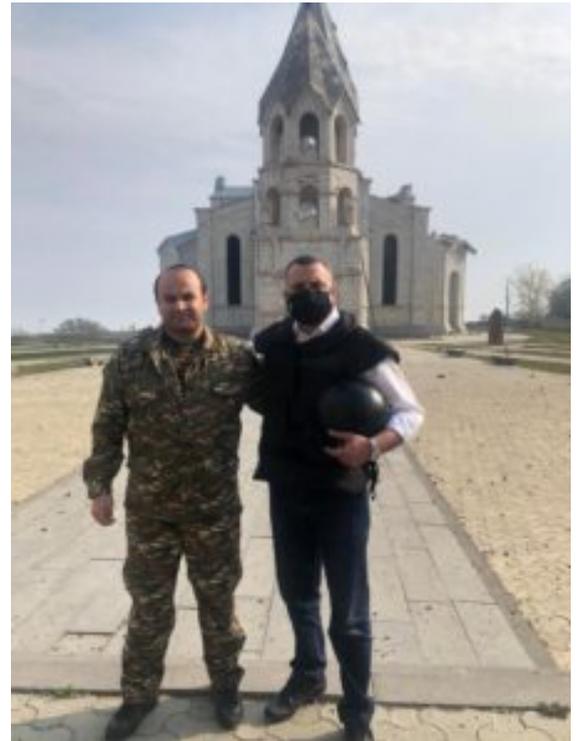
KEGHART: You were one of the OFWI delegates that recently visited Armenia and Artsakh. Please tell us about your mission and your findings.

MAJED EL SHAFIE: *The evidence of the war crimes being committed against Armenians by Azerbaijan*

and Turkey is overwhelming. It is painful to see that the world, witnessing Armenians going through ethnic cleansing, chooses to be silent. Our early findings on the ground include civilians being deliberately targeted by Azerbaijan forces, attacks on hospitals, a maternity house, schools and churches, Azerbaijan exporting terrorist fighters from Syria, using banned weapons, and mutilating the dead. This list can be continued. The Canadian government and other governments did nothing to stop these war crimes. Neither did they support the Armenian people who were facing genocide once again after 105 years. This is a shameful and a disgraceful mark on the conscience of the world.

KEGHART: How would you describe the condition of the Artsakh Armenians as a result of the Azerbaijani and Turkish Aggression?

MAJED EL SHAFIE: *I have visited many war-torn countries. One thing unique about Armenia is when it comes to standing for their country, you cannot break their strong will. I believe there is an eternal force shielding the Armenian nation from destruction. It is their belief and their love to their motherland. All their actions are guided by a deeply rooted love for their country and their belief in God. There is one thing you should know: falling down does not make you a failure; staying down will make you a failure. We have to rise from the ashes of defeat. We should always remember, and we should remind our enemy that after every night there is new morning carrying a new day. After every storm there is sunshine. They can always kill the believers, but they can never kill the belief in our hearts. They can always kill the dreamers, but no one can ever kill the dream. Artsakh will live and Armenia will live. This nation will always preserve.*



KEGHART: Have you had the opportunity to present your findings to the Government of Canada or to the international community?

MAJED EL SHAFIE: *We are in the process of working on it and we are in the process of finishing the documentary movie about Artsakh which depicts post-war conditions.*

KEGHART: What is the word that your organization is carrying out in relation to Turkish/Azerbaijani war crimes, the ensuing humanitarian crisis, and the existential issue of the recognition of independence for the Republic of Artsakh?

MAJED EL SHAFIE: *We are working on putting together our findings. Some part of what is being done by our organization is confidential and things will be disclosed at a future date.*

KEGHART: How can the Armenian community support the humanitarian efforts undertaken by OFWI?

MAJED EL SHAFIE: *The Armenian community should reach out to different communities to send humanitarian and medical aid to Armenia and Artsakh. They should also reach out to their local governments to raise awareness.*

KEGHART: Thank you for your time. And thank you for your dedication to human rights' advocacy in addition to standing up for the persecuted.

There are no comments yet.