CANADA MUST RESPOND WITH SANCTIONS TO AZERBAIJAN'S 'ETHNIC CLEANSING'

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Category: Opinions

By Prof. Christopher Waters, Windsor Star, 6 October 2023

The scenes last week of Armenians fleeing Nagorno Karabakh — leaving behind homes, farms, towns and centuries-old churches and other symbols of cultural heritage — were heartbreaking.But no surprise. The international community was warned on numerous occasions of a looming humanitarian crisis.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention has issued "Red Flag Alerts" for genocide in the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh since 2022. For 10 months, Azerbaijan squeezed Nagorno Karabakh's lifeline, the Lachin Corridor, which connected Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia proper.

Food and medicine stocks plummeted, and families were separated. The blockade of the corridor was in direct contradiction of a Russian-backed cease fire agreement reached in 2020, as well as a provisional order from the International Court of Justice in proceedings brought by Armenia against Azerbaijan.

But these warning signs were not just happening outside of Canada. Testimony before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (including by the present author) similarly underlined the ethnic cleansing resulting from the blockade.

The government responded with a tepid call to reopen the corridor and supported a European Union monitoring mission, but little else. What's more, the Canadian angle to the Karabakh war of 2020 should have meant we were hyper-alert to the fragile humanitarian situation on the ground; Canadian-made sensors had been used on Azerbaijani drones, transferred by Turkey to its client state, to great effect in that conflict.

In fairness, Canada has not been absent from the region. The 2021 appointment of Stéphane Dion, Special Envoy to the European Union and Europe, to examine ways to support Armenian democracy was a positive step.

Dion's report, released in 2022, highlighted various ways Canada could support this former Soviet republic. These included opening an embassy in Armenia — a move long called for by the Armenian diaspora in Canada — and other measures to "make Armenia a priority as a fragile democracy."

Canada recently announced the appointment of its new ambassador, career diplomat Andrew Turner. He enters a difficult environment. Roughly 100,000 refugees poured into Armenia proper in a matter of days, and the democratic — and Western-leaning — government in Yerevan is under intense domestic pressure over its failure to protect Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh.

Canada has offered welcome humanitarian aid to assist the refugees. Some undoubtedly will come to Windsor, with its small but historic Armenian population (the community first settled in Sandwich Town — around Felix, Lena, Girardot and Millen Streets — after the First World War, fleeing genocide then as well).

Last week, NDP and Bloc MPs called on the government to sanction Azerbaijan's authoritarian

regime of Ilham Aliev. In doing so, they joined members of the European Parliament and others in calling for targeted sanctions.

Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly did tell the House of Commons that "everything is on the table," presumably meaning sanctions are being considered.

Sanctions will be too little, too late, in one sense, but it will put Azerbaijan on notice that the world is watching — and reacting robustly — to ongoing abuses as the few remaining Armenians continue to flee, and as the Azerbaijani military holds Armenian civilian leaders in Nagorno Karabakh under the guise that they are terrorists.

Azerbaijan must also be put on notice that the world expects it to protect rather than desecrate Armenian cultural landmarks, including churches and cemeteries, and that calls for independent investigations into alleged war crimes will be heeded.

Dion's report was commissioned before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and in his mandate letter he was specifically told not to look at the geopolitics of Canadian support for Armenia.

Since that time, however, Canada's support has taken on greater geopolitical significance; simply put, Canada's support for democracies in the former Soviet area matters more.

For human rights, for the rule of law in international affairs, for the dispirited Armenian diaspora in Canada, this country should do the right thing and impose targeted sanctions on the authoritarian Aliyev regime in Azerbaijan.

Christopher Waters is a professor and former dean at the University of Windsor's Faculty of Law and co-editor of the Canadian Bar Review.

Comments



Gerhard Benge – 2023-10-16 12:06:41
Canada is run by by the minion of WEF/Klaus Schwabe (political (policies), and George Soros/Open Foundation (political financing) Justin Trudeau. Canada is effectively controlled by foreign NGOs. Canada effectively has no sovereignty.



Harry Buchaklian – 2023-10-12 23:15:34
I felt proud that Canada step forward and accomplished as much as they did. Somehow I feel the cause would be so much stronger if we could unite all groups outside of Armenia for a common support (Save Armenia), and have Canada spearhead the cause. It is common knowledge that our homeland is slowly being ravaged. The Armenians who have been on there land for thousands of years, are now being pushed off there sacred land. This affects, and hurts all Armenians everywhere. Armenia is our origin.