



Chronicle of an Ethnic Cleansing Foretold: Four Years of Atrocities against Ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh¹

Summary and Recommendations from Forthcoming Report

Despite repeated warnings, the international community failed to take measures necessary to prevent ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh; in light of this, it is urgent that measures be taken now to prevent further abuses and to ensure investigation and accountability for the crimes committed in the recent past.

Over a year ago, in the wake of Azerbaijan's military offensive on Armenia in September 2022, the University Network issued a statement calling for protection of vulnerable communities in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. We warned,

*If the current escalation is allowed to continue, these (and perhaps greater) atrocities will likely be repeated. Equally terrifying is the very real possibility that Armenia—cornered and desperate—will **sacrifice the people of Nagorno-Karabakh** to secure the country's territorial integrity... **In the absence of accountability for the violations committed during and in the aftermath of the 44-day War in 2020**, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Russia may well allow the situation to degenerate into **wholesale ethnic cleansing and slaughter of civilians** in Nagorno-Karabakh, **convinced that the world will shrug its shoulders and move on.***

Again, three weeks before Azerbaijan's final and decisive assault on Nagorno-Karabakh, we pleaded, “*the window to prevent yet another collective failure to live up to 'never again' is closing.*”

When the University Network began documenting human rights abuses emanating from the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War three years ago, our working thesis was not about the risk of ethnic cleansing nor genocide. We were preparing a report that would demonstrate that human rights violations were ongoing despite the signing of a ceasefire agreement that ended a bloody war over the region in November 2020. However, events unfolded in real time as we continued to visit the region, interview victims and witnesses, analyze data, and publish statements, reports and op-eds cataloging the abuses we had documented. By our fourth fact-finding trip in July 2023, our understanding of the situation and thus, our thesis, had changed. The warning signs of ethnic cleansing and genocide were too many and too clear to ignore.

In our forthcoming report, *Chronicle of an Ethnic Cleansing Foretold: Four Years of Atrocities against Ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh*, the University Network for Human Rights, in collaboration with students, lawyers, and academics from the Harvard Law School Advocates for Human Rights, UCLA's Promise Institute for Human Rights, Wesleyan University, Oxford University, Yale's Lowenstein Project and Yale's Jackson School of Global Affairs, will make evident the scale, continuous nature, and overt genocidal agenda driving the abuses that we and others have been documenting since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War through the present day.

¹ The title is inspired by the novella *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (Spanish: *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*) by Gabriel García Márquez,

Among these abuses are extrajudicial killings of civilians, including the elderly and disabled; enforced disappearance of Armenian troops; torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners of war; attacks on cultural heritage; death threats, intimidation, endangerment of food security, and deliberate attacks on sources of livelihood of residents of border communities; and life-threatening restrictions on freedom of movement and access to vital infrastructure.

These violations began during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, during which Azerbaijani and Armenian forces engaged in full-scale combat in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Rights violations continued unabated after the ceasefire agreement that formally ended active combat. By the conclusion of that war, Azerbaijan had assumed control of a significant portion of Nagorno-Karabakh. Scenes from the towns that had been overtaken foreshadowed what was to come: No Armenians remained in those areas; if they had not fled before their villages fell, Azerbaijani forces captured or executed them. Fear of a similar fate is what compelled virtually all ethnic Armenians to attempt to flee to Armenia as soon as the exit route through the Lachin Corridor was opened on September 24, 2023.

Our findings are based on over 150 interviews conducted across multiple fact-finding trips – two in Nagorno-Karabakh and four in Armenia – between March 2022 and November 2023. We spoke with forcibly displaced persons, families of missing or forcibly disappeared soldiers, families of victims of extrajudicial killings, returned prisoners of war (POWs), and current residents of Nagorno-Karabakh and border communities in Armenia. In collaboration with partners in our network, we also carried out independent verification of claims presented by Armenian human rights organizations. Finally, we closely [monitored](#) the final chapter of the forcible displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenians that began on September 19, 2023, through both open source investigation and over 40 first-hand interviews with refugees on the ground in Armenia.

Our report concludes that the Azerbaijani government, at the highest levels, has condoned, encouraged, and facilitated the commission of, or directly perpetrated, the most egregious forms of violence against Armenians. Together, the abuses we documented reveal a well-organized, comprehensive campaign to empty Nagorno-Karabakh and parts of Armenia of Armenians.

Today, there are still opportunities for the international community to take action to uphold human rights, but those windows will also close if we do not act quickly:

1. Independent human rights monitoring mechanisms should conduct investigations into rights abuses, including inspecting detention sites in Azerbaijan, investigating enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, and visiting border communities in Armenia.
2. Improve security of residents of border communities in Armenia through the establishment of a United Nations-mandated multinational peacekeeping force.
3. Take steps towards establishing a robust international accountability mechanism for the abuses of the past four years (or beyond). This mechanism might take the form of a vigorous Truth and Reconciliation Commission as in South Africa, or an international criminal tribunal such as the



International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), or the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

4. Exert pressure on Azerbaijan to:
 - a. Cease detentions of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and border areas with Nagorno-Karabakh or Armenia; and
 - i. Release all Armenian prisoners detained in Nagorno-Karabakh and border areas with Armenia.
 - ii. If there is a legitimate basis to believe that Armenians have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity, they should be tried before a legitimate international or domestic court, with jurisdiction, outside of Azerbaijan.
 - b. End all secret detention and share all information in the possession of any and all state agents regarding the whereabouts and fate of Armenians who remain classified as “missing” with the ICRC, the Armenian government, victims' families and independent human rights monitors.
 - c. Investigate all allegations of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of detainees in Azerbaijan's custody, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings at all levels of government, and hold those responsible to account. Engage constructively with the international community in carrying out these investigations.
 - d. Deter Azerbaijani officials from spreading hate, calling for violence, and advocating discriminatory measures against Armenians, including by putting an end to state programs that perpetuate and reward discrimination.
 - e. Take immediate measures to prevent continued destruction of Armenian cultural heritage. Rectify any damage that has already occurred. .

University Network for Human Rights

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