

To: Pepperdine University Administration

**Subject: Humanitarian Crisis in Artsakh (Armenia)**

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Dear President Gash, Chancellor Jackson, Provost Marrs, Dean Baker, Dean Caron, Dean Feltner, Dean Ledbetter, Dean Rensburg, Dean Williams, and distinguished staff & faculty:

We are writing to you today as the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Republic of Artsakh, also known as “Nargorno-Karabakh” located between Armenia and Azerbaijan, continues without a solution in sight. On September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan, with the full backing of Turkey, launched a military assault on Artsakh, a peaceful territory of 150,000 Armenian inhabitants. In just one month’s time, there have been 5,000 deaths; more than half of Artsakh’s residents have been displaced and 3 cease-fires brokered by France, Russia, and the Trump Administration have been violated.

***What Does this Have to do with Pepperdine and California?***

Pepperdine is located in Los Angeles County, which is home to the largest Armenian population in the country. Similarly, Pepperdine is home to a significant Armenian population as evidenced by the presence of both ASA (Armenian Students Association) and ALSA (Armenian Law Students’ Association) chapters on campus. Both former California Governor George Deukmejian and Retired California Supreme Court Justice Armand Arabian significantly supported Pepperdine University School of Law for decades. Over the last month, Armenian Angelenos have led peaceful demonstrations in order to increase awareness of the current conflict. Armenians everywhere feel helpless and need support as they watch their homeland suffer destruction for the second time in a new century. Many of these students and alumni attended Pepperdine for its all-inclusive welcoming nature (as evidenced through events such as Global Village Day and allowing us to set up Genocide Awareness Exhibits) and its Christian values prevalent among the faculty and staff. Pepperdine’s values stress a focus on spirituality, ethics, international perspectives, a service to the global community, and more specifically:

*“That freedom, whether spiritual, intellectual, or economic, is indivisible;*

*That truth, having nothing to fear from investigation, should be pursued relentlessly in every discipline”.*

As such, we believe that Pepperdine – as a Christian organization – has an obligation to speak out against terror, aggression, and the targeting of innocent civilians to display support to its student body and alumni during such a troubling time. Students are grappling with the effects of remote learning, COVID-19, and the dangers occurring across the world at Artsakh. Armenia is a small country, but consists of a strong group of people who desire nothing but peace. In addition, as a Christian nation surrounded by non-Christians, Armenians strive to continue to exercise their religion without any restraints. Armenians have been peacefully demonstrating around the United States, and have gained the support of hundreds of thousands, yet we hope Pepperdine and other influential organizations around the world can help further these efforts and to obtain the peace and tranquility that Armenia and Artsakh deserve. By advocating for change, having recognition, and showing support, Pepperdine would once again create that welcoming embrace we have come to know by allowing students to know they are fully supported, not only during the pandemic but also during traumatic criminal acts of war against their sovereign nation. Pepperdine University is a powerful, worldwide voice and can have a direct impact on educating and encouraging positive change regarding this issue on an international level.

## **History Repeats Itself**

Ethnic cleansing is an unfortunate experience for Armenians, having been subject to numerous massacres in the 20th century and most notably the Armenian Genocide that dates back to April 1915 resulting in the death of 1.5 million Armenians and displacement of millions more. We as Armenians living in the United States are all direct descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors. Through adversity, Armenians have survived and worked hard to preserve their culture. Our families have placed it upon themselves to remember and carry on the details of this tragic event in history so the world can “never forget” our past, and the atrocities carried out by the Turkish government. The descendants of the 1915 massacre bear the burden and have the duty to ensure the historical truth remains alive and not allow international disinformation to shape the future of our homeland. The verbal history shared with us by our family members is now being witnessed by a whole new generation of Armenians. We are faced with a unique opportunity to prevent a tragic repeat of history from occurring by condemning this continued attempt to annihilate a Christian presence and erase the Armenian culture in the region for good. This is why Artsakh is so important.

Artsakh has been an Armenian territory for thousands of years and over 99% of its population are ethnic Armenians. The territory was given to Azerbaijan during the formation of the USSR in order to placate Turkey, and 20th century Realpolitik has refused to accept the will of the people of Artsakh who have voted (through official referendum) to become an independent state. Turkey and Azerbaijan have an ultimate goal of the uninterrupted unification of all Turkish people and their borders. The only existing country that physically interrupts this goal is Armenia. If Azerbaijan and Turkey stop their aggression, peace in the region is restored. If Artsakh stops defending themselves, they risk total destruction.

Recently a group of 200 American Fulbright scholars issued a statement<sup>1</sup> to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo highlighting the following points:

- *Nagorno-Karabakh has never been incorporated within a sovereign Azerbaijan. Its people have legitimately voted for and declared independence, and for nearly thirty years they have stewarded a functioning government of their own.*
- *The continuation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict will intensify humanitarian crises, derail regional development, and erode democratic norms everywhere*
- *That the people of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) have a right to remain in their homes but would not be safe if Azerbaijan ever won control of the region.*

They also added:

*These unfortunate facts are evinced by Azerbaijan's record, from the Sumgait and Baku pogroms to the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Nakhichevan... The events of recent weeks, including Azerbaijan's unrelenting bombardment of civilian targets and the executions of at least six Armenians in Hadrut, conclusively show that anti-Armenian ethnic cleansing is no longer a hypothetical danger; it is an unfolding reality. With the international community paralyzed, we are convinced that only U.S. support for self-determination in Nagorno-Karabakh can halt the ongoing atrocities.*

<sup>1</sup><https://armenianweekly.com/2020/10/22/200-american-fulbright-scholars-call-for-artsakhs-right-self-determination-in-letter-to-us-secretary-of-state-mike-pompeo/>

## ***Our Prayer and Call to Action***

In light of the current situation, we respectfully ask the Pepperdine community to take the 3 calls to action listed below:

- 1) We ask Pepperdine University to release a formal statement condemning the aggression towards peaceful Armenian citizens as a way to further spread local and international awareness of the crisis.***

Pepperdine is a university with global impact. Although far away from the conflict zone and distant from our daily routines, these tragic occurrences should matter not only to our community but on a global scale as well since it is our duty as professionals and as humans to identify infringement on any rights but also to preserve them for others who are in need of our support during a time of crisis. During these tumultuous times, our Pepperdine family and those abroad need us more than ever. This conflict is at its core a human rights issue which should concern all students and the University. The first step to resolving any injustices is to acknowledge it so individuals can take steps to remedy the situation. We should honor our commitment to ensure that citizens, regardless of location, shall not be deprived of life, liberty, or the pursuit of peace.

- 2) We request Pepperdine University consider a monetary donation towards humanitarian relief.***

Please consider donating and encouraging others to donate to these organizations in an effort to further the cause:

- **Armenia Fund** -- [www.armeniafund.org](http://www.armeniafund.org)
- **Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund** -- [www.armenianwoundedheroes.com](http://www.armenianwoundedheroes.com)
- **Armenia Support Fund** -- [www.armeniasupportfund.org](http://www.armeniasupportfund.org)
  - The Armenia Support Fund also has a Homeland Tote available for sale on its website with a saying that translates to "safeguard our homeland". Proceeds from this sale will be donated to help Armenian families during these difficult times.
- **The Paros Foundation** -- [www.parosfoundation.org](http://www.parosfoundation.org)
- **My Step Foundation** -- [www.mystep.foundation/en](http://www.mystep.foundation/en)

- 3) We ask Pepperdine University to encourage student volunteering and to provide Pro Bono clinic service hours.***

Under the current curriculum at the Pepperdine Caruso School of Law, students are required to complete 50 pro bono hours to graduate. This presents an outstanding additional opportunity to get students involved by supporting a humanitarian cause. One such clinic that promises the advocacy of human rights, social justice, and empowerment for vulnerable people around the world is the Community Justice Clinic. We ask Pepperdine Caruso School of Law to please consider adding the Armenian Bar Association among its clients for this clinic as the organization is currently looking for lawyers and law student volunteers for the following committees:

- **Article Review Committee**
  - Review and fact-check news articles.
  - Reach out to authors to propose corrections and offer citations.
  
- **Information Dissemination Committee**
  - Identify individuals in or around the conflict zone who can provide compelling first-hand accounts.
  - Create platforms to allow first-hand accounts to reach broader audiences.
  
- **International Correspondence Committee**
  - Contact organizations to request that they either support Artsakh's defense struggle and stop supporting Azerbaijan's aggression.
  
- **Media Relations Committee**
  - Draft and submit articles and letters to the editor of media.
  
- **Social Media Committee**
  - Identify methods to document, report, and remove inauthentic and inappropriate social media accounts and posts.

Anyone interested in volunteering may reach out to the Armenian Bar Association directly by e-mailing: [info@ArmenianBar.org](mailto:info@ArmenianBar.org).

The Armenian diaspora is filled with such a rich diversity despite losing much of the indigenous land and our struggle for survival in maintaining our ethnic identity. In order to prevent genocide from occurring again, we commit to speaking the truth by spreading awareness and working to ensure that history doesn't repeat itself once again. We hope our Pepperdine community will join us in making this change in support of peace and Christianity.

Respectfully yours,

**Robert Armand Arabian**, Pepperdine Caruso School of Law, Class of 1995 (Former President & Founder of ALSA chapter)

**Areg Bagdasarian**, Graziadio School of Business and Management, Class of 2010

**Dr. Zarik Boghossian**, Pepperdine Professor & Graziadio School of Business and Management, Class of 1993 & Pepperdine Graduate School of Education & Psychology, Class of 2002

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**Ara Krikorian**, Graziadio School of Business and Management, Class of 2013

**Tanya Nagesvaran**, Pepperdine Caruso School of Law, Class of 2018 [Former ALSA President (2017-2018) & VP (2016-2017)]

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Signatories in support of this letter:

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**Clara Fermanian**, Pepperdine University Seaver College, Class of 2022, Current ASA Vice President  
**Ani Harutyunyan**, Pepperdine University Seaver College, Class of 2022 (Current ASA Social Media/PR Chair)  
**Liana Artunian**, Pepperdine University Seaver College, Class of 2024



**Elya Avalyan**, Pepperdine University Seaver College, Class of 2021, ASA Member  
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