An open letter to the UN on the occasion of the opening of the Military Trophy Park in Baku

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Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policy has gained momentum since the signing of the trilateral agreement on November 9, 2020. This is evidenced by the President of Azerbaijan I. Aliyev’s belligerent statements, such as the recently opened Trophy Park in Baku, which displays military equipment looted by Armenians during the war and mannequins of Armenian soldiers. This is aimed at desecrating the memory of the victims of the war, publicly humiliating the missing persons and the captives, violating the rights and dignity of their families.

Siranush Sahakyan, Co-Founder of “Path of Law” NGO, Armand Abrahamian, Chair of the Armenian Community Council of the United Kingdom, Dr. Mark and Mrs. Seymour, Members of the British Armenian Humanitarian Group, Misak Ohanian, President of the Center of Armenian Information and Advice (CIAI), and Dr. Karen Arevian, President of the Tekeyan cultural association (London Chapter), delivered an open letter to UN Secretary General António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres, UN Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet Jeria, CoE Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Matteo Mecacci, Amnesty International Secretary-General Dr Agnès Callamard and Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth.

The letter particularly refers to the photos published by the Office of the President of Azerbaijan earlier this month, in which Aliyev walks in a military uniform in the newly opened Trophy Park next to a pile of helmets of fallen Armenian soldiers.

These photos were widely discussed on social networks and international media.

Aliyev is the only leader in the Caucasus who appears more and more often in military uniform, reminiscent of some of today's notorious dictators. Michael Rubin, a resident scientist at the American Institute of Enterprise (AEI), warns in a recent article: "Is Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan the new Saddam Hussein?"

Since inheriting the country from his father Heidar Aliyev two decades ago, President Aliyev has been consistent in leading a state-sponsored propaganda against Armenian people. His obsessive hatred towards his neighboring country was unleashed already a decade ago. Back in 2014, Aliyev announced on Twitter that Turkey and Azerbaijan were working in a coordinated manner to dispel the myth of the "Armenian Genocide" in the world.

Aliyev’s public demonstrations of hatred and intolerance towards Armenians have only intensified in the aftermath of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in November 2020, which was won with the military support of Turkey and the direct involvement of over 4000 mercenaries from Syria, Pakistan and Afghanistan. In his public speeches Aliyev commonly addresses Armenians as ‘dogs’, ‘rats’ or ‘pests’.

Armenophobia is not only aimed at distracting the Azerbaijani people from the crisis of the totalitarian regime inside the country, but also "feeding" Azerbaijani nationalism.

Azerbaijani propaganda campaigns have even reached the London Underground and have been blocked by the efforts of the British-Armenian community.

During the ‘victory parade’ of 10 December 2020, attended by Turkish President Erdogan in the capital of Azerbaijan, Aliyev announced that parts of Armenia – Zangezur, Lake Sevan, and the capital of Armenia Yerevan – are historically Azerbaijani lands. Meanwhile, the Turkish President paid tribute to one of the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, Enver Pasha, and added that the Karabakh war was only the beginning: "the struggle carried out in the political and military areas will continue now on many other fronts."

The last chord of the anti-Armenian policy and the rooting of anti-Armenian hatred among the people of Azerbaijan, however, is the Trophy Park, which opened in Baku on April 12.

The authors of the letter called the park Aliyev’s version of Disneyland, which is more like a Nazi camp, where the modern "Auschwitz” offers free entry for Azerbaijani children. According to The Times of Israel, this “echoes horrors of Holocaust.”

The authors of the open letter welcomed the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović’s letter to Ilham Aliyev dated 20 April 2021 regarding the Military Trophy Park, but considered it not going far enough. This shameful representation of ethnic and racial discrimination should be outlawed by international organizations and banned immediately.

Armenian Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan also condemned the opening of the Military Trophy Park, calling it "a clear manifestation of fascism."

During the 2021 PACE spring session, while showing the terrifying photos of Aliyev's horror park to the European delegates, the leader of the "Bright Armenia" party Edmon Marukyan stated, that all of this was happening in a PACE member state, that holds over 200 Armenian POWs. He also stated that those photos were not from the past, but from the present time, as Azerbaijan considers it normal to chain people and to present degrading human treatment and torture as regular treatment of POWs. Edmon Marukyan added that, by that action, Aliyev has joined the list of dictators, such as Hitler or Saddam Hussein, who created a memorial with the helmets of some 5,000 Iranian soldiers killed in the late 1980s, calling it the "Victory Arc."

This park is particularly notorious as Azerbaijan continues to hold around 250 Armenian POWs five months after the ceasefire agreement of 9 November 2020, many of whom have already been killed in captivity. One of them was 18-year-old Erik Mkhitaryan, whose remains were identified in early April. Erik’s case was among hundreds taken to the ECtHR by human rights lawyer Siranush Sahakyan of "Path of Law" NGO, when videos of Erik, captured and brutally abused by Azerbaijani soldiers, were distributed on social media last November. It is a disturbing fact that the true number of Armenian POWs will be unknown under Aliyev’s rule.

Time and time again, Aliyev’s totalitarian regime has proven to be a threat for the security for native Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, sovereignty of Armenia and jeopardizes the peace in the Caucasus.

Those who sent the open letter urge world leaders and international organizations to act immediately and:

• compel Azerbaijan to release more than an estimated 200 Armenian military prisoners and civilian hostages;

• impose the immediate closure of Aliyev’s fascist-style, neo-Nazi camp in Baku, where the memory of victims is dishonored and the entire Armenian nation is ridiculed;

• condemn President Aliyev for his ongoing hatred propaganda based solely on ethnicity, inciting the likelihood of further armed conflicts in the region;

• due to the ongoing crisis in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), recognize the right for self-determination of indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh, without which their existence is under threat.

The text of the open letter can be found below.