

OPEN LETTER

António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres, UN Secretary-General

Dr Michelle Bachelet, UN Human Rights Commissioner

Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Dunja Mijatović, Human Rights Commissioner for the Council of Europe

Helga Maria Schmid, Secretary General of the OSCE,

Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE ODIHR

Dr Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch

27 April 2021

Ref: Ban the Military Trophy Park in Baku

Excellencies,

Earlier this month Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's photographs in military uniform walking through a tunnel of dead soldiers' helmets were distributed by his office on social media and circulated in the international press¹. Aliyev is the only leader in Caucasus who increasingly appears in military uniform, reminding some of the notorious dictators of modern history. In his recent article Michael Rubin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), made a warning: 'Is Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev the new Saddam Hussein?'².



President Aliyev, since inheriting the country from his father Heidar Aliyev two decades ago, has been consistent in leading a state-sponsored propaganda against Armenian people. His obsessive hatred towards his neighbouring country was unleashed already a decade ago: 'Armenia as a country is of no value. It is actually a colony, an outpost run from abroad, a territory'³. Back in 2014, Aliyev was declaring on twitter: 'Turkey and Azerbaijan work in a coordinated manner to dispel the myth of the "Armenian genocide" in the world'⁴.

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

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/azerbaijan-dead-soldiers-helmets-armenia-b1831316.html>

² <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/azerbaijan%E2%80%99s-ilham-aliyev-new-saddam-hussein-182853>

³ <https://twitter.com/presidentaz/status/270827003521929216?lang=en>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/presidentaz/status/507430784710361088?lang=en>

was won with the military support of Turkey and direct involvement of over 4000 mercenaries from Syria, Pakistan and Afghanistan. In his public speeches Aliyev commonly addresses Armenians as ‘dogs’, ‘rats’ or ‘pests’. Azerbaijani stamps released after the war, **illustrated the ‘disinfection’ of Nagorno-Karabakh from ethnic Armenians as pests** by men in medical uniforms. Armenophobia is not only targeted to distract from the internal crisis within his totalitarian regime, but also feeds the Azeri nationalism. Azerbaijani propaganda campaigns have even stretched to the London underground, only blocked by the efforts of the British Armenian diaspora⁵.

During the ‘victory parade’ of 10 December 2020, attended by Turkey’s 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 Turkey’s President paid tribute to one of the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, Enver Pasha, and added that the Karabakh war was only the start: "the struggle carried out in the political and military areas will continue now on many other fronts."⁶ Both dictators are certainly left enraged following President Biden’s statement from the White House on 24 April 2021 recognising the mass killings of Armenians in 1915 as Genocide.

However, recently opened ‘military trophies park’ in Baku is the definitive manifestation of Aliyev’s megalomania⁷. On 12 April, Ilham Aliyev, the proud master of the ceremony, ‘inaugurated’ the horror park, his latest ‘magnum opus’ in an hour-long televised ceremony. With wax figures representing ethnic Armenians chained like ‘dogs’ and humiliated by guards, the park welcomes visitors to slap, yell and mock the mannequins representing captured and wounded soldiers⁸. Aliyev’s version of Disneyland, resembling more to a Nazi camp such as Auschwitz, offers free entry for Azerbaijani children. According to *The Times of Israel* this atrocious development ‘echoes horrors of Holocaust’⁹.



While we welcome the letter concerning the trophy park by Mrs. Dunja Mijatović, the Human Rights Commissioner for the Council of Europe to Ilham Aliyev dated 20 April 2021, we think that it does not go far enough. This shameful representation of ethnic and racial discrimination should be outlawed by international organisations and banned immediately.

Armenia’s Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan condemned the opening of the Park as “clear manifestation of fascism”, adding that: “this once again shows that we must not allow ourselves to be numbed by Azerbaijan’s false pacifist programs”¹⁰.

⁵ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/azerbaijan-armenia-posters-removed-tfl-london-b925943.html>

⁶ <https://www.dw.com/en/erdogan-praises-azerbaijans-glorious-victory-calls-for-regime-change-in-armenia/a-55898699>

⁷ <https://www.persecution.org/2021/04/13/azerbaijan-opens-trophy-park-celebrating-genocide/>

⁸ https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=5347051655366518&id=694884177249979

⁹ <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/azerbaijans-dehumanization-of-armenians-echoes-horrors-of-holocaust/>

¹⁰ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31202017.html>

During the spring session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), showing European delegates the gruesome photos of Aliyev's horror park, Edmon Marukyan, the leader of *Bright Armenia* party, stated: 'All of this is happening in a member state of PACE, that holds over 200 Armenian POWs. These photos are not photos from the past, they are current, as Azerbaijan considers normal to chain people and to present degrading human treatment and torture as regular treatment of POWs. You can see children playing with figures of chained soldiers who are languishing and likely being tortured. It is a disgusting show in the 21st century, in a member state of PACE. This disgusting park must be closed. Opening such a park clearly confirms that in Azerbaijan there is institutional hatred towards Armenia and Armenians. By this action Aliyev is joining the list of dictators such as Hitler or Saddam Hussein. This reminds me of Irak in the late 1980s, when another dictator utilised 5000 Iranian helmets of the killed soldiers – ecstatic from the battlefield – to complete the monument that he called “the victory arc”. That man was Saddam Hussein¹¹.

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 Eric Mkhitarian, whose remains were identified in early April. Eric's case was among hundreds taken to the ECtHR by human rights lawyer Siranush Sahakyan of *Path of Law*, when videos of Eric 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 proved to be a threat for the security for native Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, sovereignty of Armenia and jeopardises the peace in the Caucasus. We urge world leaders and international organisations to act immediately:

- **to compel Azerbaijan to release more than an estimated 200 Armenian military prisoners and civilian hostages;**
- **to impose the immediate closure of Aliyev's fascist-style, neo-Nazi camp in Baku, where the memory of victims is dishonoured, the entire Armenian nation is ridiculed;**
- **to 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), to recognise the right for self-determination of indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh, without which, their existence is under threat.**

Armenian Community Council of the United Kingdom, Mr. Armand Abrahamian

British-Armenian Humanitarian Group, Dr. Mark & Mrs. Seymour

Centre for Armenian Information & Advice (CAIA), Hayashen, Misak Ohanian

Tekeyan Cultural Association (London Chapter), Dr. Karen Arevian

Path of Law, Co-Founder, Mrs. Siranush Sahakyan

¹¹ https://youtu.be/W5_LafSg5MM