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AJR-1 Republic of Artsakh. (2023-2024)

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Assembly Joint Resolution No. 1

CHAPTER 123

Relative to the Republic of Artsakh.

[Filed with Secretary of State July 17, 2023.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 1, Holden. Republic of Artsakh.

This measure would condemn Azerbaijan's blockade of the Republic of Artsakh and urge the United States government to take immediate action to assist the Armenians of Artsakh.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, Artsakh is the ancestral homeland of the Armenian people and has been a center of Armenian language, culture, and religion, having maintained its autonomy for over two millennia; and

WHEREAS, The Armenians of Artsakh were targeted during the Armenian Genocide of 1915 by Azerbaijani nationalists with the backing of the Ottoman Empire, where they massacred over 30,000 Armenians in Baku, over 20,000 Armenians in Shushi, and over 10,000 Armenians in Nakhichevan; and

WHEREAS, Artsakh was an integral part of the First Republic of Armenia founded in the wake of the Armenian Genocide due to the advocacy of United States President Woodrow Wilson, who recognized the independence of the fledgling Armenian state; and

WHEREAS, Despite Artsakh's distinctly Armenian identity, it was arbitrarily and illegally separated from Armenia by the Soviet Union at the direction of Joseph Stalin in 1921 and placed under the administrative control of Soviet Azerbaijan; and

WHEREAS, For over 70 years, the Armenians of Artsakh suffered routine discrimination and persecution at the hands of Soviet Azerbaijani authorities culminating in anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait (1988), Kirovabad (1988), and Baku (1990), resulting in hundreds of deaths and the forced displacement of over 400,000 Armenians; and

WHEREAS, In response to escalating anti-Armenian violence, the Armenians of Artsakh exerted their right to self-determination and declared their independence on September 2, 1991, which was reaffirmed by referendum on December 10 of the same year, recognizing that the Azerbaijani government was unable and unwilling to ensure the fundamental rights of the Armenian people; and

WHEREAS, Azerbaijan shortly thereafter launched a war of aggression against Armenia and Artsakh that saw Azerbaijani lay siege to Armenian towns and cities, and perpetrate human rights violations, which ended in Armenian victory with a ceasefire brokered by Russia; and

WHEREAS, For the next 25 years, the Armenians of Artsakh consolidated a free and democratic society despite constant attempts by Azerbaijan to undermine the security and prosperity of the region; and

WHEREAS, In September 2020, Azerbaijan abandoned decades of multilateral diplomacy and launched a war of territorial expansion against the Armenians of Artsakh that resulted in the ethnic cleansing of over 70 percent of Artsakh territory; and

WHEREAS, Azerbaijan perpetrated widely documented human rights abuses, including the unlawful targeting of schools, homes, hospitals, and churches with prohibited weapons, the execution of Armenian civilians, and torture of Armenian prisoners of war; and

WHEREAS, Following a trilateral ceasefire statement signed in November 2020, Azerbaijan's aggression has continued unabated, including routine incursions in Artsakh's territory and the continuous invasions and occupation of the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia since May 2021; and

WHEREAS, Azerbaijan has maintained a total blockade of Artsakh since December 12, 2022, completely severing Artsakh's only humanitarian lifeline to Armenia, preventing the transport of food, fuel, medicine, and other vital humanitarian supplies to the region, and leaving Artsakh's 120,000 Armenians facing critical shortages of life-sustaining goods; and

WHEREAS, The State of California is home to the largest Armenian American population in the United States, and Armenians living in California have enriched our state through their contributions in business, agriculture, academia, government, and the arts; and

WHEREAS, The State of California encouraged and supported the continuing efforts of the Armenians of Artsakh to develop as a free and independent nation in 2014 and has been at the forefront of efforts to raise awareness of the plight of its indigenous Armenian population amidst Azerbaijan's relentless aggression; and

WHEREAS, The United States acknowledged the threat Azerbaijan poses to the Armenians of Artsakh with the passage of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act in 1992, which prohibited the provision of United States assistance to Azerbaijan until the time it ceases all blockades and the offensive use of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh; and

WHEREAS, Azerbaijan remains committed to enacting a policy of ethnic cleansing against the Armenians of Artsakh to impose its will on the Armenian people through the use of coercion, intimidation, and the use of force; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, By the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the State of California unequivocally condemns the illegal and inhumane blockade enforced by Azerbaijan against Artsakh; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature respectfully calls on the President of the United States and the United States Department of State to condemn Azerbaijan's blockade against the Armenian people and immediately take action to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its human rights abuses and war crimes through the enforcement of restrictions on the provision of military assistance to Azerbaijan pursuant to Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, and through the imposition of targeted sanctions on Azerbaijani officials involved directly in the commissioning of war crimes; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature calls on the President of the United States and the United States Agency for International Development to work to immediately facilitate the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance by way of airlift to the Armenians of Artsakh in order to prevent an impending humanitarian catastrophe; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature calls on the Biden administration to introduce a United Nations Security Council resolution to establish a United Nations Mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, consisting of at least 5,000 military personnel and representing at least two permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature reaffirms its support for the continuing efforts of the Armenians of Artsakh to develop as a free and independent nation, urges the President and Congress of the United States to support the self-determination of the Armenians of Artsakh and recognize the democratic independence of the Republic of Artsakh, and calls on the President of the United States and the United States Department of State to engage proactively in multilateral conflict resolution efforts to ensure a lasting resolution to this conflict that ensure the fundamental right to self-determination for the Armenians of Artsakh; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges the United States government to take immediate action to assist the Armenians of Artsakh; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the Secretary of State, to the United States Agency for International Development's Administrator, and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives.