ARMENIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE INTERNATIONAL

DOSSIER

FACT-BASED ANALYTICAL RESOURCE FOR POLICYMAKERS AND THE PUBLIC

THE ARMENIAN HOSTAGES

POWs, Civilians and Political Prisoners Still Held by Azerbaijan

Status, trials, detention conditions and profiles of the 20 Armenians held in Baku

PUBLICATION DATE
2 November 2026

PUBLICATION LOCATION
Yerevan, Armenia

2 November 2026

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Dossier

Updated edition; first published 29 October 2026

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND 2
The conflict in brief 2
How the 20 came to be held 2
CURRENT SITUATION 3
Enforced disappearances 4
Independent humanitarian access and detention conditions 4
Public messages from prison 5
Letters, correspondence and family contact 5
The trials 6
Legal proceedings, ECtHR and cassation 6
Third-country access and official Armenian position 7
International response and advocacy 8
Immediate priorities 10
Sources 11
PROFILES OF THE 20 ARMENIAN HOSTAGES 16
The 20 Armenian Hostages Confirmed to Be Held in Azerbaijan 20

Note on preparation: *This dossier was prepared by the Armenian National Committee–International. An AI assistant was used to help draft and edit the text, to compare statements with the cited source documents, and to format the document. ANC–International directed the analysis, reviewed and edited the text, and is responsible for its content and conclusions.*

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BACKGROUND

The conflict in brief

Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh to Armenians) is a historically Armenian-majority region of the South Caucasus. In 1921 the Soviet authorities placed it within Soviet Azerbaijan, and in 1923 it became an autonomous oblast (Region). [1] In February 1988 its regional council asked to be transferred to Soviet Armenia; the movement was met with anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan, beginning in Sumgait, and violence and expulsions followed on both sides. [2] [3] Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence on 2 September 1991 under the Soviet law on secession, and full-scale war followed. [4] By the ceasefire of May 1994, signed by Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenian forces held most of the region and seven surrounding districts. [5] For the next quarter-century the region functioned as a de facto independent state, from 2017 officially named the Republic of Artsakh. Although Armenia's relationship with Artsakh contained substantial elements of recognition, no UN member state formally recognized it, and talks mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia and the United States, produced no settlement. [6] [7] Clashes along the front line recurred, most seriously in April 2016.

On 27 September 2020 Azerbaijan launched a large-scale offensive. The 44-day war ended with a trilateral statement of 9 November 2020, signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia. Azerbaijan kept the parts of Nagorno-Karabakh it had captured and regained the surrounding districts, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed in the remaining Armenian-held area and along the Lachin corridor, its only road link to Armenia. [8] [9] [10] Article 8 of the statement provided for "an exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detained persons, and bodies of the dead." [9] That exchange was never completed: two men captured in October 2020 are still held in Azerbaijan, and the fate of at least 80 others captured during the war remains unknown. [11] [12]

From 12 December 2022 the Lachin corridor was blocked, first by Azerbaijanis presenting themselves as environmental protesters and, from April 2023, by an Azerbaijani military checkpoint. [13] The region's roughly 120,000 residents faced severe shortages of food, fuel and medicine. [14] In February 2023 the International Court of Justice ordered Azerbaijan to ensure unimpeded movement through the corridor. [15] On 19 September 2023 Azerbaijan launched a military offensive; a ceasefire the next day required Artsakh's forces to disarm. [16] Within days virtually the entire Armenian population, more than 100,000 people, was forcibly expelled. [17]

In August 2025, at the White House, Armenia and Azerbaijan initialled a peace agreement. It has not yet been signed, and it contains no provision on the detainees. [18] [19] [20]

How the 20 came to be held

Detentions at the Azerbaijani checkpoint on the Lachin corridor began before the offensive. On 29 July 2023 Vagif Khachatryan, a 68-year-old resident of Nagorno-Karabakh travelling to Armenia for medical treatment in a group escorted by the ICRC, was detained there; he was released only in January 2026. [21] The 20 Armenians still held fall into four groups:

- The former leadership, detained during and after the exodus: Ruben Vardanyan, a former State Minister, on 27 September 2023 at the checkpoint near the Hakari bridge, while leaving for Armenia with the displaced population in a car driven by Davit Manukyan, a former First Deputy Commander of the Defense Army, who was also detained; former Foreign Minister Davit Babayan on 28 September, in Shushi, where he

had gone at the Azerbaijani authorities' request; former Defense Minister Levon Mnatsakanyan on 29 September, near the checkpoint; three former presidents, Arkadi Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan and Arayik Harutyunyan, and the Speaker of Parliament, Davit Ishkhanyan, on 3 October, in Stepanakert. [11] [22] [23] According to Artsakh lawyer Roman Yeritsyan, Azerbaijan had named five former leaders it wanted handed over (Bako Sahakyan, Arkadi Ghukasyan, Davit Babayan, Ruben Vardanyan and Davit Ishkhanyan) and warned that the mass departure of civilians would be blocked if they tried to leave; Sahakyan, Ghukasyan and Ishkhanyan surrendered after being told that refusal would endanger others. [24]

- Seven men classified as prisoners of war, detained between 19 September and the end of September 2023, and Madat Babayan, a civilian detained in Getavan on 19 September. With seven of the former leaders, these eight make up the 15 tried jointly; Vardanyan was tried separately. [25] [26]
- Two men captured during the 2020 war and classified as prisoners of war, Alyosha Khosrovyan and Lyudvig Mkrtchyan, sentenced in August 2021 to 20 years each.
- Two other civilians: Rashid Beglaryan, detained on 1 August 2023 near Aghavno during the blockade and sentenced in July 2024 to 15 years, and Karen Avanesyan, one of the handful of Armenians who had chosen to stay in Stepanakert, was arrested in September 2025 and sentenced in December 2025 to 16 years. [27] [28]

The 15 were charged under 20 articles of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code, among them planning and waging an aggressive war, genocide, terrorism and its financing, violations of the laws and customs of war, mercenarism and the violent seizure of power. All refused to plead guilty. [25] Vardanyan was charged under 42 provisions. [29] The conduct of the trials is described below.

CURRENT SITUATION

Azerbaijan is currently holding 20 Armenian hostages in the comprehensive count used by ANC–International: civilians, military personnel, and former political and military leaders of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Nineteen were detained in connection with the conflict and make up the figure used by the Armenian side; the twentieth is Karen Avanesyan, an ethnic Armenian resident of Stepanakert arrested on 14 September 2025 and sentenced on 25 December 2025 to 16 years. This is why official Armenian statements and many media reports cite 19. Earlier counts, including the January 2026 resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, refer to 23: four detainees, Vagif Khachatryan, Vigen Euljekjian, Gevorg Sujyan and Davit Davtyan, were released on 14 January 2026. All 20 have been convicted and are serving sentences ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment. [11]

Releases have so far come only as part of political bargains. Thirty-two Armenians were returned in December 2023; the four released on 14 January 2026 were handed over in parallel with Armenia's transfer to Syria, via Türkiye, of two Syrian nationals captured during the 2020 war while fighting for Azerbaijan and serving life sentences in Armenia for mercenarism, a sequence the Armenian Legal Center described as "a prisoner exchange, not an unconditional humanitarian act." [30] [31] [32]

As of 2 November 2026, no further release or transfer of Armenian detainees, no ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on the admissibility or merits of the applications, and no independent international humanitarian visit has been publicly confirmed. The central concerns remain release and repatriation, independent access,

health and detention conditions, family and legal contact, correspondence, and effective domestic and international remedies.

Enforced disappearances

The confirmed detainees should be distinguished from cases of enforced disappearance. The International and Comparative Law Center has documented at least 80 Armenians captured during the 2020 war whose captivity Azerbaijan denies and whose fate or whereabouts remain unknown; the Armenian Legal Center also counts more than 200 persons from Artsakh missing since 2020. [12] [33] [34] The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has transmitted such cases to Azerbaijan, including six in January 2025; according to the Center, Azerbaijan's replies, most recently on 18 persons in February 2026, have been formal and show no concrete investigative steps. [35] [33] Those cases are pursued separately through international mechanisms and are not included in the confirmed total of 20.

Independent humanitarian access and detention conditions

Azerbaijan required the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to close its delegation in September 2025. Geneva-based ICRC representatives nevertheless visited conflict-related detainees on 24–25 December 2025, met them in private, assessed treatment, health and detention conditions, and facilitated family contact. The ICRC identifies that as its last visit. No subsequent independent international humanitarian visit has been publicly confirmed in 2026. [36]

The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited Azerbaijan from 22 September to 3 October 2025. According to Sahakyan, its delegation went to all the facilities holding Armenians and met them; its report was delivered in 2026 but has not been published, because Azerbaijan has not consented. [37] [38] In 2024 the UN Committee against Torture found the "routine use of torture and ill-treatment" in Azerbaijan, expressed deep concern about violations against prisoners of war and other protected persons of Armenian origin, and called for ICRC access to all places where prisoners of war may be held. [39]

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reported in October 2026 that, according to Armenian officials, Azerbaijani prison officials had violated the religious freedom of 19 Armenian prisoners, denying them Bibles, requiring them to read the Quran and forcibly burning off their Christian tattoos; Azerbaijan's human rights commissioner maintained that all the prisoners' rights were ensured. In its 2026 Annual Report, the Commission recommended that the State Department keep Azerbaijan on its Special Watch List. [40] [41]

Siranush Sahakyan, who represents Armenian detainees before the ECtHR, says there have been no family visits and that physical contact with the outside world has effectively ceased. Telephone calls are limited and monitored, video calls are unavailable, and independent medical assessments are not available. She has alleged beatings resulting in serious injuries, including fractures, religiously targeted abuse and inadequate medical care. Azerbaijan's Human Rights Commissioner, Sabina Aliyeva, has rejected allegations of torture and religious discrimination and says the detainees receive medical care, books, telephone access and monitoring by her office. In the absence of independent access, current conditions cannot be independently verified. [42] [43]

Released prisoners' accounts point the same way. Vigen Euljekjian, freed in January 2026

after 1,891 days in captivity, has described beatings after his capture that left him with hearing loss and spinal damage, about four years alone in a cell at Gobustan prison, and inadequate food, water and medical care. [44]

Human Rights Watch, on 21 September, said it could not independently verify the prisoners' allegations but called on Azerbaijan to ensure regular family contact, letters and parcels, adequate medical care and daily outdoor exercise, and to permit regular ICRC access. [43]

Public messages from prison

- **Davit Manukyan —** in an audio message released on 20 July, 2026, his first public statement from captivity, he said the charges against the 15 were directed "against the past and present of the Armenian people," asked to learn "the official position of the Republic of Armenia regarding the status of those of us being held here," and said: "Those imprisoned here do not feel the presence of the Republic of Armenia." [45]
- **Ruben Vardanyan** — in a public appeal recorded on 16 September, he described restrictions on telephone and video calls, medical examinations, notarial services, exercise and written responses to complaints; he also emphasized the prisoners' increased isolation after the ICRC closure and asked the Azerbaijani Ombudsperson to meet them. [46]
- **Davit Ishkhanyan** — in a public audio statement from Umbaki, he confirmed that the Azerbaijani Ombudsperson had met the prisoners three times, most recently on 5 May, but said they had raised extensive unresolved rights concerns. He also said the prisoners and their lawyers had not received the full February trial judgment and that lawyer access remained problematic. [47]
- **Davit Babayan** — in an audio message released on 1 October, he said that on 18 September the prisoners received an electronic appellate decision comprising 47 volumes, without signatures or official authentication. He said the decision reproduced the prosecution's case and the first-instance judgment almost word for word, that his own statements and defence arguments had been edited out, and that the final, 333-page volume containing the court's reasoning had not been provided to the defense. He knew at the time of cassation appeals filed by lawyers for three defendants, without meeting their clients. [48] [49]

> *These first-hand messages are rare direct testimony from inside detention. They cannot be independently verified while access remains closed, but they are consistent with the accounts of lawyers, released prisoners and human rights organizations; they form an important part of the evidentiary and advocacy record.*

Letters, correspondence and family contact

On 1 October, the Artsakh Union handed the Armenian government 1,254 letters collected internationally through an initiative launched by Veronika Zonabend, Ruben Vardanyan's wife, asking the government to find a channel to deliver them to the prisoners. On 15 October, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan suggested that the letters be sent through ordinary postal services. HayPost and DHL subsequently confirmed that they do not provide postal or parcel service from Armenia to Azerbaijan; HayPost said such service is not currently available. [50] [51] [52] Sahakyan said on 29 October that formal letters sent to the Azerbaijani authorities had always been refused in writing, on the grounds that there is no communication between the two countries, and that these refusals had been submitted to international bodies. [53]

On 21 October, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said the letters should reach their addressees and stressed that every person deprived of liberty has a right to communication and visits regardless of the status or terminology applied to them. He said Armenia raises these issues directly with Azerbaijan and through third countries. [54]

The trials

Sixteen of the 20 were tried before the Baku Military Court in two cases: the joint trial of 15, which opened on 17 January 2025 and ran to more than 150 hearings, and Ruben Vardanyan's separate trial of nearly 60 hearings. [30] [29] The proceedings followed the same pattern:

- **a military court trying civilians**, in hearings largely closed to independent observers, foreign media and families; [55] [56]
- **422 volumes of case files, about 105,000 pages**, most without adequate translation, with defence requests for access, translation, time and contact with clients rejected or delayed; [57]
- **lawyers of the defendants' choosing excluded**: the detainees cannot sign powers of attorney for Armenian or international lawyers, and Vardanyan's state-appointed Azerbaijani lawyer has recently also been denied access; [58]
- **final statements cut short**: Davit Ishkhanyan says he was prevented from delivering 30–40% of his, and Davit Babayan says his written statement was confiscated during a prison transfer; [59] [60]
- **verdicts not read in full and, months later, still not provided to the defendants**, their families or their lawyers, so that appeals were filed on extracts; [61] [62]
- **senior officials, including President Ilham Aliyev, calling the defendants "terrorists" and "war criminals"** before any verdict. [57]

The International Commission of Jurists concluded that the trials "fall short of the guarantees of fairness, equality of arms, and public scrutiny required under international human rights law and standards." [55] President Aliyev has compared them to the Nuremberg trials; an analysis by the International and Comparative Law Center and the Armenian Legal Center finds that they meet none of the eight criteria that defined Nuremberg. [63]

ANC–International's Special Report of 27 October 2026, based on the published indictment and judgment in Vardanyan's case, shows what this pattern means in a single case: a 14-year sentence under an article never charged, more than 2,000 forensic medical reports cited without one mentioning him, and three decades of conflict attributed to one man. [29] Its Armenian-language companion volume, «ժողովածու», reprints Taron Simonyan's 15-part legal analysis of the judgment. [64]

Legal proceedings, ECtHR and cassation

The Baku Military Court sentenced the 15 Armenians tried jointly on 5 February 2026 to terms ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment. The Baku Court of Appeal upheld those sentences on 6 August. Ruben Vardanyan was tried separately and sentenced to 20 years on 17 February. [65] [62]

An application concerning Vardanyan, who chose not to appeal in Azerbaijan, was lodged with the ECtHR on 19 July, and a group application on behalf of the 15 jointly tried Armenians was lodged on 21 August. [66] [57] The Court has applied interim measures requiring Azerbaijan to report on the detainees' conditions and health; on 9 April 2026 it

rejected Azerbaijan's latest request to lift them and ordered it to submit, by 31 August, recent medical records and copies or summaries of the verdicts with the courts' reasoning. [67] According to counsel, Azerbaijan's September submission was incomplete: full judgments requested by the Court were not provided, and the latest photographs showed detention facilities but not the prisoners themselves. Denial of consular visitation has also been raised before the ECtHR. The applicants' observations were due by 6 October; no information has been made public on the Court's response, if any. The Court may request further information or find that Azerbaijan has failed to comply. [68]

Cassation appeals in the case of the 15 have been lodged with Azerbaijan's Supreme Court. When Babayan spoke on 1 October, he knew of appeals filed for three defendants and said he did not know when the Court would hear the case. Further cassation appeals have since been lodged; no hearing date has been announced. [49] Sahakyan says the Azerbaijani state-appointed lawyers did not possess the complete appellate judgment when appeals were filed, resulting in generalized appeals based on extracts. Vardanyan did not pursue a domestic appeal: he regarded the proceedings as staged and domestic remedies as ineffective, and his family stressed that the decision did not mean acceptance of the verdict or a waiver of his right to a defence. His conviction is therefore final under Azerbaijani law. [61] [66] [48] [58]

Proceedings have also been brought before UN mechanisms: in April 2026 a petition was filed with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of seven of the detainees, asking it to declare their detention arbitrary. [69] The peace agreement initialled in Washington contains no provision on the detainees, and its Article 15 requires the two states to withdraw their interstate complaints within one month of its entry into force. [20]

Third-country access and official Armenian position

Armenia has sought third-country involvement both to obtain humanitarian or consular access and to advance the prisoners' release, but no third-country visit has taken place. On 21 October, 2026, Mirzoyan said Armenia had approached third countries and that this avenue had not worked: some had refused, while others, he said, had been told to "stay away." He did not identify the countries or who had allegedly discouraged their involvement. He also said he "honestly" did not understand why Azerbaijan was delaying release and that the continued detention does not contribute to peace. [70] [54] Answering MP Lilit Galstyan in the National Assembly on 28 October, he said Armenia, which has no representation in Azerbaijan, had asked partner states to provide consular assistance, including visits to the prisoners, but Azerbaijan had told them to "stay away"; he declined to name them because Armenia would continue working with them. "Do you want the bitter reality? This is it," he said, adding that Armenia's path on the prisoners "runs directly through our dialogue with Azerbaijan." [71] [72] [73] Sahakyan noted that the official statements do not name the countries approached, which makes the claim impossible to verify, and said that NGO correspondence with the Swiss authorities in 2025 and 2026 gave no indication that Switzerland was unwilling to provide humanitarian assistance. [53] On 2 November, Vahagn Alexanyan, one of the two deputy chairs of the ruling Civil Contract party, said the prisoner issue was separate from the solutions envisaged in the peace process and, in his view, "should be resolved even before that." [74]

Sahakyan has separately stated that Switzerland had indicated willingness to undertake a consular or humanitarian mission, and in October said she held an official Swiss reply to that effect. [42] [58] When more than 40 Armenian NGOs asked Switzerland to mediate in

March 2025, the Swiss authorities replied that they would offer their good offices only if both parties requested it. [75] The absence of any successful third-country mechanism remains one of the principal access gaps.

International response and advocacy

- **18 March 2025** — at a side event of the UN Human Rights Council organized by the European Centre for Law and Justice and Christian Solidarity International, lawyers called for the immediate and unconditional release of the Armenian prisoners and warned against the closure of the ICRC delegation in Baku. [76]
- **March** — the UK Government told the House of Lords: "We also continue to call for the release of all remaining prisoners of war," adding that it had urged Azerbaijan to ensure fair trials and safe conditions for those detained. [77]
- **1 April** — the UK Parliament's All-Party Parliamentary Group for Armenia urged ministers to "put pressure on Azerbaijan to help achieve" the release of the Armenian prisoners and expressed particular concern for Ruben Vardanyan's health. [78]
- **15 January 2026** — Canada welcomed the release of four Armenian prisoners as "a positive step toward a just and durable peace" and said it looked forward to "additional prisoner releases". [79]
- **January** — the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, by 75 votes to 1, urged Azerbaijan to release all those detained on politically motivated charges, "including 23 Armenian detainees". [80]
- **3 February** — the French National Assembly, by 183 votes to 0, condemned the "arbitrary imprisonment and trial" of Artsakh's political leaders and demanded their immediate and unconditional release. [56]
- **5 February** — the ARF Bureau called the joint trial "a judicial farce that lasted more than a year," described those sentenced as "de facto hostages in Azerbaijan's hands," and pledged to "continue our struggle to secure the release of all Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan." [81]
- **11 February** — the Socialist International expressed "outrage and deep concern" at the 5 February verdicts and called on Azerbaijan to "release all Armenian detainees in Azerbaijan's custody." [82]
- **15 April** — at the annual commemoration on Capitol Hill, members of Congress from both parties called for the immediate release of the Armenian prisoners; Senator Adam Schiff noted that the peace agreement "does not even mention the prisoners of war that Azerbaijan continues to hold." [83]
- **30 April** — Armenian human rights organizations, in an open letter to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa, asked the EU to secure the release of the Armenian prisoners held in Baku. [84]
- **30 April** — the European Parliament, by 476 votes to 47, condemned Azerbaijan's "unjust detention" of Armenian prisoners of war, detainees and hostages and demanded their immediate and unconditional release. [85]
- **1 May** — ahead of the first Armenia–EU summit in Yerevan, Baroness Cox of Queensbury, a member of the House of Lords, wrote in an open letter that the plight of the "hostage prisoners and Prisoners of War from Armenia and Artsakh" could not "be put to one side by anyone who wishes … for a just and lasting peace," and that justice, peace and closer co-operation "surely demand that the EU also give this issue their highest priority." [86]
- **24 June** — at a Capitol Hill press conference marking 1,000 days of detention,

Representative Brad Sherman said: “There can be no lasting peace until each and every Armenian POW and political prisoner is freed.” [87]

- **29 June** — North American Armenian Youth Federation regions marked the 1,000th day in captivity of most of the hostages, insisting that any agreement must include their release. [34]
- **14 July** — at a conference in the European Parliament hosted by MEPs Costas Mavrides and Miriam Lexmann, participants called on the EU to use its diplomatic, political and economic tools to secure the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners and hostages. [88] [89]
- **22 July** — the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee adopted, 44 to 7, an amendment calling on Azerbaijan to release all Armenian prisoners of war and political prisoners immediately and unconditionally. [90]
- **20–22 September** — in a joint statement and at the UN Human Rights Council, Christian Solidarity International, the World Evangelical Alliance and the European Centre for Law and Justice called for “the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian detainees held by Azerbaijan, and full ICRC access to any hostages who remain in custody.” [91] [92]
- **21 September** — Human Rights Watch publicly raised alleged rights violations and called for regular ICRC access, family contact, medical care, correspondence and outdoor exercise. [43]
- **September** — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan raised the return of the detainees in his address to the UN General Assembly. [93]
- **28 September** — at a Yerevan discussion, “Three Years in Prison: Peace and Armenian Prisoners,” Anna Melikyan of Protection of Rights Without Borders said: “We cannot speak of lasting, enduring or genuine peace while there are Armenian hostages.” [93]
- **29 September** — at a Human Rights Council side event in Geneva, legal and civil-society advocates raised detention conditions, the absence of a prisoner-release clause in the initialled Armenia–Azerbaijan peace agreement, and the risk that interstate litigation could end while individual rights violations remain unresolved. [20] Sahakyan said that Azerbaijan had not allowed a single meeting between her and her clients. [94]
- **30 September / 7 October** — Armenian parliamentarian Lilit Galstyan asked the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to organize an urgent humanitarian mission to Baku to meet the prisoners; she reiterated the request at the Assembly’s Autumn Meeting in Andorra. No mission has been authorized. [95]
- **2 October** — 25 French political figures from across the political spectrum published a Le Figaro appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners. [96]
- **5–9 October** — 101 U.S. lawmakers (26 Senators and 75 Representatives) urged Secretary of State Marco Rubio to prioritize release and to withhold U.S. military assistance from Azerbaijan if it remained uncooperative. [97]
- **8 October** — the European Parliament adopted a resolution by 492 votes to 23, with 60 abstentions, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Armenian political prisoners and prisoners of war and linking future EU–Azerbaijan relations to tangible human-rights improvements. [98]
- **15 October** — UN Secretary-General António Guterres, asked in Yerevan about the detainees, called on the parties to implement all provisions of the peace agreement as quickly as possible and described the issue as “a matter of great interest to us,” without

announcing any concrete steps. The initialled peace agreement itself contains no explicit prisoner-release clause. [99]

- **16 October** — at the international conference *Freedom, Justice & Reintegration for Armenian prisoners detained in Baku or those released.* in Yerevan, organized by the Covcas Center for Law and Conflict Resolution as part of its LIBERTAS campaign, lawyers, mental-health specialists and advocates addressed the detainees' treatment, the obstacles to consular access and the needs of released prisoners. Armenian government ministries invited to the conference did not attend. The organizers announced proposals to the government and parliament, including a special legal status for captives and returned captives. [58] [100] [101]
- **October** — legal and civil-society advocacy expanded through Washington, the UCLA Promise Institute, Geneva, Toronto and Montreal; direct political outreach also continued in Brussels, including discussion of the prisoners with senior European political-group representatives. [42] [66]
- **22–23 October** — the City of Nice held a public ceremony for the Armenian prisoners. Mayor Éric Ciotti called for their immediate release and said he would propose granting the 20 prisoners honorary citizenship of Nice. [102]
- **24 October** — Armenia returned to Azerbaijan Yashar Kasimov, an Azerbaijani civilian found in Tavush Province on 19 October after becoming lost; no Armenian detainee was released in return. [103] [104] Siranush Sahakyan welcomed the unconditional return as a humanitarian act, contrasted it with Azerbaijan's treatment of Armenian detainees, including the civilian Rashid Beglaryan, and called on Azerbaijan to release innocent Armenians without seeking concessions from Armenia. [105]

Azerbaijan rejects international criticism of the prosecutions and maintains that the detainees were convicted of serious crimes. Its parliament has criticized European and U.S. interventions as biased or politically motivated. It also points to an opinion of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (No. 46/2024), adopted before Vardanyan's trial, which found his detention not arbitrary; human rights organizations have asked the UN to set that opinion aside, alleging that one of the Working Group's members had a conflict of interest arising from ties to Azerbaijan. [106] [107] [108]

Immediate priorities

- Immediate and unconditional release and repatriation of all 20 Armenian hostages, ideally without exchanges or political concessions.
- Pending release, regular access by the ICRC or another independent international humanitarian mechanism, including independent medical assessment.
- Publication of the report of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture on its 2025 visit.
- Unrestricted family contact, video and telephone communication, correspondence, parcels, and effective access to legal counsel and case materials.
- Delivery of the 1,254 letters already collected for the prisoners and establishment of a reliable continuing correspondence channel.
- Full compliance with ECtHR information requests and interim measures, including complete judgments, medical records and reliable information on each detainee's physical condition.
- Effective investigation and clarification of the fate and whereabouts of Armenians documented as forcibly disappeared.

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PROFILES OF THE 20 ARMENIAN HOSTAGES

1. Arkadi Ghukasyan

Date/place of birth	22 June 1957 — Stepanakert, NKAO (Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast/Region)
Position held and years	President of the Republic of Artsakh (1997–2007)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	3 October 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; Stepanakert
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 20 years

2. Bako Sahakyan

Date/place of birth	30 August 1960 — Stepanakert, NKAO
Position held and years	President of the Republic of Artsakh (2007–2020)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	3 October 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; Stepanakert
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 20 years

3. Arayik Harutyunyan

Date/place of birth	14 December 1973 — Stepanakert, NKAO
Position held and years	President of the Republic of Artsakh (2020–2023)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	3 October 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; Stepanakert
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — Life imprisonment

4. Davit Ishkhanyan

Date/place of birth	27 December 1968 — Ashan, NKAO
Position held and years	Speaker (President) of the National Assembly of the Republic of Artsakh (7 August 2023 – 21 May 2025; in office in Stepanakert until his arrest on 3 October 2023)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	3 October 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; Stepanakert
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — Life imprisonment

5. Ruben Vardanyan

Date/place of birth	25 May 1968 — Yerevan, Armenia
Position held and years	State Minister of the Republic of Artsakh (2022–2023)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	27 September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; near the Hakari (Akari) Bridge while trying to leave Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	17 February 2026 — 20 years

6. Davit Babayan

Date/place of birth	5 April 1973 — Stepanakert, NKAO
Position held and years	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh (2021–2023)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	28 September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; in Shushi where he went as requested by the Azerbaijani authorities "for an investigation"
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — Life imprisonment

7. Levon Mnatsakanyan

Date/place of birth	14 September 1965 — Stepanakert, NKAO
Position held and years	Minister of Defense of the Republic of Artsakh (2015–2018)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	29 September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; detained near the Lachin checkpoint while trying to leave Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — Life imprisonment

8. Davit Manukyan

Date/place of birth	15 October 1971 — Jermuk, Armenia
Position held and years	First Deputy Commander, Artsakh Defense Army (2019–2022)
Type of prisoner	Political prisoner
Arrest	27 September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; near the Hakari (Akari) Bridge while trying to leave Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia with Ruben Vardanyan
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — Life imprisonment

9. Alyosha Khosrovyan

Date/place of birth	28 March 1967 — Kapan, Armenia
Occupation	Driver / Farmer
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	3 October 2020; by the Azerbaijani military
Trial court / start	2 June 2021; Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Sentencing / sentence	2 August 2021 — 20 years (first 10 years in prison; next 10 years corrective labor)

10. Lyudvig Mkrtchyan

Date/place of birth	5 December 1969 — Masis, Armenia
Occupation	Shoemaker / Construction worker
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	20 October 2020; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	2 June 2021; Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Sentencing / sentence	2 August 2021 — 20 years (first 10 years in prison; next 10 years corrective labor)

11. Rashid Beglaryan

Date/place of birth	2 November 1962 — Askeran Region, NKAO
Occupation	Driver
Type of prisoner	Civilian
Arrest	1 August 2023; captured by the State Security Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan during the blockade of Artsakh, when he was lost near the village of Aghavno
Trial court / start	Sabunchu District Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Sentencing / sentence	12 July 2024 — 15 years

12. Madat Babayan

Date/place of birth	15 September 1952 — Getavan, NKAO
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Civilian
Arrest	19 September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; Getavan
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 19 years

13. Levon Balayan

Date/place of birth	1978 — place n/a
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	End of September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 16 years

14. Vasili Beglaryan

Date/place of birth	1993 — place n/a
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	End of September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 15 years

15. Davit Allahverdyan

Date/place of birth	1988 — place n/a
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	End of September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 16 years

16. Garik Martirosyan

Date/place of birth	1972 — place n/a
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	End of September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 18 years

17. Melikset Pashayan

Date/place of birth	1971 — Sznek, NKAO
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	End of September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 19 years

18. Gurgen Stepanyan

Date/place of birth	1987 — place n/a
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	End of September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 15 years

19. Erik Ghazaryan

Date/place of birth	1985 — place n/a
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Prisoner of war
Arrest	End of September 2023; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service
Trial court / start	Baku Military Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 17 January 2025
Sentencing / sentence	5 February 2026 — 15 years

20. Karen Avanesyan

Date/place of birth	1967 — place n/a
Occupation	n/a
Type of prisoner	Civilian
Arrest	14 September 2025; by the Azerbaijani State Security Service; Stepanakert. He is one of the few ethnic Armenians who remained in Artsakh after the 2023 ethnic cleansing
Trial court / start	Ganja Court on Grave Crimes of the Republic of Azerbaijan; 11 December 2025
Sentencing / sentence	25 December 2025 — 16 years

For more information: https://freearmenianhostages.net

The 20 Armenian Hostages Confirmed to Be Held in Azerbaijan

2 November 2026


Arkadi Ghukasyan


Bako Sahakyan


Arayik Harutyunyan


Davit Ishkhanyan


Ruben Vardanyan


Davit Babayan


Levon Mnatsakanyan


Davit Manukyan


Alyosha Khosrovyan


Lyudvig Mkrtchyan


Rashid Beglaryan


Madat Babayan


Levon Balayan


Vasili Beglaryan


Davit Allahverdyan


Garik Martirosyan


Melikset Pashayan


Gurgen Stepanyan


Erik Ghazaryan


Karen Avanesyan