

Press Release

THE INTERNMENT OF KAREN AVANESYAN IN AZERBAIJAN

BRINGS THE OFFICIAL NUMBER OF ARMENIAN STATE HOSTAGES TO 20



Karen Avanesyan

16 march 2026

Six months ago, the security forces of Azerbaijan arrested Karen Avanesyan, one of the last **inhabitants of Stepanakert**, the capital of the self-determined Republic of Artsakh, who had remained there in September 2023 after the ethnic cleansing of the entire Armenian population.

Accused of having plotted an attack against Azerbaijani President Aliyev, **Avanesyan is nevertheless known to his fellow citizens as a peaceful man who never took up arms, suffering from physical and mental disabilities**, sensitive to the suffering of animals which he cared for in all circumstances.

For LIBERTAS, the accusation of terrorism against Karen Avanesyan carries the official message of Azerbaijan: **the impossibility for Armenians to live on their ancestral lands**. With the return to Armenia, two months ago, of the remaining forcibly displaced Armenians – about twenty elderly, disabled and invalid people – **this criminalisation completes the plan of ethnic cleansing through the appropriation of their property, their lands and their heritage**.

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Karnig Kerkonian

LIBERTAS congratulates Karnig Kerkonian* for his address delivered on 16 March 2026 before the **UN Human Rights Council**, in which he denounced the expulsion of the last Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, the destruction of cultural heritage and **the arbitrary detention of Karen Avanesyan and the 19 other Armenian state hostages.**

LIBERTAS demands the immediate release of Karen Avanesyan and all Armenian hostages, as well as the safe return of the displaced persons to their lands.

***Karnig Kerkonian** is an international lawyer, a member of the Committee for the Defense of the Fundamental Rights of the Nagorno-Karabakh People (CDFRNKP), set up by the Nagorno Karabakh parliament in exile, a member of the board of advisors of Christian Solidarity International (CSI).

This Karnig Kerkonian's statement was co-sponsored by three non-governmental organizations: the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ), and Jubilee Campaign

Video of Karnig Kerkonian's address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVvzp9Ca6Rk>

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Text of Karnig Kerkonian's speech:

««Mr. Vice President, I'm Karnig Kerkonian, member of the advisory board of Christian Solidarity International and the committee for the defense of the fundamental rights of the Nagorno-Karabakh people. After forcibly displacing 150,000 indigenous Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan continues to block their safe return in violation of the ICJ order of 17 November 2023. In fact, just two months ago, Azerbaijan expelled the last 11 Armenians remaining in Nagorno-Karabakh. But this is not enough, Mr. Vice President. Azerbaijan continues to destroy Armenian cultural and religious heritage in defiance of the ICJ order of 7 December 2021, seeking to erase even the evidence of our people's presence in Nagorno-Karabakh, a presence spanning more than 4,000 years. Azerbaijan today arbitrarily detains 20 Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, subjecting them to torture and sham trials without access to counsel or even the evidence against them. By expelling the Red Cross, Azerbaijan has stripped these detainees of all independent humanitarian oversight. These violations demand a response from this council. Mr. Vice President, the elected representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh stand ready to participate in the peace forum mandated by the Swiss parliament last year. We ask the Human Rights Council to stand with our people as we seek the most fundamental of human rights, the right to return to our indigenous homeland. Thank you».

Hilda Tchoboian—Coordinator of LIBERTAS

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