

PRESS RELEASE

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One year after Azerbaijan's invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh, victims file complaint to ICC Prosecutor for crimes against humanity

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A year after Azerbaijan attacked the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh and forced the displacement of almost its entire population of over 100,000, a complaint for crimes against humanity has been filed with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on behalf of two of the victims.

In association with the Tufenkian Foundation and the *Association de soutien à l'Artsakh*, lawyers François Zimeray and Catalina de la Sota are representing Artak Beglaryan and Gegham Stepanyan. Artak Beglaryan and Gegham Stepanyan both held human rights-related public positions within the institutions of Nagorno-Karabakh and were among the more than 100,000 people deported.

They had experienced deprivations of food and health care following a nine-month blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh which began in December 2022. That was followed by a lightning invasion by Azerbaijan's military on September 19th, 2023, and a forced displacement of the population from the territory.

Several other leaders and residents who were unable to flee Nagorno-Karabakh were arrested by the Azerbaijani authorities and have since been detained, subjected to torture and ill-treatment and denied access to their families and lawyers.

For their lawyers François Zimeray and Catalina de la Sota, "***Nothing justifies the forcible uprooting of men, women and children from their home and land. The world must say no to this political bestiality. This is what is at stake in the complaint we are filing.***"

The complaint, known formally as a "communication", was filed in accordance with Article 15 of the Rome Statute establishing the court, under which the Prosecutor may open an investigation in light of information brought to his attention. For the lawyers "***the deportation of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh bears all the hallmarks of a crime against humanity. It was the forcible displacement of persons from the area in which they were lawfully present without grounds permitted under international law, as part of a widespread attack against the civilian population with full knowledge of it. All the conditions are present to ensure that those responsible are held accountable before international criminal justice.***"

Factual background

Nagorno-Karabakh is an enclave of ethnic Armenians in Azerbaijan which has long been autonomously governed *de facto*.

From December 2022, the Lachin corridor, which is the only road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, was blocked by groups linked to the Azerbaijani government. This left the Nagorno-Karabakh people in total isolation, with growing shortages of food, medicines and other essentials.

On 19 September 2023, Azerbaijan attacked Nagorno-Karabakh, heavily bombarding the enclave and launching a ground offensive. 24 hours after the beginning of the invasion, a ceasefire agreement was signed and Azerbaijan took full control of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In light of the speed of the Azerbaijani offense, the number of dead, wounded and internally displaced and the threats of violence and ethnic cleansing circulating, the population was in a state of alarm and had no other choice but to leave Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, over 100 000 ethnic Armenians were forced to flee, representing almost the entire ethnic Armenian population of the area before the offensive.

Most of the deportees found refuge in the Republic of Armenia, a State party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Deportation or forcible transfer of population is a crime against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute. The ICC therefore has jurisdiction to open an investigation into the deportation of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 and to try the individuals responsible.

- About Zimeray & Finelle Avocats -

Zimeray & Finelle is an international law firm combining legal and diplomatic expertise in the fields of human rights and criminal law.

François Zimeray, is a lawyer at the Paris and Geneva Bars, and is accredited to the International Criminal Court. He formerly served as French Human Rights Ambassador-at-large and then as Ambassador to Denmark. Called to the Paris Bar in 1987, François Zimeray has extensive experience in dealing with complex international legal challenges, for individuals, corporations and governments. He practiced for over 20 years in a leading French law firm and was also a member of the Legal Commission of the European Parliament. In September 2018, he partnered with Jessica Finelle to create Zimeray & Finelle. At the same time, he joined the renowned human rights law firm Doughty Street Chambers as associate tenant.

Catalina de la Sota is a lawyer at the Paris Bar, practising mainly in national and international criminal law. She is involved in numerous cases where human rights are at stake, both before the courts and before international bodies. She recently submitted a communication to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as a complaint to a specialised court for abduction abroad. She also regularly represents individuals seeking political asylum in France before the *Cour Nationale du Droit d'Asile*.

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