

# Azerbaijan accused of torture and ethnic cleansing

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A global human rights organization called on the United States to enforce sanctions against Azerbaijan for torturing prisoners of war and targeting Armenian Christians.

Meanwhile, the president of another human rights group blasted the International Olympic Commission for giving tacit support to Azerbaijani perpetrators of “ethnic cleansing.”

International Christian Concern, an ecumenical Christian group focused on the persecution of religious minorities, filed [formal sanctions requests against Azerbaijan](#) with the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Treasury.

Filed under the [Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act](#), ICC asked the government agencies to ban Azerbaijani travel to the United States and freeze assets of high-level officials.

ICC cited the torture and other mistreatment of Armenian prisoners of war and accused the Azerbaijani government officials of stirring up hatred against Armenian Christians.

“The reported cruelty committed against the POWs was consistent and atrocious,” said ICC’s lead investigator for what the organization termed “a comprehensive, months-long investigation” into Azerbaijan’s treatment of Armenian POWs from 2020 to 2021. The investigation included reviewing hundreds of pages of sworn testimony by victims.

“While we recognize the complexities and longstanding hostility between

Azerbaijan and Armenia, the blatant attacks and targeting of POWs and Christians were undeniable,” the lead investigator said.

## **International Olympic Committee criticized**

Azerbaijan and Armenia have battled for decades over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, also known as Artsakh. Azerbaijani military forces—aided by foreign mercenaries—attacked Armenian forces stationed in the region in September 2020.

Even after agreeing to a Russian-brokered peace treaty, Azerbaijan blocked humanitarian aid to Nagorno-Karabakh for nine months before eventually seizing control last September. More than 100,000 Armenians were displaced.

After the close of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, Christian Solidarity International President John Eibner [criticized the International Olympic Committee](#) for “providing political support to the perpetrators” of “ethnic cleansing” in Nagorno-Karabakh.

CSI noted the IOC banned Russian and Belarusian national teams from participating in the Paris Games because of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, but it took no action against Azerbaijan for its actions in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In June, CSI had launched its “[#BanAzerbaijan](#)” campaign in response to the military campaign against Nagorno-Karabakh’s ancient Armenian Christian population. CSI maintained the campaign was ordered by Ilham Aliyev, president of Azerbaijan and of the nation’s Olympic committee.

After a French television announcer referred to “the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh” during the entry of the Armenian athletes, CSI said David

MacLeod, director of national Olympic Committee relations for the IOC, wrote an Aug. 2 letter of apology to Azerbaijan's ministry of sport and its Olympic committee.

MacLeod reportedly assured Azerbaijan "clear indications have been delivered to avoid any future references using similar terms."

"It is clear from this message that the IOC is using its influence to cover up the Aliyev regime's atrocity crimes in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is a shameful indication of the IOC's true priorities," Eibner said.

"CSI will continue to campaign for accountability for the architects of the Karabakh Genocide, for the right of Karabakh Armenians to return to their homeland and live there in freedom, and for the freedom of Armenian hostages."

## **Azerbaijan named among worst offenders**

In its annual report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom added Azerbaijan to its list of 17 "[worst of the worst](#)" violators of freedom of religion or belief. The report cited a nongovernmental organization that documented 183 individuals who were "wrongly imprisoned in connection with their religious beliefs, activities or activism."

"In addition, authorities are regularly accused of torturing or threatening sexual violence to illicit false confessions from detainees, with those perpetrating such violence facing no accountability," Commissioner Stephen Schneck said.

The commission recommended the U.S. Department of State [designate Azerbaijan as a Country of Particular Concern](#)—a category reserved for a nation in which the government has engaged in or tolerated systemic,

ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom.

Last year, the State Department added Azerbaijan to its Special Watch List for the first time—a second-tier designation for nations that engage in or tolerate religious freedom violations but not in a “systemic, ongoing or egregious” manner.