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COMMUNICATION UNIVERSITY OF CHINA



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Plight of the Western Azerbaijan Community



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Published on 17th March 2025



The Western Azerbaijan Community, established in 1989, is dedicated to safeguarding the rights of Azerbaijanis who were forcibly displaced from Armenia. This community plays a crucial role in advocating for the repatriation of these displaced individuals while ensuring justice and peace in alignment with international law, domestic legislation, and historical evidence.

Rooted in a deep historical perspective, the Western Azerbaijan Community is the legal successor of the "Azerbaijan Refugee Society," which has been operational since 1989. On August 3, 2022, the association was renamed as the "West Azerbaijan Community" (WAC). Over the past two centuries, Azerbaijanis have endured severe hardships, including occupation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. The tumultuous events of the 1900s saw Azerbaijanis forcibly expelled from their ancestral lands in Armenia, leaving lasting scars on generations. Amidst this backdrop of displacement and injustice, the Western Azerbaijan Community stands as an unwavering advocate for the countless families uprooted by these crises. WAC's efforts are geared toward securing justice for all and implementing the "Concept of Return" to ensure that displaced Azerbaijanis can reclaim their rightful homes.



The Western Azerbaijan Community takes an active role in the implementation of the "Concept of Return" and continues its efforts to obtain resources within this legal framework. It is determined to continue its struggle to ensure the recognition of the rights of compatriots who were unjustly expelled from their ancestral lands after being subjected to ethnic cleansing,

deportation, and genocide. WAC stands to demand justice for all affected individuals and their heirs.

Historical Background

The expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia occurred in multiple stages, with the first recorded case taking place between 1918 and 1920. Another significant wave of deportations happened between 1948 and 1953. The most recent and largest mass deportation



occurred between 1987 and 1991, culminating in ethnic cleansing. Between November 22-24, 1988, an escalated phase of ethnic cleansing led to the forced expulsion of approximately 250,000 Azerbaijanis from their homeland. Official reports suggest that at least 216 people perished during this forced migration, although the actual number is believed to be around 460. These expulsions are well-documented historical facts, corroborated even by Armenian sources.

The consequences of these tragic events continue to affect the lives of tens of thousands of displaced Azerbaijanis. Out of the 50,000 families forcibly expelled from Western Azerbaijan between 1987 and 1991, the damages inflicted on nearly 20,000 have already been assessed, and necessary work is ongoing to address these issues.

One of the most egregious aspects of this ethnic cleansing campaign has been the systematic destruction of Azerbaijani cultural and historical sites in Armenia. For decades, the Armenian

government has attempted to erase the Azerbaijani presence in Western Azerbaijan by altering historical records, demolishing mosques, cemeteries, and cultural monuments, and appropriating Azerbaijani heritage as its own. A particularly striking example is the damage inflicted upon Azerbaijani Ashiq art, a rich cultural tradition recognized by UNESCO.



Armenia's deliberate attempts to distort the origins of this art form represent an attack on Azerbaijan's cultural identity and, by extension, universal cultural heritage. Similarly, hundreds of mosques in Western Azerbaijan have been either destroyed or falsely rebranded as Armenian heritage.

International Community's Silence

The aspiration for a triumphant return to their homeland remains a distant hope for hundreds of thousands of displaced Azerbaijanis, whose lives have been profoundly altered by the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War in 2020. Despite the clear violations of human rights suffered by Azerbaijanis, the international community has largely remained silent. The global community, which has also overlooked the destruction of Azerbaijani cultural heritage in Armenia, the violation of property rights, and the continued denial of the right to return, lacks the moral authority to selectively comment on human rights issues. Silence in the face of such injustices is tantamount to complicity.

The global response to the Azerbaijani plight has been minimal. Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) explicitly guarantees the inherent dignity and equal



rights of all individuals, including the right to return to one's homeland and protection from displacement. However, these fundamental rights continue to be denied to Western Azerbaijanis. The international community must break this silence and uphold its responsibility to protect the rights of Western Azerbaijanis.

The Armenian government must formally apologize for the deportation of Western Azerbaijanis, engage in dialogue with WAC, establish conditions for their return, halt the destruction and distortion of Azerbaijani cultural heritage, cease militarization, and open communication channels in line with their international obligations.

The Western Azerbaijan Community has repeatedly called on the Armenian government for sincere dialogue, proposing concrete steps for restoring historical justice and fostering mutual understanding. However, the Armenian government has consistently ignored these calls. Armenia must begin negotiations with WAC, fulfill its international obligations. The steps, such as the successful implementation of the “**Concept of Return**”, will contribute significantly to the peaceful, safe, and dignified reintegration of Western Azerbaijanis into their homeland. This is crucial for ensuring not only historical justice but also lasting peace in the region.

The right of Western Azerbaijanis to return is one of the fundamental human rights. The international community must take concrete steps to restore justice and address this issue through legal means. The support of the international community in this process is invaluable. Unfortunately, the Armenian government's lack of readiness for constructive dialogue complicates the issue. Nevertheless, WAC remains committed to advocating for the rightful return of Azerbaijanis to their homeland.