Dear President Spano,

We write to you today as a concerned group of international citizens regarding the continued captivity and unjust treatment of Armenian prisoners of war (POWs). We call on you to further investigate these cases and demand that the Azeri government disclose the identities of its Armenian POWs and bring the soldiers who have abused them to justice. We also urge you to consider the fact that Armenian Christians are being specifically abused for their religion by Azeri troops, in violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, protecting freedom of religion.

While it is known that Azerbaijan still holds Armenian soldiers in captivity from the recent conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, it refuses to disclose the identities of the prisoners, as well as the exact number of POWs it still holds. Dozens of Armenians still do not know the whereabouts of their family members who went off to fight in the war.

Moreover, there is mounting evidence that Armenian POWs have been abused while in captivity, in direct violation of international law. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, there are multiple videos that have been posted on social media showing Azeri soldiers beating and humiliating defenseless Armenian POWs. As a result, the European Court of Human Rights, in response to cases brought by the families of POWs, has directed Azerbaijan to provide information on the POWs, which it has failed to do.

This mistreatment of POWs speaks to the underlying religious motivations of this conflict. Armenia is the oldest Christian nation in the world, accepting Christianity in the 3rd century. The region’s identity only shifted toward Islam in the 11th Century when the Ottoman Empire invaded, establishing what has become modern-day Turkey. Although the Ottoman Empire fell in the early 20th Century, its memory still lives on through the Turkish identity that is still closely tied with Islam. As a result, Turkey has supported Azerbaijan in its fight against Armenia in an effort to connect the two countries that have a shared Turkish Islamic identity.

This connection is most clearly on display by the attendance of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the Azeri victory parade in Baku following the conflict. Furthermore, the Turkish government has perpetuated the narrative of the shared Turkish identity between Turkey and Azerbaijan in a video that they released, depicting joint military exercises of the two states’ militaries with the slogan “Two States, One Army.”

Therefore, we again call on you to further investigate the case against Azerbaijan in regards to its treatment of Armenian POWs. We also implore you to especially consider the context of the conflict when doing so, to see that specifically Armenian Christians are being targeted for their religion. This injustice should not stand anywhere, especially in a state that is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights. Armenians and their families deserve justice for the transgressions against them.

Sincerely,

International Christian Concern