

US Rep. Loretta Sanchez Calls for Leahy Law Investigation of Azerbaijani Violations



YEREVAN, APRIL 29, ARMENPRESS.

United States Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, called for a “Leahy Law” investigation into reports that the Azerbaijan armed forces, which annually receive millions of dollars in U.S. military aid, committed gross violations of human rights during Baku’s April 2nd offensive against Nagorno Karabakh, reported the Armenian National Committee of America.

In remarks during an Armed Services hearing today on the National Defense Authorization Act, Rep. Sanchez noted that she has reviewed credible allegations that units of the Azerbaijani military have committed gross violations of human rights. “I believe that these blatant human rights violations warrant action on our part to direct our Secretary of Defense to work with our Secretary of State on an investigation on possible human rights violations. And I believe the U.S. should conduct an investigation on whether the ‘Leahy Law’ is being violated by the Azerbaijani military,” stated Rep. Sanchez. “We, the United States, we are a leader on human rights and we cannot afford to support militaries that commit human rights violations.”

In her remarks, Rep. Sanchez cited sharp criticism of Azerbaijan’s human rights record and called attention to Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev’s pardon and praise for Ramil Safarov, who axed-murdered an Armenian officer while he slept during a NATO peace-keeping training program in

Hungary. Rep. Sanchez's statement accompanied an amendment that she submitted, but later withdrew for procedural purposes.

"We join with Representative Loretta Sanchez in calling for a 'Leahy Law' investigation into reports of Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian atrocities," said ANCA Western Region Chairwoman Nora Hovsepian. "Armenian Americans – from her district and across California – welcome her principled leadership in ensuring that our U.S. tax dollars are not used to kill, maim, and torture Armenian civilians or soldiers."

As a recipient of both Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance, Azerbaijan is subject to scrutiny, under a set of U.S. laws known collectively as the Leahy Laws, which are triggered when there are reliable reports of U.S.-funded foreign units have committed atrocities. If proven to be true, such conduct would result in 1) statutory restrictions on continued military aid to the units found to have engaged in these abuses, 2) U.S. efforts to engage with the foreign government in question to bring those responsible to justice.

The Obama Administration, if it chooses to move forward with an investigation, would direct the Department of State – including the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs – to open a Leahy Law review – involving a thorough vetting of our military aid program to Azerbaijan and an investigation into reported anti-Armenian atrocities.

Credible reports of war crimes committed by Aliyev's forces against civilians and Karabakh defense forces during the April 2 – 7 Azerbaijani attack on Nagorno Karabakh republic have emerged – including the execution and mutilation of an elderly couple in the village of Talish and the beheading of three Armenian soldiers.