

**Statement of Yuri Kim**  
**Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs**  
**Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**September 14, 2023**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for your invitation to speak with you today about the Administration's efforts in the South Caucasus, especially with respect to the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. I appreciate the opportunity to update you on our work and hear your perspectives on these pressing issues.

We have been working intensely over the past months to address the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. We are deeply concerned by the continued closure of the Lachin corridor and the impacts this closure is having on the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh. I want to be clear that we view the status quo as completely unacceptable. We will not stop working until we have a resolution. We have consistently said the

corridor must be open to commercial, humanitarian, and private traffic. We have conveyed this message both publicly and privately to all levels of the government of Azerbaijan on numerous occasions. Access to food, medicine, baby formula, and energy should never be held hostage.

Secretary Blinken, Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations Lou Bono, colleagues at USAID, and many others, including me, have been intensely engaged on this issue with a wide range of contacts at all levels to press for the immediate and simultaneous opening of the Lachin corridor as well as other routes to humanitarian, commercial and private traffic to allow passage of urgently needed humanitarian supplies.

We welcomed the news that one shipment carrying approximately 20 tons of humanitarian supplies passed through the Aghdam route into Nagorno-Karabakh on September 12. Additional humanitarian supplies from the International Committee of the Red Cross have been positioned for weeks just outside both the Lachin and Aghdam checkpoints. Senior Advisor Bono

is once again in the region to press for these supplies to be allowed into Nagorno-Karabakh immediately and simultaneously. President Aliyev as well as representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh have publicly stated that they have agreed to this arrangement. There should be no more delay in implementing this agreement. It is essential for these supplies – which have been ready to move for weeks – to be delivered to the population in Nagorno-Karabakh now.

It is also essential to achieve a more sustainable arrangement for the men, women, and children in Nagorno-Karabakh. In this context, we urge the Government of Azerbaijan to restore free transit of commercial, humanitarian, and passenger vehicles both in and out of the Lachin corridor expeditiously, while recognizing the importance of additional routes.

One of the many challenges to a solution is deep mistrust in the region following decades of conflict and instability. We need to continue to encourage all sides to work constructively and to encourage those in

Nagorno-Karabakh to accept humanitarian assistance from reputable international sources like the International Committee of the Red Cross. Whatever compromise is ultimately reached, the only path forward is through dialogue and compromise to build trust.

The root causes of instability and conflict that have plagued this region for so long must be addressed. The Administration continues to believe that peace in the South Caucasus has the potential to transform the region and advance U.S. interests. We now have a strategic opportunity to combat malign influence in the region from actors like Russia, China, and Iran by achieving a durable peace that will expand our bilateral economic and security cooperation and provide greater energy security for European partners and allies.

Secretary Blinken has hosted three rounds of peace negotiations with the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan since last November, and his leadership has yielded results. The sides have made progress on a peace agreement that could stabilize the region. Armenia and Azerbaijan's border

commissions have begun discussions on the complicated issue of delimiting the border. We will continue to support progress on a peace agreement between the sides.

Progress will not come easily or quickly, but we are determined to do all we can to support a dignified and durable peace – an objective that is imperative in the broader regional context. We have invested in this effort because we believe peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan would have cascading benefits for the region that are in the U.S. national security interest. A dignified and durable peace could facilitate regional energy security and boost regional transportation links, in turn improving economic prospects of all countries in the region and improving the lives of millions. The United States could increase our security cooperation in the region and build the confidence and capacity of each country to preserve and protect its sovereignty and independence.

In the context of any peace discussions, we have made clear that the rights and security of the ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh must be

protected. This is an essential element of any durable and dignified peace agreement. Azerbaijan must provide internationally verifiable assurances of respect for their rights and their ability to remain in their homes and live without fear.

In closing, I want to be clear about a critical issue: the United States will not countenance any action or effort—short-term or long-term—to ethnically cleanse or commit other atrocities against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The current humanitarian situation is not acceptable. Humanitarian access through the Lachin corridor and other routes must be made available now. We have also made it abundantly clear that the use of force is not acceptable. We give this committee our assurance that these principles will continue to guide our efforts in this region.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss our priorities and efforts to help build a just and lasting peace in the South Caucasus. I look forward to your questions.