

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 1, 2020

The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on State, Foreign  
Operations, and Related Programs  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on State, Foreign  
Operations, and Related Programs  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Leahy:

We write in light of the recent violence in the south Caucasus and the ongoing humanitarian crisis there, which will require significant support from the international community to address. We welcome the requirement to consult with Congress on programming to address these humanitarian needs in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs explanatory statement released on November 10th, and we request that you go one step further in the final FY21 appropriations bill by explicitly appropriating robust funding to address this humanitarian disaster. In particular, we urge you to include a specific appropriation for demining and clearance of unexploded ordnance, a need that has grown significantly due to the conflict.

The humanitarian situation in the south Caucasus is dire, and it will only grow worse as winter approaches. The recent fighting displaced more than half of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population, including 90% of the region's women and children. Others are now leaving their homes before that land is placed under Azerbaijan's control. Even for displaced people who can return home, the widespread damage to civilian infrastructure creates significant humanitarian challenges. Armenia, which has a GDP about one-third the size of Azerbaijan's, cannot address the needs of the ethnic Armenians affected by this conflict on its own. International funding is necessary to ensure these populations have access to food, water, shelter, and other basic resources.

The mass movement of thousands of people and crowded conditions in shelters seem to be fueling the spread of COVID-19: between the start of fighting on September 27<sup>th</sup> and November 10<sup>th</sup>, Armenia's COVID-19 case count grew sevenfold. At least one major hospital in Nagorno-Karabakh was damaged in the fighting, while hospitals in Armenia have been overwhelmed by the combination of wounded from the conflict and COVID-19 cases. The fighting may have stopped, but the damage it caused will continue to cost lives without robust action by the international community.

The United States must continue our longstanding tradition of funding humanitarian aid for those who need it most, like the thousands of ethnic Armenians displaced from their homes or otherwise affected by the violence. We urge you to appropriate a robust amount of funding

specifically to help these populations, which would highlight your commitment to that longstanding tradition.

Finally, we urge you to include a specific appropriation for clearing mines and unexploded ordnance in the final FY21 appropriations bill, as well as robust funding for rehabilitation services in Nagorno-Karabakh. The use of cluster munitions, rockets, and other such weapons in the recent conflict has only increased the need for this funding, and we urge you to include an appropriation of at least \$1.5 million for demining and unexploded ordnance clearance in the final State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill.

By including the provisions listed above in the final State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill, you can help blunt the devastating effects of the recent violence and continue America's proud tradition of humanitarian assistance.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Rob Portman  
United States Senator