



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Witness Biographies

Human Rights in Azerbaijan Since the Fall of Nagorno-Karabakh

Panel 1



Gegham Stepanyan is a **human rights defender** with extensive experience in advocating for the rights of the people of Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh. Elected to his position in March 2021, just months after the end of the 44-day war, he has been at the forefront of documenting and exposing human rights violations perpetrated by Azerbaijan. Prior to his current role, Stepanyan served as a **press secretary and assistant to the Speaker of the Artsakh Parliament**, and also taught at Artsakh State University. During the 44-day war, Stepanyan served as chief of staff for the Artsakh Ombudsman, coordinating fact-finding efforts and informing the international community about the dire situation on the ground.



Adam T. Smith is **Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences in Anthropology** at Cornell University and **Director of the Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies (CIAMS)**. Smith has conducted archaeological research in the South Caucasus for over three decades, investigating the region's Bronze and Iron Age remains. Since its founding in 2020, Smith has also been a co-director of Caucasus Heritage Watch (CHW), a forensic research and monitoring program tracking heritage destruction in the South Caucasus using high-resolution satellite imagery.



Kate Watters is co-founder and executive director of Crude Accountability, an environmental and human rights nonprofit, which was founded in 2003. She has worked with human rights and environmental defenders in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia since the early 1990s. She is the author of numerous reports and articles on civil society in Central Asia and the Caspian and Black Sea regions and has been interviewed for print media, radio, and television about environment, oil and gas, and human rights. Kate holds an MA in Russian Area Studies from Georgetown University and a BA in Russian literature from UMASS-Amherst.



Sharmagh Mardi earned her L.L.M. Degree from the American University of Armenia (AUA). She serves as the Supervising Lawyer at the **Center for Truth and Justice (CFTJ)**, having joined the organization in 2021 in the wake of the 2020 Artsakh War. She is involved in collecting firsthand testimonial evidence from survivors of armed conflicts, including various witnesses such as forcibly displaced persons, prisoners of war, and the families of those missing in action. Her work also encompasses conducting human rights research, preparing reports, and filing legal complaints based on the collected testimonies.



Van Z. Krikorian serves as Co-Chair of the **Armenian Assembly of America**. He began with the organization in 1977 and has served as Chairman of its Board of Directors, and in other positions for over forty years. Since its founding in 1007, he has been on the Board of Governors and since 2011 Chairman of the academically oriented Armenian National Institute. He also serves in other community organizations. In 1991, Mr. Krikorian was appointed and served as a member of the U.S. delegation to the Moscow CSCE human rights meetings; in 1992, he served as Deputy Representative and Counselor to the United Nations for the newly independent Republic of Armenia.



Andrea J. Prasow is the executive director of **Freedom Now**. A lawyer and global human rights advocate, Andrea's expertise includes U.S. national security and foreign policy. She is a frequent commentator in print, radio and television, and has published in a wide range of media outlets, including Politico, The Hill, Foreign Policy, Newsweek, The Guardian, The Huffington Post, and Just Security. Prior to joining Freedom Now, Andrea served as executive director of the Freedom Initiative, an organization dedicated to freeing political prisoners in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as 12 years at Human Rights Watch. Andrea J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.