

**Open Letter by the Azerbaijan National NGO Forum:
On Credibility, Responsibility, and the Misuse of Genocide Discourse**

How does an organization with its credibility increasingly questioned by scholars, civil society actors, and even by members of the lawyer's family whose name it carries, continue to present itself as a moral authority over others?

This question becomes unavoidable in light of the Lemkin Institute's recent open letter to President Donald J.Trump titled, "Bring them Home for Christmas: Urgent Appeal to Secure the Release of Armenian Hostages in Azerbaijan".

Through misinformation campaigns, individuals charged in several accounts with financing terrorism, waging aggressive war and committing crimes against humanity during over 30 years of illegal occupation, are portrayed as "hostages". This framing ignores documented evidences such as the acts committed by war criminals led to the forced displacement of nearly one million Azerbaijanis and the destruction of hundreds of civilian settlements.

Using holiday sentiment and the New Year mood to soften public judgment does not weaken the legal accountability of war criminals. Moreover, invoking religious distinctions in this context is misleading, as the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has never been religious in nature. Meanwhile, the Lemkin Institute's biased positions undermine President Donald J.Trump's peace efforts between Azerbaijan and Armenia, advanced through the Joint Declaration signed on 8 August 2025 in Washington, threatening the normalization process and emerging economic cooperation between the two South Caucasus countries.

The Institute's already questionable impartiality and credibility are further weakened by this biased approach, as even Raphael Lemkin's own family has questioned and publicly criticized the misuse of Lemkin's name by the Institute.

Over time, this approach has turned into a repeated one-sided and systematic anti-Azerbaijani messaging. Just an example, in October 2024, it published an article opposing Azerbaijan's hosting of COP29, followed on 10 November 2024 by a social media post stating "Say NO to COP29 in Azerbaijan!". Why would a genocide-focused organization repeatedly target an environmental summit unrelated to its mandate? Why politicize a climate conference so persistently? These questions are answered by the Institute's leadership structure, which includes Lyusi Mirzoyan, Administration & Project Manager of Armenian origin, and its consistent alignment with openly anti-Azerbaijan advocacy narratives.

Importantly, concerns about the Lemkin Institute's biased approach are not raised by Lemkin's family or Azerbaijani civil society alone. Criticism has even come from Armenian academic and analytical circles, including leadership figures of institutions such as the Zoryan Institute, who have publicly questioned the Lemkin Institute's unbalanced and unjustified positions. When criticism crosses national and political lines, it deserves serious consideration.

Azerbaijan's history includes deep tragedy. The Khojaly genocide and other massacres committed by Armenia over 30 years led to societal trauma. Yet today, Azerbaijani civil society focuses not on spreading hatred, but on peace, reconstruction, and reconciliation in the South Caucasus. Conversely, the Lemkin Institute's statements reflect an unsubstantiated and anti-Azerbaijan bias that fails to reflect the truth and risks undermining peace and reconciliation efforts.

Additionally, the Lemkin Institute's bias extends beyond fostering hostility between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In its "Letter to the American People" (27 March 2025), the Institute characterizes current U.S. political developments as an "authoritarian coup" and a "genocidal process," while also asserting that state violence against minority communities has persisted throughout U.S. history and into the present day.

Words carry consequences. Institutions bear responsibility for rhetoric that can shape public trust.

Accordingly, we call on the Lemkin Institute to:

- Publicly correct or withdraw statements about Azerbaijan that lack legal or factual basis;
- Engage in open and constructive dialogue with relevant partners, including Azerbaijani civil society;
- Ensure future analysis is based on verified facts, international law, and basic professional ethics;
- Put an end to the dissemination of biased, unsubstantiated, and politically motivated narratives against Azerbaijan.

It is widely believed that if the whole world seems unjust to someone, either that person is misreading the world, or the world is responding to that person's own actions. The growing criticism of the Lemkin Institute from different countries is not accidental. The message is increasingly clear: **stop biased approaches and act responsibly.**

Azerbaijan National NGO Forum