

**Statement of Ambassador Philip Reeker
Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 16, 2022**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished

Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you as the Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations to discuss the Administration's efforts to support regional negotiations and address the core issues that pose a challenge to sustainable peace in the South Caucasus. I welcome cooperation with this committee and all Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in the region and help build a lasting, comprehensive peace that will benefit the people of the region.

Let me start by echoing Assistant Secretary Donfried's optimism about the potential for peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and her realism about the setbacks we have encountered. I was in the region during the September 13-14 fighting and met with President Aliyev on September

14 to urge an end to the violence. My meetings with Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders paralleled urgent and around-the-clock engagements with leadership of the two countries by Secretary Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Assistant Secretary Donfried, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Erika Olson, as well as by our colleagues at the Department of Defense. Those engagements have continued since, and the joint efforts of the United States, EU, and partner countries have paved the way for a series of meetings between Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders to discuss peace.

Despite recent hostilities, we are encouraged by the pace of engagement by Armenian and Azerbaijani leadership in the peace process. The leaders have met for negotiations on multiple occasions in recent months as part of an EU-facilitated peace process, most recently in Prague on October 6. The Prague meeting produced two meaningful outcomes that have the potential to pave the way for peace: mutual recognition of the 1991 Almaty Declaration as a basis for border discussions, and acceptance of an EU “Monitoring Capacity” with the potential to build

confidence amongst the sides and deescalate potential hostilities.

The United States is engaged bilaterally, through partners like the EU and its peace process, and through international organizations like the OSCE. On September 27, national security advisors met in Washington to discuss ways of focusing the various tracks of negotiations and accelerating efforts. On October 2, I conferred with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers before and after their meeting in Geneva to encourage their discussions and accelerated negotiations. Last week, on November 7, the Secretary hosted both foreign ministers here in Washington to maintain positive momentum between the sides. Our efforts support and complement those of the EU, which hosted border discussions on November 3 in Brussels. As with any peace negotiations, these are difficult discussions that focus on issues complicated by layers of history. But the pace and depth of the current discussions demonstrates a clear potential for a settlement that could end decades of conflict.

Of course, much remains to be done by both governments, including investigating allegations of human rights and international humanitarian law violations, holding perpetrators accountable, ceasing inflammatory rhetoric, and fostering reconciliation.

Though the U.S. and EU are facilitating negotiations between the sides, the substance of these discussions is being led by Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives themselves. Direct negotiations held at the initiative of the two countries and driven by their interests, rather than the interests of outside actors, have the greatest chance of long-term success. We will support those efforts in any way we can. The Secretary has not only offered his counsel, but he has also offered U.S. technical assistance on issues ranging from border delimitation to the planning of transportation routes. While the resolution of contentious issues remains the responsibility of Armenia and Azerbaijan, I have made it clear the international community has a specific responsibility to ensure that the rights and security of ethnic Armenians are addressed credibly and in line with a peace settlement. To that end, I have

repeatedly encouraged the leaders in both countries to consider an international mechanism to ensure, monitor, and report on any agreement involving Nagorno-Karabakh.

The sides are at an historic crossroads. We are encouraging them to choose a future of prosperity and demonstrate the wisdom of working together on a peace that will benefit the people of the region for generations to come. Our efforts will continue towards this goal, and we will do so in any way we can.