

Azerbaijanis 'bar Nagorno-Karabakh residents' from crossing Lachin Corridor

Ani Avetisyan · OC Media · 2023-04-05

The authorities in Stepanakert stated that the Azerbaijanis claiming to be eco-activists blocking the Lachin Corridor prevented a group of Nagorno-Karabakh residents from entering Stepanakert.

On Tuesday, Nagorno-Karabakh's State Minister Gurgen Nersisyan stated that the 27 Nagorno-Karabakh residents had attempted to enter Stepanakert accompanied by Russian peacekeepers.

Nersisyan has said that the group had been residing in Armenia since the closure of the Lachin Corridor on 12 December.

The corridor — the only way in and out of Nagorno-Karabakh for its Armenian population — is under blockade by Azerbaijanis claiming to be eco-activists protesting illegal mining in the region.

Only four members of the group were reportedly allowed into Stepanakert due to illness, while the rest returned to Goris in southern Armenia after 'long and persistent negotiations [with the Azerbaijanis] yielded no results'.

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'Azerbaijan, which regularly declares that the road connecting Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh] to Armenia is open, today openly prohibited the entry of Artsakh residents to their place of residence', the State Minister wrote on Facebook after the incident.

'Azerbaijan shows the completely opposite approach regarding those leaving Artsakh for Armenia, which directly documents their criminal behaviour and intention to expel Armenians from Artsakh.'

Moscow and Baku have yet to comment on the incident, however Azerbaijani media reported that the group of Nagorno-Karabakh residents were held up by Russian peacekeepers and not Azerbaijani protesters.

Apa, a pro-government Azerbaijani TV channel, reported that the group had departed from Goris in Armenia and was met by Russian peacekeepers on the Lachin Corridor, who accompanied them to Shusha (Shushi). In Shusha, the group was allegedly stopped by another Russian peacekeeping checkpoint because their trip to Stepanakert had not been pre-arranged.

Apa corroborated State Minister Nersisyan's claim that four members of the group were transported to Stepanakert due to illness, adding that they were taken there in Azerbaijani ambulances accompanied by Russian peacekeepers.

'According to obtained facts, some Azerbaijanis even broke into one of the cars', the Human Rights Defender of Nagorno-Karabakh, Gegham Stepanyan, wrote on Facebook late on Tuesday.

'Moreover, by allowing the exit of people from Artsakh in various ways, but prohibiting entry, the Azerbaijani authorities are openly implementing a policy of ethnic cleansing, as Ilham Aliyev once again admitted in his statement on 10 January.'

Stepanyan was referring to a statement made by Aliyev, in which he said: 'for whoever does not want to become [an Azerbaijani] citizen, the road is not closed, but open. They can leave'.

Nagorno-Karabakh's Foreign Ministry condemned the incident and called it the 'next level of practical implementation of [Azerbaijan's] plan to ethnically cleanse Artsakh and expel its people from their historical homeland'.

The ministry's statement went on to accuse the international community of 'tacit approval, if not complicity' in Baku's actions.

Only vehicles belonging to the Red Cross or the Russian peacekeepers have been allowed in and out of Nagorno-Karabakh since the blockade of the Lachin Corridor started in mid-December. They are usually stocked with essential medical supplies and food, and are responsible for transporting those needing urgent medical care to hospitals in Yerevan.

The Lachin blockade was condemned by a number of Western countries and the European Union, with the International Court of Justice ordering Azerbaijan to unblock the road in late February.

[Read more on OC Media: ICJ orders Azerbaijan to unblock Lachin Corridor]

This article was amended after publication to include reports of the incident by Azerbaijani media.

For ease of reading, we choose not to use qualifiers such as 'de facto', 'unrecognised', or 'partially recognised' when discussing institutions or political positions within Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia. This does not imply a position on their status. Read in Georgian on On.ge.

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