

PRESS RELEASE

AZERBAIJAN KIDNAPPED TWO ARMENIAN SOLDIERS

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The **LIBERTAS collective** for the release of Armenian prisoners of war informs that on 26 May 2023, two new Armenian soldiers, H. Hovakimyan and K. Ghazaryan, were kidnapped by the army of Azerbaijan following an illegal incursion in the sovereign territory of Armenia.

While delivering water and food to Armenian army units guarding the border in the Syunik Province, H. Hovakimyan and K. Ghazaryan were ambushed in Shikahogh Forest Reserve.

H. Hovakimyan's mother explained to Radio Free Europe that her son regularly went back and forth on the same road where he was kidnapped with his comrade. She said in particular: "He knows this road very well and would not have deviated a single inch from it".

The Armenian Foreign Ministry reported that Azerbaijan applied no less than 6 charges against the two abducted servicemen, including "terrorism", "incitement to hatred between peoples" and "illegal transport of armaments", accusing them of sabotage activities accompanied by "violation of the borders" between the two countries. The Armenian government has asked the European Court of Human Rights to order the Azerbaijani authorities to provide urgent information on the state of health and the conditions of detention of the two soldiers.

The LIBERTAS collective points out that in addition to these two kidnapped soldiers, Azerbaijan still holds 33 Armenian prisoners of war recognized by the ICRC and whom Azerbaijan has sentenced to terms ranging from 4 to 20 years in prison for "terrorism", in violation of the Geneva Convention III of 12 August 1949 relative to the treatment of prisoners of war.

This figure does not cover the "forcibly disappeared", people captured by the Azerbaijani army since the 2020 war, estimated at 100 - 200 civilians and soldiers whose existence Baku denies despite numerous testimonies and irrefutable evidence.

Despite the application by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) of Article 39 of the provisional measures concerning Armenians captured by Azerbaijan (October 2020), Baku does not cooperate with the latter. On 20 May 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian servicemen and civilians captured or arrested during and after the conflict, and for Azerbaijan to refrain from arbitrary detentions in the future.

Several NGOs (Human Rights Watch), institutions (European Parliament, Council of Europe) and European courts (ECHR) have confirmed that Azerbaijan continues to torture and subject prisoners of war to inhuman and degrading treatment.

The Libertas collective for the release of Armenian prisoners of war calls on France and the European Union to demand the immediate release of all Armenian detainees, in accordance with the provisions of international law, and with Azerbaijan's own commitments in the tripartite agreement of November 9, 2020.

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