

Christian Solidarity International joins Libertas campaign, sponsors Vicken Euljekjian

Zurich, Geneva, 6 March 2024



Christian Solidarity International (CSI), a Zurich-based international NGO campaigning for religious freedom and human dignity, will sponsor Vicken Euljekjian, an Armenian civilian unjustly detained by Azerbaijan since 2020. CSI is sponsoring Vicken as part of the Libertas campaign.

Joel Veldkamp, CSI Head of International Communications, commented: “For three years, the dictatorship of Azerbaijan has been holding Vicken hostage, purely because he is Armenian. His case is emblematic of Azerbaijan’s genocidal campaign against the Armenian people. We are honored to stand alongside him and his family.”

On behalf of the Libertas campaign, Alexis Krikorian (Hystart), stated: “We are thrilled that CSI has agreed to sponsor Vicken Euljekjian. Vicken should have been released along with POWs on 7 December 2023 as part of a prisoner exchange, but his name was removed from the list at the last minute. Vicken’s health has deteriorated, and he needs to be released asap. CSI’s participation will strengthen the Libertas campaign for the liberation of all Armenians unjustly detained by Azerbaijan: POWs, civilians, political leaders, the forcibly disappeared.”

Background Information about the Libertas campaign:

In late September 2020, Azerbaijan started the second large-scale war in Nagorno Karabakh, after 26 years of frozen conflict. The cease-fire agreement of 10 November 2020 provided for the exchange of all prisoners of war between Azerbaijan on the one hand, and Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh on the other. By the beginning of 2021, all Azerbaijani POWs had been returned by the Armenian sides. The process of returning detained Armenian POWs and civilians occurred in several waves in 2021, but Azerbaijan halted it prematurely.

According to information from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in early 2023 Baku was still holding 33 confirmed prisoners of war, whom it had accused of terrorism and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 4 to 20 years, in violation of the ceasefire declaration and the Geneva Convention III of 12 August 1949 regarding the treatment of prisoners of war.

This is why in the spring of 2023 the **LIBERTAS collective** made up of Hystart, the Covcas Center for Law and Conflict Resolution and l’Observatoire d’arménophobie launched the Libertas campaign with the aim of securing the release of these Armenian POWs through their sponsorship by cities, regions, NGOs and personalities. First and foremost, sponsoring a POW means protecting them from cruel or degrading treatment, and demanding their repatriation as soon as possible.

In April 2023, the mayor of Lyon (France, Green Party) became the first mayor to publicly sponsor a prisoner of war, Grigor Saghatelyan. Many other cities joined the sponsorship campaign, including Geneva, Valence and Montpellier. Other sponsors include former Swiss State Counselor Lisa Mazzone and NGOs such as the Scottish Peace Network, Dove Tales and the Society for Threatened Peoples.

On 7 December 2023, 32 Armenian prisoners of war and civilians were finally returned to Armenia, following an agreement between the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments, in return for the release of 2 Azerbaijani saboteurs, and Armenia's withdrawal of its bid to host the COP29 climate summit. The Libertas campaign welcomed the release of the prisoners, which included all but one of those prisoners being sponsored across Europe as part of our campaign.

This release marked a significant victory for Libertas and the sponsors of POWs.

However, the situation remains worrying, with at least 23 prisoners still held in Baku prisons, including POWs, civilians and political leaders.

In addition to these 23 prisoners, evidence (videos of their capture, testimonies of freed POWs etc.) indicates the existence of at least 80 other captured persons of whom we have no news. Azerbaijan denies their existence. The fate of these "forcibly disappeared" remains uncertain, as the ICRC has no information about them and cannot visit them.

The aim of the Libertas campaign is to free all Armenians unjustly detained by Azerbaijan: prisoners of war, civilians, political leaders and the many victims of enforced disappearance whom Azerbaijan refuses to recognize as detainees.

It is vital to put an end to the ill-treatment and torture of prisoners in Azerbaijan reported by those who have returned to Armenia. The hostages are being used as bargaining chips to satisfy Azerbaijan's expansionist objectives, which now include occupying even more of the sovereign territory of Armenia.

More about Christian Solidarity International, the sponsor of Vicken Euljekjian:

CSI is an interconfessional Christian human rights group, campaigning for religious liberty and human dignity, and assisting victims of religious persecution, victimized children, and victims of catastrophe. CSI is an NGO with consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It operates humanitarian aid projects in fourteen countries to help the persecuted, including the Armenians expelled from Nagorno Karabakh by Azerbaijan in 2023.

On 19 December 2022, one week after Azerbaijan began its blockade of Nagorno Karabakh, CSI issued a genocide warning for the region's Armenian population, a warning that was tragically realized nine months later with Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing campaign.

More about Vicken Euljekjian:

Vicken was born on 12 July 1979, in Beirut, Lebanon. He attended the Anjar Armenian Evangelical Secondary School. He has 3 brothers. He is married and has two children: a son and a daughter. He moved to Armenia, became an Armenian citizen and started a small business. On 10 November 2020, the Azerbaijani military captured Vicken along with his colleague Maral Najaryan near Shushi.

Join the LIBERTAS campaign [here](#).

#FreeArmenianPrisoners - your support can save them; your voice can bring hope to their families. Let's unite our voices to guarantee their right to life, liberty and security!