



**HUMANITARIAN AID RELIEF TRUST
NAGORNO KARABAKH VISIT REPORT**



25TH May – 1st June 2014

Executive Summary

- Recent achievements at the Rehabilitation Centre include increasing referrals, the appointment of a new social worker and a fruitful partnership with French organisation *Kinésithérapeutes du Monde* (Physiotherapists of the World). An upcoming educational programme will train 12 new nurses to become rehabilitative therapists in hospitals across Karabakh.
- Discussions are underway with the Government of Nagorno Karabakh (NKR) to secure funding for a new building, to allow the Centre to expand.
- Tensions between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh have been described as a '*potential flashpoint*' (US Intelligence Community), and confrontational rhetoric is present on both sides, with Azerbaijan increasingly emphasising a military solution. Despite this, the situation is barely on the radar of the international community or media. The lack of international awareness and diplomatic engagement means there is little sustained pressure to break the current deadlock or to prevent military escalation.
- Ceasefire violations along the Line of Contact (LOC) continue, posing a serious threat to peace.
- Increasing repression and restrictions on political freedoms in Azerbaijan are threatening cross-border initiatives and could make the situation more explosive.
- Extensive investment in arms by Azerbaijan continues; their defence expenditure in 2013 was \$3.7bn, more than Armenia's entire national budget.
- The Government of NKR are keen to increase diplomatic engagement with the British Government, and are planning a visit to the UK in November.

Recommendations

- Representatives from Nagorno Karabakh should be included in peace negotiations.
- More concerted international diplomatic engagement is urgently needed, with a focus on preventing confrontation, deescalating tensions, fostering dialogue at all levels, and working towards a sustainable peace.
- Greater international economic, political and cultural engagement with Nagorno Karabakh by governmental and non-governmental organisations should be encouraged; this would foster greater international cooperation and could bring tangible benefits to those living in the region.
- The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) monitoring mandate should be strengthened, with an emphasis on preventing, monitoring and investigating clashes and casualties along the Line of Contact.
- Both sides should withdraw their snipers from the front lines.
- The formal peace negotiations need to be re-invigorated, and a concerted effort made by the co-chairs to find points of coherence between the parties.
- The formal peace process could be enhanced by greater support for conflict transformation processes at all levels of society, including track II initiatives and confidence-building mechanisms.
- The OSCE Minsk Group should improve the gender balance of its mission and commit to improving women's participation in the peace process; this has been shown time and again, around the world, to be a crucial success factor in peace building.
- Arms embargoes should be put in place and actively enforced on both sides, with a focus on discouraging the main arms suppliers, including Russia, South Korea and Israel.

Contents

Executive Summary	p. 2
Introduction	p. 3
Objectives	p. 4
Terminology	p. 4
Section I: HART Project, Rehabilitation Centre, Stepanakert	p. 5
Section II: Meetings with Political and Religious Leaders, summary of issues raised	p. 9
Section III: Background to issues raised in meetings	p. 12
About HART, contact details and further information	p. 16
Appendices, including Personnel, Itinerary and Acknowledgements	p. 17

Introduction

Between 25th May and 1st June 2014, a delegation from HART visited Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. This was an opportunity to spend time with partners and friends, and to gather information and make plans for both aid and advocacy.

Nagorno Karabakh is a place in which the need for HART's dual mandate for aid and advocacy is clearly manifest. The pioneering Rehabilitation Centre, supported by HART, has become an internationally recognised medical facility, despite the challenges of being located in a post-conflict region and a context of political, economic and social isolation. It is a place for building up strength and breaking down stigma.

However, the future of the centre cannot be considered outside of the political landscape in which it is situated. This is an area of forgotten conflict: a fragile ceasefire has remained in place for 26 years without a resolution.

Recent months have seen increasingly divisive and aggressive rhetoric, growing tensions and continuing proliferation of arms. International Crisis Group reported in September 2013 that *“terms like “Blitzkrieg”, “pre-emptive strike” and “total war” have gained currency with both sides’ planners”*¹. Nagorno Karabakh can no longer be considered a “frozen conflict”; this misrepresentative term deflects attention from the shifting dynamics and growing threats to peace, and pre-empts more concerted international engagement.

The internationally mediated peace process needs serious consideration; little progress has been made in over two decades and the two sides are becoming more rather than less polarised. Clashes and casualties along the Line of Contact – the 160km front line, where opposing military forces are permanently situated in close proximity – have increased. These clashes pose the most serious threat to peace, with potential for escalation and miscalculation high. Clear measures are needed to prevent further casualties, including the withdrawal of snipers by both sides, as advocated by the NKR Government. Concurrently, more effort must be put into initiatives for dialogue, trust and confidence-building and the process of conflict transformation at all levels.

The dispute over Karabakh is bound up with the politics of history and national identity, irreconcilable claims to the land legitimated by cultural, historical, political and economic reasoning. We must bring the conversation back to the human dimension of the conflict – to those whose everyday lives are lived at the heart of an unresolved conflict.

¹ International Crisis Group, 26th September 2013, 'Armenia and Azerbaijan: A Season of Risks'
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/b071-armenia-and-azerbaijan-a-season-of-risks.pdf>

These are the individuals who are building and shaping Karabakh – its institutions, cultures, and communities. While challenges remain, the achievements are myriad. It is these, and their achievements, who are the most vulnerable to a resumption of hostilities; it is the fabric of their families, communities and everyday lives which will be rent asunder if conflict resumes.

This is the paradox at the heart of the NKR question: it is those who have the strongest stake in the debate and the most to lose from a resumption of hostilities who are excluded from the conversation about its future.

Despite this, those who take the time to listen will hear from the Karabakh Armenians an enduring story of hope. In these stories we can acknowledge shared histories and, crucially, explore what the future might hold.

It is essential that we remember – in the words of the Chair of the Assembly of NKR, during our visit – that, *“this is not a sleeping conflict”*. With the passing of time, the casualties continue, the rhetoric grows and the arsenal of sophisticated weaponry possessed by both sides increases. Every clash along the Line of Contact carries the potential for escalation, with regional implications. All the while, at the heart of this misnamed “frozen conflict”, lives are lived, visions dreamed and realised and communities grow, despite the constant threat of a return to war.

Objectives

- 2.1 To visit and support the Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre;
- 2.2 To obtain up-to-date information and first hand accounts of the situation in Nagorno Karabakh;
- 2.3 To discuss with representatives of Artsakhian communities their concerns and priorities for support, and their messages for members of the international community;
- 2.4 To develop HART’s strategy for both aid and advocacy work in these regions;
- 2.5 To collect high quality audio-visual materials for the purposes of both aid and advocacy, for use by HART and its partners;
- 2.6 To lay the groundwork for an international pilgrimage for 2015.

Terminology

The enclave’s formal name is the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR), or Artsakh in Armenian. Both names are used by our partners and friends in the region, and so both are used throughout this report. Stepanakert is the capital.

Section I: Rehabilitation Centre, Stepanakert

“We give the chance to people with different disabilities to understand their abilities and their rights, and to feel there is not any shame. This is also good education for the community – the community see that people with disabilities ... can be with them in political life, social life, in everything that is in the community. This is one of the best achievements of the last few years.

This is not only a treatment centre but an educational centre – for the patients, the carers, the family. We have opened the doors for everyone from the family to come and see what’s going on here, how they can learn, and we are happy to answer all of their questions.

We had really hard work in the beginning, not only training the new team but re-building this building as a rehabilitation centre. But I think this project was really very successful, because in 15 – 16 years we have had thousands and thousands of people getting great success here. I think this can be a model for all the countries where there is no rehabilitation.” – Vardan Tadevosyan.

HART’s partner in Nagorno Karabakh is the Rehabilitation Centre in Stepanakert, run by its Director, Vardan Tadevosyan. HART’s support for the centre has been largely facilitated by funding from Trusthouse Charitable Foundation for three successive years, for which we, the staff and the patients are immensely grateful.

The Centre: in Numbers

Since its establishment 16 years ago, the Centre has provided a high standard of personal, tailored care to individuals with physical and mental disabilities. The centre can host a maximum of 20 in-patients and around 35 day patients, and currently employs 12 physiotherapists, 4 nurses, 2 speech therapists, 3 psychologists and 1 doctor. At the beginning of 2014, a social worker joined the centre’s team.

Between January and December 2013, the Centre provided treatment and care for:

- 134 in-patients, including those with cerebral palsy, strokes, muscular dystrophy, amputation and spinal injuries;
- 61 day patients - who attend all day and receive medication and access to all therapies (similar to in-patients), but return home at night;
- 503 out-patients;
- 108 home patients, with a total of 2,088 visits;
- 104 patients who received speech therapy, with a combined total of 3231 sessions;
- 121 patients who received support from psychologists, with a combined total of 3684 sessions;
- 484 outpatients who accessed hydrotherapy;
- 200 who attended art therapy.

Challenges and Priorities

One of the biggest challenges currently facing the Rehabilitation Centre is growing demand coupled with a lack of capacity. As diagnosis of patients with physical and mental disabilities improves – largely due to the efforts of the centre and its staff – the numbers of referrals to the centre increases. Medical and paramedical staff are increasingly being trained to identify disabilities in babies; resulting in the centre now treating approximately 160 – 180 babies each year. Doctors with little experience of rehabilitative care are seeing the results in their previous patients, and as a result are increasingly willing to refer people with disabilities for rehabilitation. Whilst this is a huge success, it adds to the pressure on the rehabilitation centre. It is the only centre in the country to which doctors can refer patients who need rehabilitation, including those with spinal cord injuries, stroke patients and persons with neurological disabilities. The waiting list of patients hoping to be treated currently stands at around 6 months.

Plans to surmount this challenge are well underway. The coming months will see a new programme of educational training for 12 new nurses to become rehabilitation therapists. The course will run every day, 8 hours a day, for 36 – 40 weeks. These new therapists will work on rehabilitative treatment in regional

hospitals across Karabakh and in Stepanakert hospital. This will both increase the quality of treatment in the regions and reduce the waiting list of the centre.

Further challenges are posed by the building itself – formerly a bomb-damaged school, which offers little scope for further expansion. Vardan and HART are liaising with the Government of Nagorno-Karabakh to secure funding for a new building.

In the near future, the Rehabilitation Centre will require a new vehicle to facilitate visits to the regions. Two nurses travel regularly to the homes of patients in Stepanakert and the regions, supporting around 81 home patients to live independently or with their families. Currently, the visits are made using a 2-door Russian Niva, which was acquired by the centre 11 years ago. The vehicle is too small to transport patients and larger supplies such as wheelchairs or mattresses. It is also inappropriate for the types of journeys that are needed – some patients live in mountain villages far from Stepanakert, accessible only by difficult roads, which are particularly dangerous in winter.

Both the size and age of the vehicle mean it is ill-equipped for purpose. The centre is looking for a large 4 wheel drive vehicle, which would be suitable on the difficult roads. This would enable them to visit patients in remote areas in all seasons, and to transport patients, wheelchairs, mattresses and other equipment. They are looking at a Toyota Hilux or Mitsubishi L200, with a price of around 32,000 USD in Yerevan.

Collaboration with Kinésithérapeutes du Monde (Physiotherapists of the World)

An on-going collaboration with the French organisation Kinésithérapeutes du Monde is bringing new skills, expertise and personnel to the Centre, enhancing the training and development of local staff.

This collaboration began in June 2013, with the aim of improving skills in the Centre and developing rehabilitative care in hospitals across Karabakh.

Vincent Farigoule, a physiotherapist, spent six months at the Centre. He focused on care for children, particularly those with Cerebral Palsy and Scoliosis. This included training on the process of assessment and the use of certain types of rehabilitative equipment, including the pulley and the Wii. He set up meetings with an orthopaedic specialist and a neuropaediatrician at the rehabilitation centre, on the last Friday afternoon of every month, and created an option for pregnant women to access hydrotherapy there. He instigated a partnership with the Prosthesis Centre of Stepanakert, and initiated meetings with regional hospitals, with the aim of exploring the potential for working together.

Astrig Topouzkhania, a speech therapist, spent two weeks in the Centre. Her teaching focused on swallowing troubles and speech therapy more broadly.

The Centre is currently hosting **Fanny Thiebault**, a physiotherapist undertaking a four-month placement. Her focuses are respiratory care for children and adults and improving the centre's practice with stroke patients. She is also working in the crucial area of assessment; particularly fostering a greater depth and individuality in the assessment process. She is conducting lectures for the staff as well as exploring possibilities for extending rehabilitation therapies to hospitals and other treatment facilities in the region. She has been training the physiotherapists of the Rehabilitation Centre to be able to teach other nurses, who will then become physiotherapists for the hospitals of Stepanakert, Martakert, Martuni and Hadrut. This teaching focuses on the different skills needed for the acute phase of care, particularly on re-animation and neurology. She has spent time in the hospitals of Martakert, Hadrut and Stepanakert, assessing their needs and initiating practice with the rehabilitation centre. She has also looked for financial support for the project, and has liaised with the Minister of Health to ensure that jobs can be provided for the new physiotherapists in the various hospitals. There is huge potential here; currently, the hospitals are very weak in respiratory care, and there are no pneumologists in Karabakh.

Fanny is also ensuring the continuity of multidisciplinary consultation with doctors at the centre, carrying on the work of earlier visiting physiotherapists. For example, she is continuing the partnership with the prosthesis centre of Stepanakert, and as a result has been able to secure an ankle foot orthosis for the centre.

She has undertaken initial visits to home care patients, assessing the current situation in preparation for the arrival of another colleague, an occupational therapist, who will be coming to the centre at the end of July for three months. She will be helping to develop the practice of Occupation Therapy in the centre and to improve the care of home patients, and will continue the partnerships with Karabakh's hospitals.

Day Care for children

The kindergarten brings together classes of children under 7yrs; 10 with disabilities and 10 without. This enables children with and without disabilities to mix, thus breaking down stigma whilst ensuring a supportive and effective environment for the development of all children involved. In Vardan's words: *"the biggest benefit is they are playing with the children who have no disability. This is good education for all of them, that they are together, they are one community. It doesn't matter who has what."*

The disabled children have access to a range of therapies, including physical, occupational and speech therapy, hydrotherapy and support from psychologists.

Recent years have seen a growing number of children with autism cared for and supported by the Rehabilitation Centre. A team of speech therapists and psychologists work together to help these children to become independent, and to move on to state schools once they graduate the kindergarten. All of the children who graduated the day care centre continued with their education in public schools.

Staff members, including the psychologist and speech therapists, are beginning to work with school teachers from across Karabakh, training them on how to best support autistic children. This educational programme gives teachers the opportunity to see for themselves how the centre works, attend seminars and take the principles and practices of rehabilitation back to their own schools.

Trips

One of the central tenets of the Rehabilitation Centre's ethos is to allow patients to experience as normal a life as possible. To this end, the Director and staff organise trips – to restaurants, the seaside, churches, and even a recent holiday to Lake Sevan in Armenia.

Therapies

Speech therapies and psychological support.



Physical therapy, sports and gym

A wide range of physical therapies are offered at the Centre with the aim of securing greater mobility and independence for all patients. Vardan states, *“This is our goal – even the most sick person, we are trying to help him to be self-caring, doing all his activities on his own, at least dressing, washing, brushing teeth, doing transferring from wheelchairs and back to wheelchairs.”*

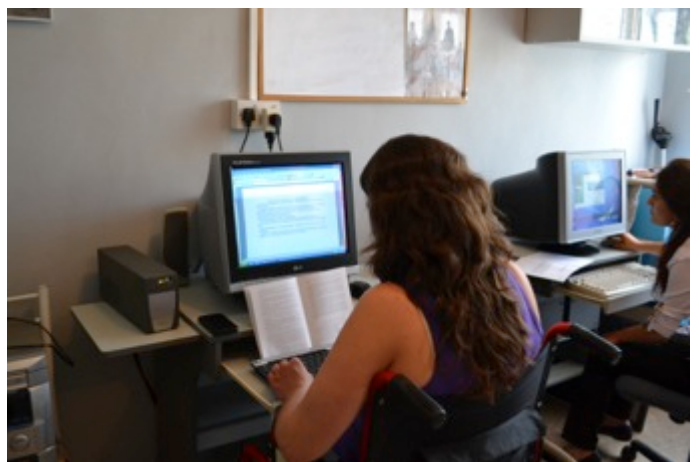


Above: Arsen is 16 and has Cerebral Palsy. He has been coming to the for 14 years. His therapies are helping him to walk correctly, and are strengthening his muscles, increasing tone and elasticity.

Hydrotherapy

The Centre’s hydrotherapy pool is the only such facility in the region. It was opened in 2008.

Occupational therapy, including art, woodworking, pottery, macramé, weaving and music



Section II: Summary of Meetings

Over the course of the week, meetings were held with political, religious and community leaders in Nagorno Karabakh. The summaries below outline the major issues that were raised.

Meeting with the President of The Republic of Nagorno Karabakh, Bako Sahakyan

- The President and his Government are committed to securing a new building for the Rehabilitation Centre. Next steps were agreed, including the drafting and sending of a letter and accompanying dossier to potential funders by HART, Vardan and the Government.
- The President highlighted the support that Baroness Cox has given to Artsakh over the years, saying: *“You’ve contributed many things to Nagorno Karabakh but the most important thing is not the material side, but that you have given us part of your soul and your heart.”*
- Nagorno Karabakh’s engagement with and reputation in the UK was discussed. International recognition and engagement is a central issue. The President stated: *“We are moving along the path towards universal European values – so developing relations with the UK is very important to us.”* He explained his plans for a delegation from Nagorno Karabakh to visit the UK in November, and requested Baroness Cox’s assistance in this.
- The Government of Nagorno Karabakh are doing all they can to facilitate the work of the Minsk group. However, there is a strong feeling that the talks cannot succeed without Artsakh’s participation.

Meeting with the Chair of the Assembly, Ashot Ghoullyan

“This is not a sleeping conflict – it can explode at any time.”

“If you keep the situation tense, you don’t give people the chance to feel the peace and get used to peace. If people always keep their guns ready, it is much harder to think about and to keep or build the peace.”

- Azerbaijan is continuing its military build up, mainly from Russia. It is misrepresenting the Karabakh problem in international structures, and is succeeding in many countries in Europe – particularly due to oil interests.
- There are concerns that internal movements in Azerbaijan, including increasing restrictions on political freedoms, will make the situation more explosive. Recent months have seen a number of detentions of journalists and human rights activists.
- There is an awareness within the Government of Karabakh that they need to hold themselves to a high standard in terms of political culture, civil society and freedom of speech. They are working to strengthen democratic systems.
- Due to the on-going tensions, a lot of money is spent on security issues and are therefore kept from developing schools, hospitals and democratic structures, with repercussions for the quality of life of Karabakhi citizens.
- **Proliferation of Arms:** serious concerns were raised about the continuing military build up in the region and the potential for unpredictable clashes.
- **Line of Contact:** No dramatic changes on the Line of Contact in the past year, but the tension has been increasing.
- In 2014, about 4 diversion groups have attempted to penetrate Karabakh.
- Currently, snipers are sitting along the front lines, waiting to shoot. They also use Kalashnikovs and machine guns. Soldiers are receiving orders from high up to keep tension on the Line of Contact.
- There is an urgent need to take measures to prevent more casualties along the Line of Contact. The Government has made a number of suggestions to try and keep the calm, including increased contact and a withdrawal of snipers. The recommendation that snipers be withdrawn from the Line

of Contact was taken up by the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. These measures have been rejected by Azerbaijan.

- This is the only ceasefire in the world which is maintained without peacekeeping troops – because of the balance of power on both sides. This is significant: the Mr Ghoulyan believes that without instructions coming from above, the situation would be calm, with far fewer incidents and casualties.
- This is a serious hindrance to negotiations, because it maintains the pressure on each side not to compromise. The psychological effect on society of losing a young soldier on the Line of Contact is great – after such incidents, you can't make concessions during negotiations, because society is alert and is watching.
- To the international community – hold all sides accountable to what they have agreed. All sides agreed to solve the Karabakh issue ***exclusively by peaceful means***. Only after making this commitment was Azerbaijan accepted to the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other structures, yet today Azerbaijan ignores its agreements on arms.
- Utilise the instruments that you can. For example, any international structure of which Azerbaijan is a member, and which they have made commitments to – ask why they are not complying with their commitments.

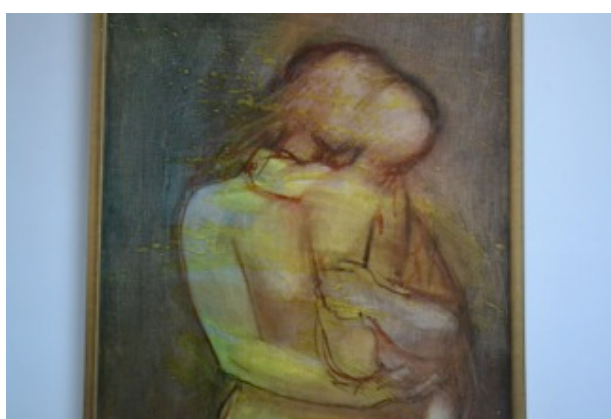
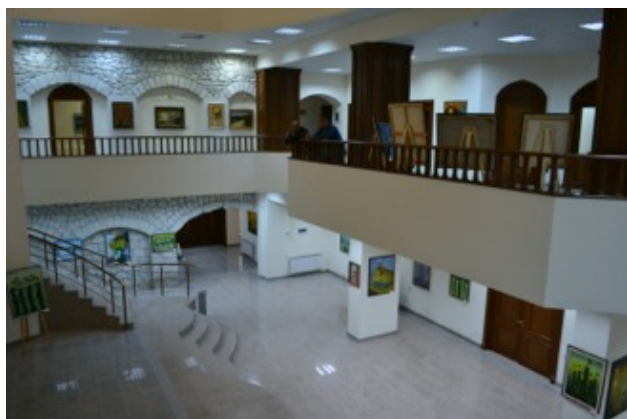
Meeting with Minister for Culture, Narine Aghabalyan, and visit to cultural sites



Above left: with the Minister for Culture.

Above right: with the Chair of the Assembly.

The delegation met the Karabakh Minister for Culture in her new office in Shoushi, and visited a number of sites of social and cultural importance, including a new geological museum and art gallery in Shoushi. Newly opened, these institutions are a testament to the Karabakhi people's commitment to cultural and social development. They also have potential to play a central role in the development of tourism in the region.



Above left: inside the new art gallery at Shoushi.

Above right: artwork donated by Armenian diaspora.

Meeting with Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan at Holy Etchmiadzin

“Our main desire is to have the free and independent rights of people who have chosen to live freely, so they can practice their faith and preserve their traditions.”

“It is our prayer and hope that one day we will come to mutual understanding, that the peace will be permanent and constant without any violations.”

“We try to separate religion from politics; to stand above the political issues. Our main goal is to establish peace and mutual understanding. We lived with Azeris for a long time during the Soviet time, and we know each other well.”

“Our entire history is the story of hope. It is in our blood.”

- Since the beginning of the war, there have been several meetings between the heads of religious institutions in Armenia and Azerbaijan, often organised by the Russian Church.
- The main objective of these meetings is to discourage violations of the ceasefire and to keep the relative peace that exists. The communication is not very intensive, but an effort is made to keep these channels open. The current focus at the moment is on keeping the peace, avoiding violence and violations of the ceasefire. Dialogue is on-going on various levels.
- However, the reality is on the borders – as seen in the many violations of the ceasefire.
- In the recent case of the capture of an Armenian shepherd on the border, the Armenian Church appealed and sent a letter to senior religious leaders in Azerbaijan. Nothing has yet come of this.
- The destruction of hundreds of churches and crosses – including Khachkars – in Nakhchivan, remains a point of serious consternation.
- This is not a religious war – religion has to help the people, not separate or make them enemies.
- We are hopeful that through collaboration, a relative peace can be kept.

Further Observations

- The Government of Nagorno Karabakh is working to strengthen civil society and to open up greater freedom of expression. We urge international supporters of Artsakh to help facilitate this progress, by supporting civil society and community-based organisations.
- Despite political and economic isolation, impressive progress has been made in Nagorno Karabakh, with increasingly sophisticated infrastructure and service provision. However, on-going insecurity means that a significant proportion of the state budget is channelled into defence, leaving critical sectors such as health and education underfunded, leading to gaps in service provision.
- Despite considerable progress (with increasing numbers of women accessing higher education, for example) significant challenges to women’s rights exist. There is a need to increase women’s participation in the political sphere: in the Karabakh National Assembly, just 4 of 33 members are women. This problem extends to both Armenia and Azerbaijan – a recent analysis by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation on women’s political participation reported that *“Even though both countries have laws that promise gender equality, women are limited by the lack of their implementation. Politicians from both countries seldom discuss women’s issues openly and policies are often made behind closed doors and without women. Due to prescribed gender roles, women who are active in politics are assigned to ‘soft’ affairs, have less influence, do not attain positions of power and influence, are neglected and risk their reputations”*.²
- The peace negotiations are also almost entirely male-dominated, and international actors are cementing rather than challenging the status quo. Since the ceasefire in 1994, not a single woman has been in a leadership position within the Minsk Group. Neither the EU nor OSCE have any female representatives in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. This is an issue which all international actors should be working to address.

² Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2012, ‘Equal Power – Lasting Peace. Armenia and Azerbaijan: stuck in conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh’. <http://kvinna.tillkvinna.se/wp-content/uploads/qbank/301ad0e3bd5cb1627a2044908a42fdc2.pdf>

Section III: Background to and analysis of issues raised in meetings

3.i The Line of Contact

May 12th was the 20th anniversary of the Russian-brokered ceasefire, signed in 1994. This is the only ceasefire in the world maintained without international troops. At some points along the 160-mile front line, the trenches are less than 100metres apart. Both the Azerbaijani and Armenian armed force have up to 70,000 men under arms.³ Around half are positioned along the Line of Contact.

The ceasefire has been violated regularly throughout its twenty-year history, with around 30-40 deaths annually⁴ (though reliable figures are hard to come by). The Chair of the Assembly, Ashot Ghoulyan, offered an insight into the psychological and cultural impact of the continuing tensions and casualties along the Line of Contact during our meeting: *“This is a serious hindrance to negotiations, because it maintains the pressure on each side not to compromise. The psychological effect on society of losing a young soldier on the Line of Contact is great; after such incidents, you can’t make concessions during negotiations.”* Ongoing clashes allow a sense of fear to flourish, and serve to polarise the parties to the conflict.

January’s Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, released by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, reported that *“The standoff between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh and adjacent territories will remain a potential flashpoint... the close proximity of opposing military forces and recurring ceasefire violations along the Line of Contact (LOC) continue to pose a risk of miscalculation.”*⁵

A number of measures have been proposed to keep the peace along the Line of Contact. These include:

- **A stronger presence on the ground for international monitors.** Currently, there are only six international monitors from the OSCE covering the entire front line.⁶ As a result, reliable monitoring of the ceasefire, including the verification of clashes and casualties, is sparse. A *“more frequent, unannounced and better-staffed monitoring mission could instil a sense that the international community does care about ceasefire violations, and that armed forces are accountable”*.⁷
- **Withdrawal of snipers.** This recommendation has been made by the Government of Nagorno Karabakh and taken up by the Minsk Group co-chairs. This would reduce the potential for miscalculations and sporadic clashes to escalate into a resumption of full hostilities, and could reduce casualties along the LOC – which, in turn, could play a crucial role in de-escalating tensions between the parties to the conflict. The OSCE has been calling for the withdrawal of snipers since 2008. A range of civil society organisations have made similar recommendations; Saferworld, for example, has recommended that *“the EU should encourage governing authorities to focus specifically on the issue of sniper deployment and to accept the mediators’ proposal to withdraw snipers to a distance of 500 metres from the border”*.⁸
- **A Crisis Hotline** should be established between the two sides, to prevent military escalation and miscalculation. There are currently no hotlines across the frontline.⁹

3.ii Proliferation of arms

Azerbaijan’s defence expenditure for 2013 was officially set at \$3.7billion, more than Armenia’s entire \$2.8billion national budget.¹⁰ Azerbaijan is now committed to spending \$4billion on defence annually.¹¹

³ De Waal, A. 15th May 2014, ‘A forgotten front line’, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/15/forgotten-front-line/hatv>

⁴ Broers, L. 18th Feb 2014. ‘Confidence-building in the Karabakh conflict: what next?’,

<http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/confidence-building-in-the-karabakh-conflict-what-next/>

⁵ Clapper, J. R., 29th January 2014. ‘Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’.

<http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/DN1threats2014.pdf>

⁶ De Waal, A. 15th May 2014, ‘A forgotten front line’, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/15/forgotten-front-line/hatv>

⁷ Broers, L. 18th Feb 2014. ‘Confidence-building in the Karabakh conflict: what next?’,

<http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/confidence-building-in-the-karabakh-conflict-what-next/>

⁸ Saferworld, 2012, ‘People’s Peacemaking Perspectives: Nagorny Karabakh conflict and frontline areas’.

<http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/652-nagorny-karabakh-conflict-and-frontline-areas>

⁹ Broers, L., 11th October 2013, ‘The unbearable starkness of choices: What lies between solution and resumption of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict?’ <http://commonsense.eu/eng/news/6/id2798>

Without Azerbaijan's oil reserves and suffering from economic isolation, Armenia's defence budget lags far behind; though significant discounts from Russia on military equipment somewhat mitigate the shortfall.

An analysis by International Crisis Group (ICG) highlights that, since the mediation efforts stalled in 2011, Azerbaijan has increasingly discussed a military solution, whilst stockpiling weapons. ICG's report on this build-up is as follows [emphasis added]:

*In recent years [Azerbaijan] has bought a wide array of hardware, from **attack helicopters, fighter planes, and surface-to-air missiles, to anti-tank artillery systems**. In August 2013, government officials announced plans to procure another \$3 billion worth of arms from South Korea, including **submarines and naval vessels**. **Drones**, some imported from Israel, others produced domestically in a joint venture, are another major focus. Azerbaijan has also embarked on creating a large domestic weapons industry, from the **high explosive hexogen to machine guns, ammunition, automatic rifles and artillery**.*

*The June 2013 delivery of some \$1 billion worth of Russian weapons was the latest in a series since 2010, with an estimated total value of \$3 billion-\$4 billion. These have included **advanced tanks, artillery and air defence systems**... The most recent Russian delivery raised particular concerns, as it included eighteen "Smerch" (Tornado) BM-30 **multiple rocket launch systems (MRLS)**. These have a **strike range of up to 90km**, and can also **disperse anti-personnel and anti-tank mines over wide areas, threatening Armenian re-supply and escape corridors around the occupied territories and Nagorno-Karabakh.**"¹²*

The proliferation and increasing sophistication of weaponry suggests that if conflict resumes, the effects will reach further and be more destructive than in the previous conflict.

3.iii International Engagement with Artsakh

The state of Nagorno Karabakh continues to exist in a state of economic and political isolation, side-lined by the international community: both through its rejection of Karabakh's statehood and through its neglect of the ongoing 'frozen' conflict. Peace negotiations are coordinated by the OSCE Minsk Group; comprised of 11 members and co-chaired by France, Russia and the US. The inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh in negotiations and discussions about its own future is an issue of paramount importance.

Russia is a key player in the region, and supplies cash and weapons to both sides.

In a recent testimony to the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Eric Ruben gave an update on the US' priorities in relation to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, thus offering an insight into the current work of the OSCE Minsk Group, of which the US is a co-chair. The co-chairs are focusing on bringing the sides into negotiations on a peace agreement, and are optimistic that the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan will agree to meet in the near future. Ruben also emphasised that it "*is important that both governments support Track II efforts to build people to people contacts between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. These kinds of confidence building measures can help to prepare citizens of both countries for peace.*"¹³

3.iv Internal human rights situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan

Armenia

Human Rights Watch's 2014 World Report stated:

Broadcast media lacks pluralism and there were several instances of violence and harassment against journalists and media workers during the year. Violence and discrimination based on sexual

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, 26th September 2013, 'Armenia and Azerbaijan: A Season of Risks'

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/b071-armenia-and-azerbaijan-a-season-of-risks.pdf>

¹¹ Broers, L., 11th October 2013, 'The unbearable starkness of choices: What lies between solution and resumption of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict?' <http://commonsense.eu/eng/news/6/id2798>

¹² International Crisis Group, 26th September 2013, 'Armenia and Azerbaijan: A Season of Risks', p. 5 - 6

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/b071-armenia-and-azerbaijan-a-season-of-risks.pdf>

¹³ Rubin, E., 11th June 2014, 'The Security, Economic and Human Rights Dimensions of U.S.-Azerbaijan Relations', Statement before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission).

<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2014/jun/227477.htm>

*orientation and gender identity by both state and non-state actors are serious problems. Bureaucratic restrictions prevent people with terminal illnesses from accessing strong pain medications.*¹⁴

Concerns also exist around ill-treatment in police custody, with authorities often refusing to investigate allegations of ill-treatment.

Challenges to freedom of assembly have been reported, including attacks by unidentified assailants on peaceful protestors. The Women's Resource Centre, an NGO, has been subjected to increasing threats by nationalist groups.¹⁵

Azerbaijan

With regard to Azerbaijan, Human Rights Watch reported in 2014 that:

The Azerbaijani Government's poor record on freedom of expression, assembly, and association dramatically deteriorated during the year. The authorities arrested dozens of political activists on bogus charges, imprisoned critical journalists, broke up several peaceful public demonstrations, and adopted legislation that further restricted fundamental freedoms.

The government continued its urban renewal campaign in the capital Baku, forcibly evicting hundreds of families without adequate compensation. Torture and ill-treatment persists with impunity.

*Azerbaijan's international partners failed to fully realize the potential of their relationships with the government to press for rights improvements.*¹⁶

The Presidential Election of October 2013 failed to meet international standards. Crackdowns on political activists and journalists continue, with severe limitations to freedom of expression and assembly being committed in legislation and in practice. There are concerns that this will provoke greater aggression towards Karabakh as the Government of Azerbaijan seeks to deflect criticism away from its internal policies.

In February 2014, the writer Akram Aylisli was targeted by a government smear campaign, after publishing a novel containing critical analysis of Azerbaijan's modern history and treatment of Armenians. Aylisli was stripped of his government stipend and title of "People's Writer", and his wife and son were fired from their jobs.¹⁷

3.v Cross Border Collaborations and Confidence Building Mechanisms

A recurring conversation throughout our time in Karabakh was of the work being done to promote mutual understanding and cross-border dialogue between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh. A number of confidence-building initiatives have been underway during the course of the twenty-year ceasefire; though they have struggled to gain traction both in political and public spheres.

Reciprocal visits were regular during the late 1990s and early 2000s, but have lessened in recent years. There are a number of possible, interrelated reasons for this, including a lack of economic and political support for such initiatives, mistrust amongst both communities and a fear of potentially negative repercussions for the participants, and a failure to gather critical momentum. That said, visits do continue on various levels, and are being re-explored in a number of arenas, particularly driven by faith groups. As we heard at Holy Etchmiadsin, the channels of communication between faith-based leaders in Armenia and Azerbaijan have remained open throughout the history of the ceasefire, and offer a potential point for contact and consensus.

Commissions on each side for missing persons have not met for several years;¹⁸ these channels of communication could be reopened.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, 2014, 'World Report 2014: Armenia'. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/armenia>

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, 2014, 'World Report 2014: Armenia'. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/armenia>

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, 2014, 'World Report 2014: Azerbaijan', <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/azerbaijan>

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, 2014, 'World Report 2014: Azerbaijan', <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/azerbaijan>

¹⁸ Broers, L. 18th Feb 2014. 'Confidence-building in the Karabakh conflict: what next?'

<http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/confidence-building-in-the-karabakh-conflict-what-next/>

The maintenance of divisive rhetoric, particularly on the Azerbaijani side, is a significant hindrance to such confidence-building initiatives. Recent, high profile cases of harassment of individuals who have participated in Track II processes serve as a strong deterrent to participation in cross border dialogue. Azerbaijan's arrest of journalist Rauf Mirkadirov, and the investigation of Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif Yunusov, are very recent examples of this. These cases were highlighted in Rubin's recent testimony to the US Helsinki Commission. He stated, "*All three have been strong proponents of the Track II process and the Azerbaijani government's actions will have a chilling effect on any contact between Azerbaijanis and Armenians.*"¹⁹ Further tension has been caused by the pardoning by Azerbaijan of an officer who killed an Armenian colleague while both were attending a NATO "partnership for peace" – sponsored language course in Hungary. Azerbaijan promised that he would serve the remainder of his prison sentence, but on his return he was "*treated as a hero, freed and promoted*".²⁰

¹⁹ Rubin, E. 11th June 2014, 'The Security, Economic and Human Rights Dimensions of U.S.-Azerbaijan Relations', Statement before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission).
<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2014/jun/227477.htm>

²⁰ International Crisis Group, 26th September 2013, 'Armenia and Azerbaijan: A Season of Risks', p. 7
[http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/b071-armenia-and-azerbaijan-a-season-of-risks.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/caucasus/b071-armenia-and-azerbaijan-a-season-of-risks.pdf)

For further information:

Read more about the Rehabilitation Centre in our most recent newsletter, which can be downloaded [here](#). Learn more about the concept and history of rehabilitation in the article “Silenced Lives: Empowering the Disabled in Post-Soviet Karabakh”, available [here](#). Find the Lady Cox Rehabilitation Centre on Facebook [here](#).

About HART:

HART (Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust) was established to provide aid and advocacy for victims of oppression and persecution, often trapped behind closed borders, often ‘off the radar screen’ of international media and whose governments deny access by aid organisations.

HART relies on first-hand evidence of human rights violations, using this as a basis for a powerful twin-track programme of international advocacy in arenas such as the House of Lords and the media, and targeted aid-work focusing on sustainable community development, local partnership and regional networks of support. Through advocacy in national and international arenas, we can be a voice for those who have no voice and strive to promote political solutions to the causes of oppression and exploitation.

Contact HART:

Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust
3 Arnellan House
144-146 Slough Lane
Kingsbury
London NW9 8XJ

T: +44 (0) 20 8204 7336

E: office@hart-uk.org

W: www.hart-uk.org

For questions or further information, to arrange interviews, or access further audio-visual materials, please contact Alice Robinson, HART’s Advocacy and Communications Manager, at alice.robinson@hart-uk.org.

VISIT NAGORNO-KARABAKH

In summer 2015, HART will be taking a delegation of interested individuals from around the world to Nagorno-Karabakh, to learn about the region, its history and the questions around its future. This is an opportunity to learn about an oft-forgotten, under-reported conflict and to facilitate the telling of its story to a wider audience.

Anyone is welcome to join us on this trip. For more information, please contact alice.robinson@hart-uk.org.

Appendices

I. Delegation

Caroline Cox, CEO, Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)
Anoush Fermanian
Helen Gilbert, Chairperson of HART Board of Trustees
Graham Hadley
Erika Nordblad, HART Intern
Nimer Rashed, Filmmaker
Alice Robinson, Advocacy and Communications Manager, HART
Sylvia Simpson
Elizabeth Stanton, HART Intern
Steven John Turner

II. Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all who took the time to organise, host and participate in the visit.

A special thank you goes, as always, to Artemis Grigorian for her work organising the visit, and her tireless translation efforts.

III. Itinerary

25th May: Travel to Yerevan (via Moscow).
26th: Travel to Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh, by bus.
27th: Meeting with the Chair of the Assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh, Mr Ashot Ghoulyan.
Visit to the Museum for Fallen Soldiers and meeting with the Director.
Travel to the city of Shoushi. Meeting with the Culture Minister, Ms Narine Aghabalyan, and visited new geological museum and art gallery.
28th: Visit to Gandzasar Monastery, rehabilitation centre home patient and walk with Aslan Grigorian.
29th: Visit to the Museum for Missing Soldiers and meeting with the Director.
Visit to Rehabilitation Centre (extended visit by some HART staff).
Meeting with the President of The Republic of Nagorno Karabakh, Mr Bako Sahakyan.
Dinner as Guests of the Artsakh Government.
30th: Travel back to Yerevan.
31st: Travelled to City of Etchmiadsin. Meeting with Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan.
Respects paid at The Memorial for the Armenian Genocide and meeting with Director.
Guests at dinner with Zori Balayan and Pilots of the Artsakh War.
1st June: Travel back to London.