

AEN Calls for Support for U.S. Bill to Aid Reforestation Efforts in Armenia

PRESS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C.– Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced legislation last Wednesday to aid reforestation efforts in Haiti and Armenia. The Armenian Environmental Network (AEN) is extremely pleased that Senator Durbin has taken leadership on such a critical issue to Armenia's development.

According to Senator Durbin's office, the *Haiti and Armenia Reforestation Act*, S. 1548, seeks to end the rapid and near total deforestation of the two nations and restore their native forests to their pre-1990 levels within 20 years using proven market-based reforestation models. Durbin has traveled to Haiti a number of times and witnessed the effects of deforestation first hand. Last year, he traveled to Armenia to discuss regional, security and environmental issues with the nation's president.

While there are yet other important problems that threaten Armenia's environment, such as irresponsible mining practices that violate national and international laws and poison Armenia's waterways, croplands, and forests, AEN fully supports this comprehensive reforestation bill, which will lead to immeasurable improvement for the lives of the Armenian people.

"Armenians are tired of the unchecked abuse of their country's resources, and they are seeking positive change," noted AEN's President and Founder, Ursula Kazarian. She continued, "Prioritizing the sustainable management of environmental resources is a creative, very practical, and effective approach to combat corruption and environmental disinformation so prevalent in Armenia today. We are excited to be working with Senator Durbin's office and others on this important initiative."

Armenia recently received international attention after joining the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union, leading many to wonder whether Armenia chose to do so freely or whether political pressure from Russia played a role. In fact, it is Kremlin-connected money that underlies many of the economic and development problems facing Armenia today, including the massive scale of illegal logging of Armenia's forests for commercial export.

Durbin's bill will reverse decades of deforestation by requiring the U.S. government to work with Haiti and Armenia to develop a sustainable, market-based plan to save and regrow its native forests. The bill outlines plans to provide technical assistance, support, and capacity-building expertise to manage conservation and reforestation efforts in a measurable, reportable, and verifiable way. Significantly, the bill also authorizes debt-for-nature swaps for both nations.

Some aspects of the bill may be strengthened as it moves forward and AEN has offered its expertise as well as general support to Senator Durbin's office to ensure maximum impact from the reforestation activities authorized by this legislation. If the Armenian-American community comes together to actively support this proposed legislation, AEN is confident that the bill will pass, making it the first of its kind for direct assistance for environmental restoration in Armenia.

By introducing this legislation, Senator Durbin, together with the bill's co-sponsors, Senators Sherrod Brown (OH), Benjamin L. Cardin (MD), Dianne Feinstein (CA), Bill Nelson (FL), and

Sheldon Whitehouse (RI), have truly taken the time to understand the real problems facing development in the Caucasus region and specifically in Armenia.

AEN strongly encourages the Armenian-American communities in Illinois, Ohio, Maryland, California, Florida, and Rhode Island to [call and thank](#) their Senators for leading the way to provide for US assistance to restore Armenia's environment.

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AEN's mission is to increase information sharing and engagement among Armenians, in Armenia and in the Diaspora, and the wider conservation community about environmental issues in Armenia, while facilitating environmentally sustainable development in Armenia through responsible partnerships of Diasporan and international resources. Please visit our website www.armenia-environment.org.

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