

**SPECIAL REPORT ON
THE DAMAGES AND THREATS TO THE ARMENIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE
AS A RESULT OF ARMENOPHOBIC POLICIES OF AZERBAIJAN**

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Introduction

1. This report reflects on the state policy of Azerbaijan aimed at total destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage, its appropriation through misrepresentation of the history and actual removal of all the traces of indigenous Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK, also called by its historical name - Artsakh) as well as in the region.
2. Nagorno-Karabakh is home to many fortresses, religious sites, and antiquities dating back centuries. Its cultural landscape has ineffaceable Armenian presence, as Armenians have inhabited Nagorno-Karabakh continuously for over two thousand years.
3. "The historical monuments of Karabakh, a mountainous territory in the South Caucasus, collectively testify the millennia-long Armenian character of the region. While the Hellenistic and Armenian archaeological site of Tigranakert, the fifth-century tomb at Amaras and basilica of Tzitzernavank, the medieval monastery of Dadivank, and the 19th-century Cathedral of Shushi are most cited in scholarship, they represent only a small fraction of the extant Armenian structures, many of which date to the medieval period."¹
4. After the war of Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in the fall of 2020 a large number of historical-cultural monuments appeared under Azerbaijan's control. In 2021, the Human Rights Ombudsman of Nagorno-Karabakh published a report describing the 1,456 Armenian historical objects and cultural monuments that had passed under Azerbaijani control, including 161 Armenian churches, 591 khachkars (engraved cross-stones), the archaeological site of Tigranakert, the Azokh Paleolithic cave, the Nor Karmiravan tombs, Mirik, Keren, and architectural monuments such as palaces, bridges, and historic quarters.²
5. Additionally, 8 state museums and galleries, such as the Shushi Carpet Museum and Armenian Dram Museum that used to operate on a private basis, with up to 21,000 artefacts, and 127 school libraries with 617,000 books appeared under Azerbaijan's control.³
6. Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian racism state-sponsored policies and the multiple episodes of full destruction, damage and conversions of Armenian cultural and religious sites under its control raise serious concerns on the risks and the future of the Armenian heritage.
7. No international organization has been able to send a technical mission to Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding areas to monitor the situation, as Azerbaijan creates all possible impediments for such a visit, which only confirms the concerns.
8. In its recent response to the communication of UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights from 2 years ago (October 2021), Azerbaijan presented a distorted picture of the real state of affairs around the cultural monuments in the territory within its control and once again refused the visit of the Special Rapporteur to those territories, where Armenian cultural heritage exists.⁴

¹ Christina Maranci, "The Medieval Armenian Monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh Must be Protected," Apollo Magazine. 9 December 2020, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/medieval-armenian-monuments-nagorno-karabakh/>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

² Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh, Ad Hoc Public Report the Armenian Cultural Heritage in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh): Cases of Vandalism and at Risk of Destruction by Azerbaijan, 26 January, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3s9xOiy>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Response of Azerbaijan to the written communication of Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gld=37390>, 21 February 2023, accessed on 17 April 2023.

9. Despite international reactions from Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), EU Parliament, UN Special Rapporteurs as well as the binding order of International Court of Justice (ICJ), Azerbaijan has continued its policy of erasure of the Armenian cultural heritage, demonstrating that its policy of falsification of history and culture is not limited to Nagorno-Karabakh, but also to Armenia.
10. Comprehensive picture of the destruction, damage, intentional conversion, or appropriation of the Armenian cultural heritage by Azerbaijan currently is not available due to the lack of international monitoring, however, materials are available through satellite images, as well as videos and photos published by Azerbaijani media evidencing the continuous erasure of the Armenian traces in territories currently under control of Azerbaijan.
11. The present report has put forward the existing evidence - vivid examples of damage to the cultural heritage sponsored at the state level in Azerbaijan by pointing to the urgent need to undertake specific actions and practical steps from the side of the international community to use their mechanisms to stop the manifest violation of international law leading to the loss of the ancient Armenian cultural heritage of the region.

Background Information

12. The origin of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh dates back to Russian Empire, which used the religious differences of Christian Armenians and Caucasian Tatars (Turkic populace that form the core of current Azerbaijani population) to instigate clashes and to rule.
13. In 1921, Joseph Stalin - responsible for the Bolshevik government's policy of nationalities, pushed for annexation of the Armenian populated Nagorno-Karabakh to Soviet Azerbaijan to please the prospective leadership of Turkey – Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. In July 1923, a special Armenian administrative-territorial unit – Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) - was created with some level of autonomy within Soviet Azerbaijan, against the will of local population and leadership, while other regions with dense Armenian population were put under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan without any special status, governed by Azerbaijani authorities. The same approach was used for Nakhichevan – creating Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan, with a more mixed population.
14. Since then, for about 70 years under the Azerbaijani rule, the Armenian people were subject to discrimination (e.g., obstacles to study the Armenian language, broadcast Armenian language programs, no direct roads from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, etc.), coupled with intentional movement of Azerbaijani population into the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which significantly

changed the demography of the Armenian populated areas.⁵ Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan was almost completely cleansed from indigenous Armenians.⁶

15. In February 1988, in light of some civic and political freedoms provided by Perestroika the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh exercised their political freedoms (freedoms to assemblies, petitions, voting of representatives) to become part of the then Soviet Armenia, however those actions were met with pogroms instigated by the Azerbaijani authorities in Sumgait (27-29 February 1988) and later in Kirovabad (nowadays Ganja) (November 1988) and in Baku (January 1990).
16. The growing ethnic tensions in both countries and unwillingness of Soviet authorities to solve the problem led to an armed conflict, which resulted in displacement of about 84,000 Azerbaijanis from Armenia⁷ and about 220,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan.⁸
17. The war of 1991-1994 (also called First Karabakh War), launched by Azerbaijan against the Nagorno-Karabakh people ended with a ceasefire agreement in May 1994, with Nagorno-Karabakh losing some areas in the north of their territory, but also taking control of other adjacent 7 regions.⁹
18. The issue of peaceful and lasting solution of the conflict was negotiated under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) - the Minsk Group, established in 1992.¹⁰
19. Since then, though the de-facto government of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (Republic of Artsakh) made evident efforts to protect the Muslim monuments, such as renovation of a mosque in Shushi (Gohar Agha Upper Mosque), it failed to protect all, though few, monuments throughout the whole territory appeared under its control.
20. The satellite investigation by the Caucasus Heritage Watch has shown that in the interwar period between 1994 and 2020 while the Armenian side was negligent, there was no systemic destruction and erasure of cultural traces.¹¹
21. On 27 September, 2020, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh in spite of the ongoing negotiations on a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Azerbaijan, supported

⁵ Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926 года. Национальный состав населения по регионам республик СССР: Закавказская СФСР/АО Нагорного Карабаха, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2304, accessed on 14 April 2023; Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года, Распределение городского и сельского населения областей республик СССР по полу и национальности: Нагорный Карабах, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp_nac_89.php?reg=71, accessed on 14 April 2023.

⁶ Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926 года. Национальный состав населения по регионам республик СССР: Закавказская СФСР/АО Нахичеванская АССР, www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2294, accessed on 14 April 2023; Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по регионам республик СССР: Закавказская СФСР/АО Нахичеванская АССР, www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp_nac_89.php?reg=70, accessed on 14 April 2023.

⁷ Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР: Армянская ССР, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=13, accessed on 14 April 2023; Council of Europe, Second Report Submitted by Armenia Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 1 of The Framework Convention For The Protection of National Minorities, ACFC/SR/II(2004) 010, 24 November, 2004, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1052022/432_1163080631_pdf-2nd-sr-armenia.pdf, accessed on 14 April 2023.

⁸ Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР: Азербайджанская ССР, www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=7, accessed on 14 April 2023; ECRI Report on Azerbaijan, adopted on 28 June 2002, <https://rm.coe.int/first-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b5579>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, Azerbaijan: Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Helsinki, 8 December 1994, https://www.hrw.org/reports/AZER%20Conflict%20in%20N-K%20Dec94_0.pdf, accessed on 14 April 2023.

¹⁰ OSCE Minsk Group, [https://www.osce.org/mg;Mandate of the Co-Chairmen of the Conference on Nagorno Karabakh under the auspices of the OSCE](https://www.osce.org/mg;Mandate_of_the_Co-Chairmen_of_the_Conference_on_Nagorno_Karabakh_under_the_auspices_of_the_OSCE), March 1995, www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/f/70125.pdf, accessed on 17 April 2023.

¹¹ Caucasus Heritage Watch, Silent Erasure, A Satellite Investigation of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan, 5 April 2023, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/48703f664f2f467b8f4f42008d8c75da>, accessed on 10 April 2023.

by Turkish military, launched a large scale attack against Nagorno-Karabakh - using heavy artillery, tanks, aircraft and missiles, including cluster munitions and unmanned air vehicles - targeting peaceful population and civilian infrastructures, schools and hospitals of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹²

22. Azerbaijani army, shelled the places of worship and cultural monuments, including the St Ghazanchetsots cathedral and mosques in Shushi.
23. Azerbaijan took control of about ~30% of the former NKAO,¹³ including 111 settlements¹⁴ in Shushi, Hadrut, Martuni and Martakert districts. Also, the adjacent territories of NKAO were taken or handed over to Azerbaijan by Armenia in accordance with the tripartite ceasefire statement brokered by Russia on 9 November 2020.¹⁵
24. According to the ceasefire statement, the current relative peace in Nagorno-Karabakh is ensured by the Russian peacekeeping contingent. The latter also controls the access to the monuments that appeared very close to the de facto line of contact under Azerbaijan's control, such as Dadivank monastery, or ensure the safety of monuments that appeared on the de facto line of contact under Nagorno-Karabakh's control, such as Amaras Monastery.
25. Since the tripartite ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of NK has made efforts to take back from occupied Shushi the collections of the city's three museums, including about 200 monuments of the Museum of History of Shushi, nearly 800 paintings, graphic works and sculptures of the Museum of Fine Arts and over 700 samples of the Geology Museum. However, the negotiations through the Russian peacekeepers have been unsuccessful and there are concerns that a large part of collections will be appropriated, while others might be destroyed.¹⁶

¹² Open Society Foundations et al., Human Rights Violations during 44-day war, joint fact-finding report, Yerevan 2022, https://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Fact-Finding-Report_FINAL_web.pdf, accessed on 17 April 2023.

¹³ Caucasian Knot, Karabakh on the Map: What Azerbaijan Gains after War, 12 November 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>; International Crisis Group, The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer, 15 February 2022, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/52755>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

¹⁴ Government of Armenia, Decision N 1820-L, Annex on Assistance to Citizens Registered in Communities of Republic of Artsakh Communities Passed under the Control of the Republic of Azerbaijan as a Result of War Launched on September 27, 2020 (in Armenian), 21 November, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3vbmV1u>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

¹⁵ Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation, 9 November, 2020, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement>.

¹⁶ Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), Fears for Armenian Cultural Heritage in Karabakh, 18 January, 2021, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/fears-armenian-cultural-heritage-karabakh>; Hetq, Shushi's Museums: Most Collections Now in Azerbaijani Hands, 26 January, 2021, <https://hetq.am/en/article/126646>; The Art Newspaper, Azerbaijan Refuses to Hand over 1,500 Artworks after Seizing 'Cultural Capital' in Nagorno-Karabakh, 29 January, 2021, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/01/29/azerbaijan-refuses-to-hand-over-1500-artworks-after-seizing-cultural-capital-in-nagorno-karabakh>; Archi Galentz on Facebook, 25 November 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/archi.galentz/posts/10223964146800890>, all accessed on 14 April 2023.

Policy of Erasure of the Armenian Heritage

26. Azerbaijan has a historical record of intentionally destroying Armenian cultural heritage within its borders.¹⁷ Its campaign of cultural heritage destruction, unprecedented in the modern world, has been referred to as the “worst cultural genocide of the 21st century”.¹⁸
27. From 1997 to 2006, Azerbaijan has erased nearly all traces of prevalent Armenian indigenous culture in its exclave Nakhichevan, with more than Armenian 89 medieval churches, 5,840 carved cross-stones (khachkars), and 22,000 historical tombstones.¹⁹ In 2005, Azerbaijan completely destroyed the richest Armenian cemetery in Julfa (Nakhichevan) - “a medieval necropolis that once housed tens of thousands of khachkars dating back to the sixth century A.D.”²⁰
28. Armenian cross-stones are on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity.²¹ They represent Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and salvation through that crucifixion, “carry inscriptions, including a date, names of sponsors and family members, and pleas for salvation,” making them “not only aesthetically appealing markers of a general Armenian presence and also specific documentary sources that, along with manuscripts, constitute a remarkable resource for reconstructing the history of the region.”²² They are also used for devotional and worship purposes by Armenian Christians and pilgrims.
29. A year-long forensic investigation by Caucasus Heritage Watch (CHW) documented the fate of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Nakhichevan between 1997 and 2011. CHW used high-resolution satellite imagery and revealed the complete destruction of 108 medieval and early modern Armenian monasteries, churches, and cemeteries. The conclusive forensic evidence also showed that silent and systematic cultural erasure has been a feature of Azerbaijan’s ethnic policies.²³
30. Since the launch of Azerbaijani military aggression in September 2020 (44-day war), a similar pattern of destruction has been documented by CHW in Nagorno-Karabakh that fell under the control of Azerbaijan with 6 confirmed destroyed, 7 confirmed damaged, and 17 threatened since then, including after the ceasefire. This made CHW to raise a concern that the template for cultural erasure in Nakhichevan will be pursued in Nagorno-Karabakh too.²⁴
31. Destruction or alteration of Armenian cultural heritage fits well in the core of the policy of Azerbaijan towards the Armenian people is to present them as newcomers in the region and deny

¹⁷ Simon Maghakyan, “Archeologist Raises Alarms Over Azerbaijan’s Shelling of an Ancient City,” HyperAllergic, 3 October 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/592287/tigranakert-Nagorno-Karabakh-nagorno-karabakh-war>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹⁸ Dale Berning Sawa, “Monumental loss: Azerbaijan and ‘The Worst Cultural Genocide of the 21st Century,’” The Guardian, 1 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/monumental-loss-azerbaijan-cultural-genocide-khachkars>, accessed on 10 April 2023.

¹⁹ Christina Maranci, “The Medieval Armenian Monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh Must be Protected,” Apollo Magazine, 9 December 2020, : <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/medieval-armenian-monuments-nagorno-karabakh>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

²⁰ Nora McGreevy, “Why Scholars, Cultural Institutions Are Calling to Protect Armenian Heritage,” Smithsonian Magazine, 24 November 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/metropolitan-museum-scholars-call-protection-cultural-heritage-nagorno-karabakh-180976364/>, accessed on 10 April 2023.

²¹ “Armenian cross-stones art. Symbolism and craftsmanship of Khachkars,” UNESCO, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/armenian-cross-stones-art-symbolism-and-craftsmanship-of-khachkars-00434>, accessed on 10 April 2023.

²² Ibid

²³ Caucasus Heritage Watch, Silent Erasure, A Satellite Investigation of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan, 5 April 2023, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/48703f664f2f467b8f4f42008d8c75da>, accessed on 10 April 2023.

²⁴ Ibid

their right to have their own political determination and even existence in the region. This is also evidenced by statements of high-rank officials,²⁵ including president Aliyev.

32. Given this intent, Azerbaijan pursues a policy of erasure of the Armenian traces in the territories under its control using the following methods: 1. damage to a degree that the historical-cultural property loses its Armenian traces; 2. complete destruction of cultural property; 3. any other conversion or misrepresentation of the Armenian churches and monasteries as e.g. Russian Orthodox, removal of Armenian crosses, 4. and other uses, such as turning those to cafes, kebab restaurants, etc.
33. In August 2020, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its review of Azerbaijan's compliance with the obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns about reports on the destruction of and damage to Armenian cultural heritage, including to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts, and the lack of information on investigations carried out into such allegations.
34. In some places, the complete destruction of the Armenian monasteries and churches have gone in parallel with the construction of mosques in areas where Muslim people have not lived before.²⁶ Also, these attempts are accompanied with the widespread construction of new roads, villages, towns, military bases and modifying the landscapes to an extent of being unrecognizable and unsafe in order to prevent any desire of the indigenous people to return to their homeland.
35. One major explanation for the drive to appropriate Armenian culture is Azerbaijan's national identity - considered to be grounded not on ethnic, but on territorial grounds.²⁷ In the post-Soviet era, Azerbaijan's President Heydar Aliyev²⁸ - "the father of the nation" - adopted a nation-building formula based on "Azerbaijanism" – "trying to portray Azerbaijanis as a nation with ancient history and authentic national identity."²⁹ Hence, political elites tried to connect contemporary Azerbaijanis with the ancient peoples who inhabited the territory of present-day Azerbaijan (including Karabakh) – including Armenians, Caucasian Albanians, Iranians. Along these lines, to resolve the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh in favor of Azerbaijan, in one of his speeches, H. Aliyev proposed to develop the historical background for strengthening the nation and *"to create such works that constantly and consistently prove the Azerbaijani ownership of the lands where*

²⁵ Website of The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "We all know the history of the resettlement of Armenians from Eastern Anatolia and Iran. But it so happened. They have lived there for 200 years", <https://president.az/en/articles/view/44692>; <https://president.az/en/articles/view/20167>; <https://president.az/en/articles/view/9397>, all accessed on 12 April 2023.

²⁶ Website of the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels, 12 January 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55243>, accessed on 10 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva have laid a foundation stone for the mosque to be built in Sugovushan settlement, Tartar district, 20 March 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55655>, accessed on 10 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva viewed construction of Zangilan Mosque, 26 May 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/56205>, accessed on 10 April 2023.

²⁷ Tabachnik, M. Citizenship, Territoriality, and Post-Soviet Nationhood: The Politics of Birthright Citizenship in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, 2019, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 142-164, referred in G.Meneshian, Exploring the Azerbaijani National Identity: a historical analysis, 21 February, 2021, <https://mecacs.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/2021/exploring-the-azerbaijani-national-identity-a-historical-analysis>, accessed on 17 April 2023.

²⁸ Wikipedia, Heydar Aliyev, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heydar_Aliyev, accessed on 17 April 2023.

²⁹ Abbasov, I. et al, Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey. The Caucasus Edition – Journal of Conflict Transformation, 2016, referred in G.Meneshian, Exploring the Azerbaijani National Identity: A Historical Analysis, 21 February, 2021, <https://mecacs.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/2021/exploring-the-azerbaijani-national-identity-a-historical-analysis>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

40. The history of an ancient state of Caucasian Albania (Aghwank, Aluank) is a major instrument of Azerbaijan's revisionist theories, which started in the early 1960s, mainly by Ziya Bunyatov, a Soviet-era Azerbaijani academic.³⁶ His theories have been questioned by a number of international scholars and experts, including Soviet Russian historians Victor Schnirelmann³⁷ and Igor Diakonoff,³⁸ and journalist Thomas de Waal.³⁹ According to Schnirelmann, this narrative is directed toward "ripping the population of early medieval Nagorno-Karabakh off from their Armenian heritage" and "cleansing Azerbaijan of Armenian history."⁴⁰ This practice of appropriation of others' cultures continued later and accelerated after the 2020 war.
41. The Kingdom of Caucasian Albania existed on the territory within the boundaries of the current state of Azerbaijan – to the northeast of Nagorno-Karabakh. Caucasian Albanians, who were Christians, have mostly assimilated throughout the centuries. Their only descendants are the Udi (sometimes, Uti) people. Belonging to the Armenian branch of Christianity, though with different saints, Udis too have suffered from massacres committed by the 1918-1920 Azerbaijani Republic against Christians. Currently, there are small Udi communities in Russia, Ukraine, and in smaller numbers in Georgia and Armenia.⁴¹
42. The Udis of Azerbaijan are actually under threat. Their numbers have declined from more than 50,000 in the 19th century (almost all living on the territory of Azerbaijan) to 6,125 in 1989,⁴² to 4,200 in the early 2000s⁴³ and 3,800 in 2018.⁴⁴ Udis are concentrated in the settlements of Nij (Nizh) and Oghuz (formerly called Vardashen).
43. As a vulnerable group, Udi people are being used by the Azerbaijani authorities to take part in the "Albanisation" process through staged services in churches in Nagorno-Karabakh with an obvious aim of challenging the Armenianness of those sites.
44. "Albanisation" of the Armenian heritage was particularly accelerated by the Azerbaijani authorities following the Order of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) from 7 December 2021, which urged Azerbaijan to *"take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts."*⁴⁵
45. On 3 February 2022, the Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan, Anar Karimov told a press briefing that a working group consisting of "local and international experts" has been established which will be

³⁶ Wikipedia, Ziya Bunyatov, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziya_Bunyatov; Eurasianet, Perspectives | Who were the Caucasian Albanians? 7 June 2021, <https://bit.ly/3HkndWi>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

³⁷ Wikipedia, Victor Schnirelmann, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Schnirelmann, accessed on 12 April 2023.

³⁸ Wikipedia, Igor M. Diakonoff, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igor_M._Diakonoff, accessed on 12 April 2023.

³⁹ Wikipedia, Thomas de Waal, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_de_Waal, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁴⁰ Schnirelmann, Albanian Myth: Albanization of the Armenian Heritage, 2006, <http://www.vehi.net/istoriya/armenia/albanskymif.html>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁴¹ OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, The Problems of Ethnic Survival of National Minorities in Azerbaijan, June 6, 2007, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/b/25591.pdf>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁴² Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР: Азербайджанская ССР, 2013, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=7, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁴³ OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, The Problems of Ethnic Survival of National Minorities in Azerbaijan, 6 June 2007, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/b/25591.pdf>, accessed on 10 April 2023.

⁴⁴ World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Azerbaijan, March 2018; <https://minorityrights.org/country/azerbaijan>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁴⁵ ICJ, Order on the Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures, *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan)*, 7 December 2021, para. 92, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

responsible for removing “the fictitious traces written by Armenians on Albanian religious temples.”⁴⁶ He said, “We are going to inspect those places with the working group members, and after the inspection, we will consider our next steps.”⁴⁷

46. At the same time, on 8 February, 2022, Azerbaijani media published a “petition by Azerbaijani NGOs” to “alarm” international organizations about “the cultural genocide” and “ethnic cleansing” of the Azerbaijani people.⁴⁸ Azerbaijani NGOs complained about Armenia “destroying,” “appropriating,” “forging the origins” of the cultural heritage of Azerbaijani people, using Armenian toponyms of geographic locations, “disregarding human values”, etc. They declare that they have demanded that UNESCO send an expert mission to Armenia to assess Azerbaijani heritage, but Armenia has refused it.
47. In light of a solid evidence of the state-run racially-motivated revisionism of history, in August 2022, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its review of Azerbaijan’s compliance with the obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns about reports that school textbooks promote prejudice and incite racial hatred, particularly against ethnic Armenians, and that ethnic minorities are marginalized in history education in the State party and recommended that the State party adopt measures to ensure that history is taught in such a way as to prevent a dominant historical narrative and ethnic hierarchizing, while ensuring the effective and meaningful participation of the ethnic minorities.
48. The existence of a distinct and unique Armenian alphabet and the Armenian language inscriptions on the cultural heritage does not stop Azerbaijan from denying their Armenian origin. Azerbaijan’s policy in this regard is that Armenians have “armenised” their heritage and that “the inscriptions in Armenian were carved later”.⁴⁹

Episodes of Destruction and Distortion of the Armenian Cultural Heritage

Damages

Surb Ghazanchechots Cathedral in Shushi, Shushi region

49. During the war in 2020, Azerbaijan targeted the Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, a landmark of Armenian cultural identity and religious center for Artsakh Armenians in the city of Shushi.

⁴⁶ Eurasianet, heydar Isayev, Azerbaijan announces plans to erase Armenian traces from churches, 4 February 2022, https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-announces-plans-to-erase-armenian-traces-from-churches?fbclid=IwAR3Gxw9vCCM9QhejTRhuX_vorY5POVTgK_7PTQBzUuaGJvb6w_Iewl0xopc, accessed on 11 April 2023.

⁴⁷ Working group set up to restore Armenianized Albanian temples, 3 February 2022, <https://report.az/en/cultural-policy/working-group-set-up-to-restore-armenianized-temples-of-ancient-albania/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁴⁸ Haqqin.az, НПО Азербайджана обратились к гендиректору ЮНЕСКО, February 8, 2022, https://haqqin.az/news/234034?fbclid=IwAR3-CLVliyNEDNQs_Hs5oaldRucJ50A_kiHSRX2Zz5bFHPsSXeNS3UyMKew, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁴⁹ CBC TV Azerbaijan, Президент Азербайджана и первая леди посетили освобожденные районы, 3:00 minute, 16 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blq-Kn1QnMs>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

50. Shushi, the third city in the Caucasus during the times of Russian Empire, has been a cultural center for Armenians as well as for Muslim population. Its Armenian population was massacred in 1920 by Turks and Caucasian Tatars (later called Azerbaijanis), restored by then Soviet Azerbaijani leader Heydar Aliyev (Ilham Aliyev's father) in the 1970s and populated mostly by Azerbaijanis until the first Karabakh war.⁵⁰
51. According to a historical report of 1821, the Holy All Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral of Shushi previously used to be wooden.
52. The inscription opened during the renovation of the cathedral in 1982 mentions the names of the architects who built the monument – Simeon Ter-Hakobyants, and master Avetis Yaramishyants. The epigraph placed at the top of the southern portal also mentions the following: *“Thanks to and by the mercy of Almighty God, this magnificent holy temple was built by the tributes and scots of the pious people of the Holy All Savior Ghazanchetsots Church of Shushi, whose construction launched in 1868 – in the days of the kingship of the God-empowered Sovereign Great Emperor of All Russians – Alexander II and under the Patriarchate of Gevorg IV, was completed in 1887 – in the year of the kingship of His Son, Blessed Emperor Alexander III and in the Catholicosate of Markar I in 20 September 1888.”*⁵¹
53. During the massacre of Armenians in Shushi in 1920 Surb Ghazantchetsots cathedral has been damaged. During the Soviet period, the Cathedral was closed, used as a warehouse, the statues of angels at the cathedral entrance were damaged and the dome was destroyed, then, the cathedral was turned into a parking lot for agricultural machinery. During the restorations in 1982 the high leadership of Azerbaijan was hindering the construction of the dome. During the Nagorno-Karabakh war in the 1990s, the Azerbaijanis converted the cathedral into a military depot.⁵² As a result, the cathedral was again damaged in early 1990s in the course of hostilities. The Cathedral was again renovated and restored after the 1990s war and became operational as a place of worship.
54. On 8 October 2020, Azerbaijan used precision weaponry (drones) shelling the Ghazantchetsots Cathedral twice, with the attacks taking place within hours of each other.⁵³ A “gaping hole” can now be seen in the masonry vaults, and “the floor and pews are covered in debris.”⁵⁴ Civilians in the cathedral, including journalists, were wounded because of the attack.

⁵⁰ Report In response to the destruction and desecration of Armenian religious and cultural heritage property by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces and the denial and erasure of Armenian cultural heritage authored by Armenian Bar Association and Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and submitted to the UN Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights and freedom of religion or belief, 21 January 2021, <https://armenianbar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Armenian-Cultural-Heritage-Report-1.21-2021.pdf>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁵¹ Monument Watch, Holy All Savior Ghazanchetsots Church in Shushi, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/holy-all-savior-ghazanchetsots-church-in-shushi/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Armenian Unified Infocenter, Facebook, post Photos, 8 October 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=803636630472266&set=pcb.803636813805581>, accessed on 1 February 2023; Ghazanchechots, ArmNews, ԱրմՆյուզի Նկարահանող խումբը՝ ռմբակոծության էպիկենտրոնում, Video, 8 October 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6p_XgwtFT4, accessed on 12 April 2023; Rob Lee, Twitter post, video, 8 October 2020, <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1314220632587087872>, accessed on 12 April 2023; more on the weapons used, “Hetq” investigative journalists’ field findings, Vahe Sarukhanyan, Hetq, 2020 Karabakh War- Azerbaijani Military Used Turkish Rockets to Hit Shushi Cathedral, 30 May 2021, <https://hetq.am/en/article/131468>, accessed on 12 April 2023; HRW, Azerbaijan: Attack on Church Possible War Crime Investigate and Hold Those Responsible to Account, 16 December 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/16/azerbaijan-attack-church-possible-war-crime?fbclid=IwAR2tz8CC5TL5E1Kn7NAWIjTa7QpFe047pPNINQx3kkj1S34qX_ryKkYjy, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁵⁴ Simon Maghakyan, “Archeologist Raises Alarms Over Azerbaijan’s Shelling of an Ancient City,” HyperAllergic, 5 November 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/592287/tigranekert-Nagorno-Karabakh-nagorno-karabakh-war/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

55. Human Rights Watch referred to the attacks as a possible war crime.⁵⁵ The damage to the interior and exterior of the cathedral was extensively documented.
56. After the ceasefire Azerbaijan further damaged the cathedral and its possessions. E.g. the statue of the famous angel of Shushi was also damaged in November 2020.⁵⁶



57. In early 2021, Azerbaijan launched a “renovation” of the cathedral to “return it to its original form.”⁵⁷ It removed the pile of stones inside the temple, collapsed walls, scaffolding was erected around the temple, the dome of the cathedral was removed, distorting the appearance of the temple, while the painted inscriptions were removed.
58. The removal of the dome and attempts to change its shape aim to deny its Armenianness as domes of Armenian churches have a particular shape. According to Monument Watch, the Azeri media presents Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, sometimes as a Russian Orthodox, sometimes as an Udi church, stating that “the Armenians Armenianized that by transforming the dome after the occupation of the city.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ “Azerbaijan: Attack on Church Possible War Crime,” Human Rights Watch, 16 December 2020,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/16/azerbaijan-attack-church-possible-war-crime>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁵⁶ Zartonk Media, Twitter post, 13 November 2020, <https://twitter.com/ZartonkMedia/status/1327037563039666176>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

⁵⁷ Kucera J., Azerbaijan Begins Controversial Renovation of Armenian Church, May 7, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-begins-controversial-renovation-of-armenian-church>; Humans of Artsakh: From Celebration to Mourning, 24 May, 2021,

<https://www.persecution.org/2021/05/24/humans-artsakh-celebration-mourning>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁵⁸ Monument Watch, About the Azerbaijani “restoration” of Surb Amenaprkich Ghazanchetsots Church in Shushi, 30 May 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/about-the-azerbaijani-restoration-of-surb-amenaprkich-ghazanchetsots-church-in-shushi/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

59. As proved by some sources, the "renovation" was done inside the cathedral in early January 2021, before the visit of Ilham Aliyev and his wife.⁵⁹



60. The recent video from May 2022 shows that Surb Ghazanchents Cathedral of Shushi town was not only not renovated since November 2020, as had been asserted by official Baku, but was further damaged. The fence of the courtyard is destroyed, the gates, khachkars that were standing in the courtyard are displaced, a grass cover has grown in some parts of the roof, which has not

⁵⁹ This can be seen at Mehriban Aliyeva's Instagram page, https://www.instagram.com/p/CKEMxVcAOI2/?fbclid=IwAR3smF12U9Nccfv5Tq3clQ6T_kRQkkqbeJsZx2dpTfeUPM80Upp_rK95Os, accessed on 12 April 2023.

been restored since the collapse after the shelling and is not even covered. The ceiling of the church is in disrepair. The church dome is still set aside, the green construction netting is still frayed, and the entire area around the temple is in a state of disrepair.⁶⁰

Surb Hovhannes Mkrtych Church (Kanach Zham) in Shushi, Shushi region

61. The domes of Saint John the Baptist (Kanach Zham), another Armenian church in Shushi, were immediately destroyed and the Church was continuously damaged by February 2021.⁶¹



62. According to Monument Watch, the original structure of Surb Hovhannes Mkrtych Church was made of wood and the present church and the belfry were built in 1847 as a holistic complex. The preserved inscription asserts: *“Saint Hovhannes Mkrtych Church was built by Shushi townsman paron (master) Hovhannes and Baba Stepanyan Hovnanents in memory of their deceased brother Mkrtych, in the year of 1847.”* The church received its name “Kanach Zham” (“Green Church”) as the dome of the building was once of green colour.⁶²

⁶⁰ Nasimi Aghayev, Twitter post, photos, 9 July 2021, <https://twitter.com/NasimiAghayev/status/1413558311732006915>, accessed on 11 April 2023; Monument Watch, About the Azerbaijani “restoration” of Surb Amenaprkich Ghazanchetsots Church in Shushi, 30 May 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/about-the-azerbaijani-restoration-of-surb-amenaprkich-ghazanchetsots-church-in-shushi/> accessed on 11 April 2023; an aerial video as of 22 May 2022 https://t.me/military_arm/13434?single&fbclid=IwAR0IYpXzM09vjsMasji_Gwy1kqtpfwkYq4cxPJ5Dp4yK6N35xfiXlzIDGMU, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁶¹ Zartonk Media, Report: Azerbaijanis Have Destroyed the Bell Tower & Dome of Shushi’s Armenian “Kanach Zham” Church, Built in 1818, 19 November 2020, <https://bit.ly/3iaSLmy>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁶² Monument Watch, Hovhannes Mkrtych Church of Shushi or Kanach Zham (Green Church), <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/hovhannes-mkrtych-church-of-shushi-or-kanach-zham-green-church/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.



63. In July 2021, Azerbaijani sources presented this church as a Russian Orthodox as opposed to its Armenian origin, announcing that its so-called restoration was underway.⁶³
64. As of January 2022, according to a video, published on “Talishkiy Vestnik” Telegram channel, the transept of Kanach Zham church was converted into a café called “Secret”.⁶⁴ In June 2022, photos were circulated on social media, perhaps taken earlier, in winter since there is snow inside the church due to the destroyed the dom. The photos demonstrate the dome was destroyed, the holy throne and the holy altar were damaged, the candlesticks for lighting candles were broken, and the sacred stones of the temple were turned into a pile of garbage.⁶⁵

Halevor Bridge, in Hadrut region

65. 19th century Halevor bridge, 2km southwest to Mets Tagher village, was found damaged by the CHW as of October 2022, although it is under the threat of destruction, since significant construction activity has been monitored adjacent to the bridge.⁶⁶

⁶³ Video and photo are available at Fact Investigation Platform, The Kanach Zham Church in Shushi has been partially destroyed, 19 November 2020, https://fip.am/en/13788?fbclid=IwAR3K0_ban-xXBt51iLL8ZkgG5O-KjLw_qDyEx1VBoG1ISVNXXK06WGMkracl, accessed on 12 April 2023; Hov Nazaretyan, Twitter, Photos (Satellite), 17 March 2021, https://twitter.com/HovhanNaz/status/1372085651097726978?s=19&fbclid=IwAR3y_1BfGULTDCOY-gvNCG0MIPq1gfCRK_SD3ebFIEyqtUxO72SyO5OebiU, accessed on 11 April 2023; Telegram, Агдамский Портвейн, Главы христианских общин Азербайджана посетили христианский храм в Шуше, 10 July 2021, <https://t.me/agdamwhite/1781?single>, accessed on 12 April 2023; Monument Watch, Presentation of the Kanach Zham as Russian Orthodox Church and illegal rites performed there, 15 July 2021, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/presentation-of-the-kanach-zham-as-russian-orthodox-church-and-illegal-rites-performed-there/>, accessed on 11 April 2023; Monument Watch, Hovhannes Mkrtych Church of Shushi or Kanach Zham (Green Church), <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/hovhannes-mkrtych-church-of-shushi-or-kanach-zham-green-church/>, accessed on 12 April 2023; Azat News TV, Kanach Zham in Shushi converted into a café, 17 January 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsOT7rcRIQQ>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

⁶⁴ Талышский Вестник, Telegram Video “Café Secret” (Kanach Zham), 16 January 2022, https://t.me/Talish_vestnik/20973, accessed on 11 April 2023; see also: Monument Watch, The Transept of Kanach Zham Church in Shushi turned into a café, 23 January 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/the-transept-of-kanach-zham-church-in-shushi-turned-into-a-cafe/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁶⁵ See the photos at Nagorno-Karabakh Monuments, Facebook post, 4 July 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Nagorno-Karabakh-monuments/posts/pfbid01MXCDBGkiN3Zbi7uhWXDoxuwPvzTNRhQhzHz4oGKfphd9NXKFnYKekf9hf3C2bJsl>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁶⁶ CHW, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & L. Khatchadourian, CHW Monitoring Report #4, October 2022, Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch, p. 23, <https://indd.adobe.com/embed/bc52b43e-ea70-4967-9b26-1c57fcfd7ed?startpage=1&allowFullscreen=true>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

66. The Armenian inscription in the bridge attests: *“The bridge is in remembrance of Harutyun – son of Gevorg, I built to the memory of my parents, whoever passes let him say God have mercy on them (1834).”*⁶⁷



⁶⁷The Bridge of Halivor Monument Watch, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/the-bridge-of-halivor-oldman>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

Destruction

Holy Mary Church in Mekhakavan town, Jabrayil region

67. In March 2021, BBC correspondent Jonah Fisher uncovered an outrageous example of post-war destruction during a visit to the town of Mekhakavan in Jabrayil. Having seen a video of Azerbaijani soldiers standing in the top of the church in Mekhakavan after the occupation in 2020,⁶⁸ he investigated its current state. He was able to find the site, but the church had disappeared entirely.

⁶⁹



St. Sargis Church in Mokhrenes village, Hadrut region

68. CHW discovered that Azerbaijan destroyed Surb Sargis Armenian Church located in Mokhrenes village of Hadrut region of Nagorno-Karabakh,⁷⁰ which Azerbaijan occupied in the 44-day war in 2020. It was completely demolished between March and July 2022.

69. Surb Sargis was an 18th-19th century church, in active use before the 44-day war,⁷¹ Other buildings of the village have been destroyed too. The cemetery of the Mokhrenes village was intact as of October 2022, but given the widespread destruction of the village and the church, the cemetery appeared under threat.⁷²

⁶⁸ Armenian National Commission for UNESCO, 25 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ArmUnesco/status/1374981132136120320>, accessed 13 April 2023.

⁶⁹ 'Nagorno-Karabakh: The mystery of the missing church' (BBC News, 25 March 2021), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-56517835> accessed 12 April 2021.

⁷⁰ Surb Sargis Church at Monument Watch, Surb Sargis church of Mokhrenes, Monument Watch, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/surb-sargis-church-of-mokhrenes/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁷¹ CHW, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & L. Khatchadourian, CHW Monitoring Report #4, October 2022, Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch, p. 21, <https://indd.adobe.com/embed/bc52b43e-ea70-4967-9b26-1c57fcfd7ed?startpage=1&allowFullscreen=true>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁷² CHW, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & L. Khatchadourian, CHW Monitoring Report #4, October 2022, Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch, p. 25, <https://indd.adobe.com/embed/bc52b43e-ea70-4967-9b26-1c57fcfd7ed?startpage=1&allowFullscreen=true>, accessed on 13 April 2023.



Khachkars in Mataghis village, Martakert region

70. On 8 May 2022, a video was posted on Telegram where a man in Azerbaijani military uniform and the Azerbaijani flag on his back was destroying khachkars first hitting them by stones, then kicking. Monument Watch has identified these were khachkars next to the chapel in Mataghis village of Martakert region, Nagorno-Karabakh built by the Union of Veterans of the Karabakh War.⁷³ The territory fell under the control of Azerbaijan following the 44-day war in 2020.

Park of Teachers and Armenian cemetery in Mets Tagher village, Hadrut region

71. In May 2022, a video was published on social media showing that the Park devoted to teachers was destroyed in Mets Tagher village of Hadrut region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The park was built in memory of the teachers of Mets Tagher and Sokrat Aghabekyan.⁷⁴

72. An Armenian cemetery in the village of Mets Tagher was destroyed in 2021. Caucasus Heritage Watch alerted about the situation by showing the satellite imagery with complete destruction of the cemetery, as signs of bulldozer scars are visible in the image. The cemetery was founded in the early 19th c. and was in use until when Armenians had to flee the village in 2020, when

⁷³ Ararathau, telegram post, Video, 8 May 2022, <https://t.me/ararathau/13271>, accessed on 13 April 2023; Monument Watch, Destruction of khachkars caused by Azerbaijan in the occupied territories of NK, 10 May 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/destruction-of-khachkars-caused-by-azerbaijan-in-the-occupied-territories-of-Nagorno-Karabakh/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁷⁴ Ararathau, Telegram post, video and photo, 4 May 2022, https://t.me/ararathau/13236?single&fbclid=IwAR1APPE85BvL4ub11IGQ84IsJGLR2T8h_gAdvovad1vUb7Yc0L2Gwi1zu8, accessed on 13 April 2023; Monument Watch, Azerbaijan destroyed the Park of Teachers and the inscription in Mets Tagher village, 14 May 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijan-destroyed-the-park-of-teachers-and-the-inscription-in-mets-tagher-village/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

Azerbaijani military forces were approaching.⁷⁵ The village has been under Azerbaijani control since then.

Cemetery in Sghnakh village, Askeran region

73. According to the photo published on 21 April 2022 on social media, the satellite images showing before and after the 44-day war demonstrate that the village of Sghnakh, including its houses, the cemetery and even vegetation was largely destroyed after falling under the Azerbaijani control.⁷⁶



⁷⁵Caucasus Heritage Watch, Alert: An Armenian cemetery in the village of Mets Tagher/Böyük Tağlar was recently destroyed, 4 May 2021, <https://twitter.com/CaucasusHW/status/1389639754602491904>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁷⁶ Mané Alexanian, Twitter post, 21 April 2022, <https://twitter.com/manealx/status/1517223600822136836>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

Cemetery near Parukh village, Askeran region

74. In March 2022, in violation of the ceasefire regime, Azerbaijan used military force attacking Parukh village of Askeran region of NK, and took control of Parukh height and former settlement Karaglukh. On 30 March 2022, Azerbaijan spread information that its armed forces, as a result of excavation works, have discovered “mass graves, the human remains of which belong to the Azerbaijani servicemen who went missing during the First Karabakh War in the early 1990s” “in Khojaly (Ivanyan).”⁷⁷
75. According to specialists, the bones found near the village of Parukh originate from the territory of the Medieval (9-13th centuries) Armenian cemetery of Kalen Hut.⁷⁸
76. According to observations by culturologists and archaeologists, the human skulls presented in the video have a brachycephalic (round-headed) structure of Armenoid anthropological type typical of Armenians, while the population of Azerbaijan have dolichocephalic (long-headed) structure of Caspian anthropological type skull. The smooth surface of the bones means in the archaeological sense that they are centuries, rather than 30 years old. In addition, the assertions by Azerbaijan that the bones are the remains of the victims of Khojaly massacres are not grounded since Khojaly is located 17 km away from Parukh.⁷⁹ This means that Azerbaijan destroys the cemetery at the same time falsifying the history and demonising Armenians.

Other Conversions and Posed Threats

Park of Royal Springs in Tigranakert, Askeran region

77. On 31 October 2021, Azerbaijani TV journalist Saadat Mamedova published a video on her Youtube channel, showing with special pride that the Park of Royal Springs has been turned into a barbeque area. Next to the pool, excavated by the archaeological expedition of Tigranakert (a city/settlement, established by Armenian King Tigran the Great in the 1st century, B.C.), Azerbaijanis have built a concrete platform to set up barbeque grills there. One of those was placed right on the edge of the excavated pool.
78. Several decades ago, in the Soviet period the Azerbaijanis turned the fortress, built in the middle of the 18th century and located nearby, into a restaurant.

⁷⁷ Caspian News, Mass Grave Found in Karabakh Region Could Belong to Missing Azerbaijani Soldiers, 2 April 2022, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/mass-grave-found-in-karabakh-region-could-belong-to-missing-azerbaijani-soldiers-2022-4-1-0/>, accessed on 13 April 2023; Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Germany, Nasimi Aghayev, Twitter post, 30 March 2022, <https://twitter.com/NasimiAghayev/status/1508902538753437696> accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁷⁸ Monument Watch, Another aggression of Azerbaijan. Heritage under threat, 15 April 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/another-aggression-of-azerbaijan%E2%80%A4-heritage-under-threat/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Culture and Sciences of NK, Facebook post, 2 April 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/edu.nkr.am/posts/350995373745455>, accessed on 11 April 2023; 1lurer.am, Azerbaijan destroys Armenian cultural heritage of Parukh and Karaglukh: photos, 2 April 2022, <https://www.1lurer.am/en/2022/04/02/Azerbaijan-destroys-Armenian-cultural-heritage-of-Parukh-and-Karaglukh-photos/694945>, accessed on 12 April 2023, Caliber.az, С места событий: оперативная ситуация у села Фәғрих, 5 April 2022, 10:21 minute, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub0Inhi-Eb0>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

79. Before the 44-day war the fortress was home to the Tigranakert Archaeological Museum, and the territory of the Park of Royal Springs was landscaped and served as a platform for cultural events.⁸⁰ The before and after pictures can be seen below.



Spitak Khach church in Hadrut, Hadrut region

80. On 8 January 2022, a video was circulated online showing Spitak Khach (White Cross) Church in Hadrut that is under Azerbaijani control since October 2020. The video shows that the cross of the dome was removed and it is presented as an “Albanian” church where Udi religious representatives conduct a religious ceremony.⁸¹
81. According to Monument Watch, the exact date of the foundation of the monastery is not known, the oldest of the preserved inscriptions, engraved inside the church, under the khachkar of the northern arch, is dated to 1333: “*I – Sirok, erected this cross for my father Khutlap in the year of 1333.*”⁸²

Dadivank Monastery, Karvachar (Kelbajar) region

82. The history of Dadivank structures dates back to the 12th century. Dadivank is mentioned in the 12th century records, describing the destruction of Dadu in the battles for Gandzak in 1145.⁸³ The main church of Dadivank was built in 1214.
83. The first written source about Saint Dadi and Dadivank is found in Armenian historian Movses Daskhurantsi’s 10th-century work “History of Aghvank”, which concerns 9th century events: “*Varaz*

⁸⁰ Azerbaijanis turned the Park of Royal Springs of Tigranakert into a barbecue restaurant, Monument Watch, 11 November 2021, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijanis-turned-the-park-of-royal-springs-of-tigranakert-into-a-barbeque-restaurant/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁸¹ Asbarez, Azerbaijanis remove cross from Spitak Khach Church in Occupied Hadrut”, 27 January 2022, <https://asbarez.com/azerbaijanis-remove-cross-from-spitak-khach-church-in-occupied-hadrut>, accessed on 13 April 2023; see the video at, REC TIME, Xocavənd rayonu Ağ oğlan qəsəbəsi (Khojavənd district, Ağ oğlan settlement)(HADRUT), 8 January 2022, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrqUakelks&t=6s>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁸² Monument Watch, Spitak Khach (White Cross) Monastery, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/spitak-khach-white-cross-monastery/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

⁸³ History of Dadivank at Monument Watch, Dadivank. About Saint Dadi and his grave, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/dadivank-about-saint-dadi-and-his-grave/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

Trdat and his son Stephanos Nerseh Philippean, as well as a relative, were murdered in Khoradzor, known as Dado monastery.”

84. Following the 44-day war, Dadivank fell under the control of Azerbaijan. The Russian-peacekeepers set a post by the monastery. It was promised that Armenians would have access to the monastery as a place of worship.
85. Immediately after the ceasefire, on 11 November, 2020, Azerbaijan's First Deputy Minister of Culture Anar Karimov declared that the Armenian monastery of Dadivank (which he calls “Khudavang”) is “one of the best testimonies of ancient Caucasian Albanian civilization.”⁸⁴
86. A month later, the Azerbaijani government staged a visit of Udi community representatives to Dadivank Monastery. The religious service was conducted by Udi community representative Robert Mobili.⁸⁵
87. From April 28 through July 8, 2021, the Azerbaijani military blocked access to Dadivank Monastery to Armenian worshippers⁸⁶ - intending to affirm the monument’s Azerbaijani-Albanian ownership and attempting to establish control over access to the monument.
88. On 8 February 2022, several days after the Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan Anar Karimov announced that a “working group of specialists in Albanian history and architecture has been set up to remove the fictitious traces written by Armenians on Albanian religious temples,”⁸⁷ the official website of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation published a report and a photo of Russian peacekeepers visiting Dadivank monastery of Karvachar region. The initial article mentioned that “*Dadivank was one of the largest monastic complexes of medieval Armenia of the 12th-13th centuries, that it was named after Saint Dadi, who preached Christianity in the western (should be “eastern”) regions of Armenia and was a disciple of the Apostle Thaddeus. According to legend, the complex was built on the tomb of Saint Dadi.*”⁸⁸ However, this fragment of the report containing the fact that the Dadivank monastery was Armenian was later removed,⁸⁹ which is a clear signal of the effective influence of Azerbaijani authorities on the peacekeeping forces and the complicity of the latter in the falsification of the Armenian history in Artsakh.
89. On 3 September 2022, a video was published on “Карабах Today” Azerbaijani Telegram channel clearly showing an Azerbaijani man in military uniform who takes the tag “*This chapel was renovated by Mr. Ralph Yirikian in 2017*” from the chapel, demonstrates on camera and breaks on the ground. The Telegram channel calls this act “*Fake Armenian inscriptions gorbagor oldu (in Azerbaijani meaning “damned”).*”⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Anar Kerimov on Twitter, November 11, 2020, https://twitter.com/Anar_Karim/status/1326437397270310912?s=20.

⁸⁵ Monument Watch, Udi Propaganda as an Expression of Azerbaijani Politics, 8 October, 2021, <https://monumentwatch.org/alerts/udi-propaganda-as-an-expression-of-azerbaijani-politics/>, accessed 12 April 2023.

⁸⁶ Forum 18, Azerbaijan: "They Hold Services and Pray There, But without a Congregation", 8 July, 2021, https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2671, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁸⁷ Report.az, Working group set up to restore Armenianized Albanian temples, 3 February 2022, <https://report.az/en/cultural-policy/working-group-set-up-to-restore-armenianized-temples-of-ancient-albania/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Defence of Russia, Российские миротворцы в Нагорном Карабахе посетили монастырский комплекс Дадиванк, 8 February 2022 (initial version), https://web.archive.org/web/20220208091119/https://mil.ru/russian_peacekeeping_forces/news/more.htm?id=12407657@egNews, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁸⁹ Ministry of Defence of Russia, Российские миротворцы в Нагорном Карабахе посетили монастырский комплекс Дадиванк, 8 February 2022 (final version), https://mil.ru/russian_peacekeeping_forces/news/more.htm?id=12407657@egNews, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁹⁰ Карабах Today Azerbaijani telegram channel, АЗАМ Лачинский район. Фальшивые армянские надписи горбагор олду), 3 September 2022, <https://t.me/KarabakhRu/25429>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

90. Monument Watch identified the chapel near Dadivank.⁹¹ The relevant screenshot from the video is shown below.



Surb Astvatsatsin Church (Tsakhkavank) in Tsakuri village, Hadrut region

91. On 15 March, 2021, Aliyev visited a 12th-century Armenian church, in the village of Tsakuri (Hunarli in Azerbaijani), near the occupied town of Hadrut, Nagorono Karabakh. While TV cameras were rolling, Aliyev pointed at the Armenian inscriptions on the wall of the church and said: *“This is an ancient Albanian temple, an Albanian church. It is located in the village of Hunarli. The Armenians wanted to Armenianize this church and wrote inscriptions in Armenian here, but they failed. If this were an Armenian church, would they leave it in such a state? It looks like a stable or as if it were a garbage dump. It is our ancient historical site, a temple of our Udi brothers. They will come here, too. Just as the Armenians desecrated our mosques, they have also desecrated this ancient Albanian temple. But we will restore. All these inscriptions are fake – they were written later. They have created a false history for themselves in our ancient lands. But they failed because we exposed them. The fact that this church – the Albanian temple – is in this condition again shows Armenian fraud. If it were an Armenian church, they would have renovated it. Some criticize us for not taking good care of Christian sites. It is Armenians who brought it to this condition.”*⁹²

⁹¹ Monument Watch, On the destruction of the information board of the chapel in Dadivank, 6 September, 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/on-the-destruction-of-the-information-board-of-the-chapel-in-dadivank/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁹² Website of The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/50893>; CBC TV Azerbaijan, Президент Азербайджана и первая леди посетили освобожденные районы, 3:00 minute, 16 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blq-Kn1QnMs>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

92. TV Azerbaijan and the interviewed religious representatives specifically emphasised that the church is Udi-Albanian. Meanwhile, the interviews were being carried out in front of the entrance of the Surb Astvatsatsin Church in Tsakuri where the Armenian inscriptions were clearly visible even in the video.⁹³
93. On 13 April 2022, a few days before Holy Easter, Azerbaijan’s State Committee for Work with Religious Structures organised a visit of religious representatives of Christian religious communities and various Christian organizations to the Churches of Surb Astvatsatsin in Tsakuri village and Surb Hovhannes in Togh village of Hadrut region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Such organisations included “Biblical Society of Azerbaijan”, “Evangelical Christian Baptists”, “Evangelical Lutherans of Salvation”, “Seventh-Day Adventists”, “Prefecture of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Azerbaijan”, “Russian Orthodox Church of Azerbaijan”, “Albanian-Udian Church” and others, as well as representatives of Muslim religious organizations.
94. This visit was a part of propaganda showing that these Christian and even Muslim organisations were brought together by the “religiously tolerant” Azerbaijani government to pray in these churches, “finally liberated from the Armenian occupation.”
95. While Azerbaijan’s president Aliyev says that “Armenians can enjoy the same rights as their other citizens,”⁹⁴ and according to international reports there are about 20,000 Armenians living in Azerbaijan (beyond Nagorno-Karabakh),⁹⁵ there was no Armenian Apostolic Church organisation to be brought in to visit the church.
96. In the middle of 19th century Tsakuri village had 22 houses with Armenian residents and belonged to the Haykaz Mirzabekyants kin. An inscription has been preserved on the lintel of the church, according to which the church was built in 1682: *“I – Archimandrite Hakob, from Taghlar borough, from the Tankots kin, a disciple of Archimandrite Yesayi from Krtchevan, was appointed by Yermia – the Patriarch of Aghuank, as the leader of some northern villages. But they did not allow us to live in our native see and wandering in different places, I did not find a more suitable (place) than this. And I wished to live here, and having leveled Indusar (mountain), I turned it into a residence and began the construction of the cathedral church in memory of my soul and my parents – my father Dalvat and my mother Mariam, and for the pardon of nanny-nurses, my two sisters – Sarah, Yashak. I pray for their lives. The holy church was built by the hands of Archimandrite Hakob in the summer of 1131 (1682) [as mentioned on inscription].”* A khachkar dated to 1196 was preserved in the vicinity of the church which gives grounds to suppose that the church was built on the site of an older complex. During the Soviet period, the church was used as a collective farm (kolkhoz) warehouse after being closed in 1920.⁹⁶

⁹³ CBC TV Azerbaijan, В храмах Карабаха отметили приближение Пасхи, 15 April 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vliMa828CHO>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁹⁴ Monument Watch, Another manifestation of Azerbaijani religious and national “tolerance” in the churches of Tsakuri and Togh, 20 April 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/another-manifestation-of-azerbaijani-religious-and-national-tolerance-in-the-churches-of-tsakuri-and-togh/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁹⁵ ECRI, Report on Azerbaijan, adopted on 28 June 2002, <https://rm.coe.int/first-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b5579>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁹⁶ Monument Watch, St. Astvatsatsin Church of Tsakuri (Tsaghkavank),: <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/st-astvatsatsin-church-of-tsakuri-tsaghkavank/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

Surb Hovhannes Church in Togh village, Hadrut region

97. According to Monument Watch, the construction date of Surb Hovhannes Church in Togh village of Nagorno-Karabakh is unknown but it is most likely from the early 19th century, since it has been mentioned in written sources since 1841. According to the preserved inscription, *“this Shurjar (Armenian chasbule, religious attire) was gifted to the Surb Hovhannes church in 1896 by the Taghot villager Hovakim Andonean Karapeteants.”*⁹⁷ The village fell under Azerbaijani control as a result of the 44-day war in 2020.
98. President Aliyev had earlier coined that Surb Hovhannes church was also Albanian.⁹⁸

Surb Harutyun church in Hadrut town, Hadrut region

99. On 27 April 2022, Azerbaijani media published news on marking the Holy Easter in Hadrut city of Nagorno-Karabakh. Hadrut fell under the Azerbaijani control as a result of the 44-day war. Azerbaijan’s State Committee for Work with Religious Structures organised a visit of Udi community to Surb Harutyun, church of Hadrut and Surb Hovhannes Mkrtich church of Togh village on the occasion of the Holy Easter. An “Albanian” religious ceremony was conducted in these Armenian churches.⁹⁹
100. The photos demonstrate that the Armenian scripts were erased and the cross was removed from Surb Harutyun church.
101. According to Monument Watch, Surb Harutyun church was built in 1621, renovated in 1819 and more recently, in 1999.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Monument Watch, Surb Hovhannes church of Taghot, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/surb-hovhannes-church-of-taghot/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁹⁸ Hayk Makiyan, Hetq, Տող գյուղի մելիքական ժառանգությունը. հայկական պատմական արժեքները Ադրբեջանի օկուպացրած տարածքում, 21 November 2022, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/150359>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

⁹⁹ Apa.az, Easter marked in Azerbaijan's Hadrut-PHOTO, 27 April 2022, <https://apa.az/en/social/easter-marked-in-azerbaijians-hadrut-photo-374624>, accessed on 13 April 2023; CBC TV Azerbaijan, Посещение села Туг членами Албано-Удинской христианской общины Азербайджана, 27 April 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPeTZ-ni7QA>, accessed on 13 April 2023 ; CBC TV Azerbaijan, Члены Албано-Удинской христианской общины Азербайджана посетили Гадрут, 27 April 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMZIBNmBJVk> accessed on 12 April 2023; 525-ci Kanal, Hadrut, 8 May 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpZ2SxxqOZs&t=3s>, accessed on 12 April 2023; Karabakh Records, Azerbaijan desecrated Hadrut church: the cross was removed, and the Armenian inscription was erased, 29 April 2022, <https://war.karabakhrecords.info/en/2022/04/29/azerbaijan-desecrated-hadrut-church-the-cross-was-removed-and-the-armenian-inscription-was-erased/>, accessed on 12 April 2023; Zartonk Media, Facebook post, photos, 28 April 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/ZartonkMedia/posts/pfbid02aiHbwetz7oXPw6nr38e5JDS6aigU4J8k5oe4a9Le4tBnsFUB2Y2mwe7yREvDBSwU> accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Monument Watch, Հարություն եկեղեցին, <https://monumentwatch.org/hy/monument/hարություն-ը%E2%80%A4-հարություն-եկեղեցի/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.



Surb Yeghishe Church in Mataghis village, Martakert region

102. On 26 June 2022, on the day of the Azerbaijani armed forces, representatives of the Udi community of Azerbaijan performed a worship service in the Armenian Apostolic Christian Church of Surb Yeghishe in Mataghis village of Martakert region of Nagorno-Karabakh. This visit, like other similar state-organized visits of representatives of Udi communities to Armenian churches, has aimed to alter its Armenianness of the church and demonstrate its Albanian origin. Azerbaijan presented the church as an Albanian building of the 5th century, which was rebuilt, restored and Armenianized by Armenians in 1898.¹⁰¹

103. According to the inscription in the Armenian language, *“the Church of Surb Yeghishe was built by the united people of Mataghis. It was started in 1892 and was completed in 1898.”*¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Monument Watch, Udi propaganda at the Church of Surb Yeghishe in Mataghis village, 17 July 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/udi-propaganda-at-the-church-of-surb-yeghishe-in-mataghis-village>, accessed on 12 April 2023; Telegraf.com, Alban-Udi xristian icmasinin üzvləri Suqovuşana səfər etdilər, 26 June 2022, <https://telegraf.com/news/toplum/331825.html>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹⁰² Monument Watch, St. Yeghishe Church of Mataghis, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/st-yeghisha-church-of-mataghis/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

104. After the 44-day war, in 2021, a video was spread on social media, showing several men in military uniforms entering the church and breaking the icons.¹⁰³ Between October 2021 and July 2022 earth moving has been noticed immediately east and north to the church threatening it.¹⁰⁴ CHW released a social media alert on 25 July 2022.¹⁰⁵

Surb Hambardzum Church in Berdzor (Lachin) town, Kashatagh (Lachin) region

105. Upon the forceful deportation of Armenians from Berdzor, Aghavno and Sus in August 2022,¹⁰⁶ Azerbaijan announced it would convert Surb Hambardzum church of Berdzor into a mosque. The construction of Surb Hambardzum Church in Berdzor was finalised in 1998.¹⁰⁷ According to the plan presented by the Azerbaijani organisation Public Association for Monument Protection, the top of the dome will be demolished, the bell tower will be dismantled and two minarets will be built on the northern facade. Obviously, all the Armenian inscriptions on the walls will also be removed.¹⁰⁸ The project was approved by the order of Azerbaijani President Aliyev.¹⁰⁹

Kusanats Surb Astvatsatsin Monastery, Karvachar (Kelbajar) region

106. On 3 September 2022, the Azerbaijani ICTIMAI TV prepared a report on the 12th century Monastery of Kusanats Surb Astvatsatsin near Dadivank Monastery misrepresenting the monastery as Albanian and referring to the Armenian khachkars (cross-stones) in the walls as “late Grigorian khachkars.”

107. According to Monument Watch, such khachkars with an incised image of a cross belong to the 10th-11th centuries, which were quite common in Armenia, including Nagorno-Karabakh, and that it is well known and scientifically confirmed that earlier khachkars were widely used in the construction of Armenian churches in difficult times”.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Sputnik Armenia, Ադրբեյջանցիները հերթական եկեղեցին են պղծել: տեսալուսույթում Մատաղիսի եկեղեցին է, 27 March 2021, https://armeniasputnik.am/20210327/adrbejancinery-hertakan-ekexecin-en-pxtsel-tesanyutum-mataxisi-ekexecin-e-26953693.html?fbclid=IwAR23nJZEIMUOxjnjpsb2_FWw9TFUmm6xstfuundJI493FqBgYIRhq-uTk, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹⁰⁴ CHW, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & L. Khatchadourian, CHW Monitoring Report #4, October 2022, Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch, p. 33, (<https://indd.adobe.com/embed/bc52b43e-ea70-4967-9b26-1c57fcfd7ed?startpage=1&allowFullscreen=true>, accessed on 13 April 2023. <https://twitter.com/CaucasusHW/status/1551629823260459012?s=20&t=5bHvkWgPx6Gw3WygpxveA>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Asbarez, Residents of Nagorno-Karabakh's Aghavno Village Told to Evacuate by August 25, 5 August 2022, <https://asbarez.com/residents-of-Nagorno-Karabakh-aghavno-village-told-to-evacuate-by-august-25/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Monument Watch, Surb Hambardzum Church of Berdzor, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/surb-hambardzum-church-of-berdzor/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Arka, Azerbaijan announces plan to turn St. Ascension Church in Nagorno-Karabakh's Berdzor into a mosque, 22 August 2022, <https://arka.am/en/news/politics/azerbaijan-announces-plan-to-turn-st-ascension-church-in-artsakh-s-berdzor-into-a-mosque/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹⁰⁹ News.am, Azerbaijan intends to turn church in Berdzor into mosque, 8 August 2022, <https://news.am/eng/news/715370.html>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹¹⁰ Monument Watch, Another Azerbaijani nonsense: Armenians inserted “Gregorian” crosses into the walls of Nagorno-Karabakh churches in the 19th century, trying to Armenize the “Albanian” heritage, 11 September 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/another-azerbaijani-nonsense-armenians-inserted-gregorian-crosses-into-the-walls-of-Nagorno-Karabakh-churches-in-the-19th-century-trying-to-armenize-the-albanian-heritage/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

Church and cemetery in Arakhish village, Kashatagh (Lachin) region

108. As of October 2022, Arakhish church located in Kashatagh region, 50 km north to Berdzor (Lachin), was threatened due to the extensive earthmoving and road construction activity by Azerbaijan immediately to the north east to the church and its adjacent cemetery 12th-16th century khachkars.¹¹¹



¹¹¹ Monument Watch, The Church of Arakhish, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/the-church-of-arakhish/>, accessed on 13 April 2023; CHW, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & L. Khatchadourian, CHW Monitoring Report #4, October 2022, Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch, p. 27, https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/index.php/report?fbclid=IwAR2Px4Q_s_-SDmIxcWgAUMrLPhMFHnjBV48Tvo1MPIpbrhWXrzLjXus_LxM#, accessed on 13 April 2023.

Zorakhach church in Arakhish village, Kashatagh (Lachin) region

109. Zorakhach church in Arakhish village of Kashatagh region was threatened as of October 2022, since it was adjacent to the earthmoving operation along a new road project.¹¹² There is no bibliographic information about the monument.

110. According to Monument Watch, judging by the architectural solutions of the church and the gravestones embedded in the walls, the church is a structure of the 17th-18th centuries.¹¹³



¹¹² CHW, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & L. Khatchadourian, CHW Monitoring Report #4, October 2022, Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch, p. 29, <https://indd.adobe.com/embed/bc52b43e-ea70-4967-9b26-1c57fcfd7ed?startpage=1&allowFullscreen=true>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹¹³ Monument Watch, Zorakhach Church, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/zorakhach-church/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

Church in Vakunis village, Kashatagh (Lachin) region

111. The church in Vakunis village of Kashatagh region of Nagorno-Karabakh was also threatened as of October 2022 due to the roadwork by Azerbaijan immediately adjacent to the eastern wall of the church where the altar and vestries are located.¹¹⁴
112. No historical data is known on the church of Vakunis. According to Monument Watch, based on the architectural-compositional solutions and the embedded khachkars and gravestones, the church is a 17th century structure. From the second half of the 18th century, the locally established Kurds used the building for economic purposes. 13th-17th centuries khachkars and gravestones were used in the walls three of which have inscriptions.¹¹⁵



¹¹⁴ CHW, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & L. Khatchadourian, CHW Monitoring Report #4, October 2022, Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch, p. 31, <https://indd.adobe.com/embed/bc52b43e-ea70-4967-9b26-1c57fcfd7ed?startpage=1&allowFullscreen=true>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹¹⁵ Monument Watch, The Church of Vakunis, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/the-church-of-vakunis>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

Holy Mother Church in Karin Tak village, Shushi region

113. A video from March 2021 shows the interior of the Holy Mother Church in Karin Tak, Nagorno-Karabakh, which was damaged. In the video, the Muslim call to prayer is sung inside the church, symbolizing the conquest of the Christian site.¹¹⁶
114. On 7 November, 2021, the anniversary of the occupation of the village by the Azerbaijani military Aliyev announced the construction of a mosque in Karin Tak, though the village has been historically populated by Armenians. The selected date of the announcement was apparently symbolic.¹¹⁷

Cultural landscape in Hadrut town, Hadrut region

115. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev announced the construction of a mosque in Hadrut, Nagorno-Karabakh, an area that was populated by Armenians and for centuries had maintained its unique culture and dialect. Hadrut fell under the control of Azerbaijan as of October 2020. Aliyev symbolically laid the foundation of the building on October 9, 2021, to mark one year after the occupation of the town. He also stated that the historical center of the town of Hadrut will be demolished and Hadrut will turn to an “international center of culture and tourism.”¹¹⁸

Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother) Church in Banants village, Dashkesan region (after 1990s)

116. On 7 April 2022, a video was published on social media showing Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Virgin) Church in Banants village (Armenian-inhabited until the First Karabakh War. The local Armenian population was forcibly displaced). The signboard in Azerbaijani attached to the church facade says: “*Chichirevanch Albanian prayer house, 7th to 9th centuries.*” The altar, several cross-stones set in the front wall of the bema, the font, and another cross-stone of 1621, surmounting its western pediment were destroyed.
117. According to Raffi Kortoshian, co-director of the Foundation of Research on Armenian Architecture, both the name “Chichirevanch” and construction dates of 7th-9th centuries are invented to make it possible to attribute the church to the “Albanian” heritage.
118. In 1986 the prominent monumentologist Samvel Karapetian documented 153 tombstones of the 16th to 17th centuries that had been reused as building material for the church, which has led to conclude that the church should be traced back to the 17th to 18th centuries. In 1981, during the Soviet period, the church was repaired by the local Armenians.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ YouTube channel: Karabakh Hnor, Şuşada kilsədə əhli sünənə qardaşımlla vəhdət azanı verərkən, 23 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/IRHhNTHIRwg>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹¹⁷ Trend news agency, Президент Ильхам Алиев и Первая леди Мехрибан Алиева заложили фундамент мечети в селе Дашалты, 7 November, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3M00Hp9>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹¹⁸ Haqqin.az, Ильхам Алиев строит мечеть в Гадруте, October 10, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3BKl5ox>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹¹⁹ Raffi Kortoshian, Facebook post, 7 April 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/raffi.kortoshian/posts/pfbid034SNe7JPPpDSRxmKzP6mQ5v5YD7viffzLsfzEowaWfa6wkCm88yLwMGK9yZi7huJQl> accessed on 13 April 2023.

Violations of International Law Related to the Protection of Monuments

119. The above-mentioned facts as well as the overall policy of Azerbaijan and its apparent intent to destroy the cultural heritage manifest severe violation of the human rights and international humanitarian law standards.
120. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, Article 27¹²⁰ and **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, Article 15¹²¹ require a guarantee of the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, without discrimination.
121. **The Second Protocol to The Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1999)**, Article 2, point C,¹²² "any alteration to, or change of use of, a cultural property which is intended to conceal or destroy cultural, historical or scientific evidence" is prohibited.
122. The general concepts of **UNESCO** and **ICOMOS**¹²³ prohibit any external or internal changes of forms, components, functions of the cultural object that can contradict the primary principles of identity, integrity, cultural value and uniqueness of the heritage site.
123. The targeted destruction of many cultural and religious sites by Azerbaijan neglects **General Comment Number 21, recalled by the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights**¹²⁴, as well as the **Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage** from 1972.¹²⁵
124. Azerbaijan violates the history and integrity of the cultural heritage, making it impossible to transmit the heritage in its original form to the future generation. That contradicts the principles of not only international conventions, but also the **UNESCO Nara Document of Authenticity**¹²⁶ adopted in 1994 in Japan, the document signed in 2017 by **ICOMOS 'Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy'**¹²⁷, as well as various documents of other international structures.¹²⁸
125. Azerbaijan also violates the provisions of the 2001 convention "**On the Protection of Cultural Diversity**" and 2005 "**On the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions**," of which it is a member.

¹²⁰Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>, Article 27.

¹²¹International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>, Article 15.

¹²²The Second Protocol to The Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1999), <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/second-protocol-hague-convention-1954-protection-cultural-property-event#:~:text=The%20Parties%20to%20a%20conflict,in%20support%20of%20military%20action>, Article 2, point C.

¹²³<https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijan-claims-that-dadivank-monastery-belongs-to-udi-cultural-heritage/>, accessed on 15 April 2023.

¹²⁴UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General comment no. 21, Right of everyone to take part in cultural life (art. 15, para. 1a of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 21 December 2009, E/C.12/GC/21, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ed35bae2.html>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹²⁵Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage The General Conference of UNESCO adopted on 16 November 1972, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

¹²⁶Information note: Nara Document on Authenticity. Experts meeting, 1-6 November 1994 <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/nara94.htm>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹²⁷'Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy' adopted at closing session of ICOMOS 19th General Assembly, 21 December 2017, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1767>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹²⁸Azerbaijanis turned the Park of Royal Springs of Tigranakert into a barbeque restaurant, 11 November 2021, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijanis-turned-the-park-of-royal-springs-of-tigranakert-into-a-barbeque-restaurant/>, accessed on 13 April 2023.

126. The change of the functional purpose of the cultural heritage violates the **UNESCO provisions of the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage"** (2003). According to Article 11, parties undertake to respect intangible values, regardless of their origin and function.
127. Customary International Humanitarian Law also contains a rule on protection of cultural property. According to the rule 40, *"each party to the conflict must protect cultural property: A. All seizure of or destruction or willful damage done to institutions dedicated to religion, charity, education, the arts and sciences, historic monuments and works of art and science is prohibited. B. Any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of, and any acts of vandalism directed against, property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people is prohibited."*¹²⁹ Thus, actions of Azerbaijan done during and post war period gravely violate international humanitarian law provisions as well.

Justification Narratives of Azerbaijan

128. In order to provide justifications for the misconduct of Azerbaijan and its "cultural genocide" policies, Ilham Aliyev uses refined messages, addressed to the international community.
129. First, Aliyev keeps repeating that "Armenians had destroyed 65 out of 67 mosques that existed in the territories Azerbaijan had 'liberated'".¹³⁰ This is a "mirroring" tactic to show that both conflicting sides are engaged in destruction of monuments, so that to create false equivalences as well as prepare grounds for further such actions.
130. Secondly, Aliyev attempts to present the conflict as a religious one and to Armenia's position as Islamophobic, which intends to unite Muslims throughout the world against the cause.¹³¹
131. In the found 2 online sources for such a claim there is only one evidence of vandalism and one destruction mentioned, while there is no any information (name, location, history, photo) of the other 62 "destroyed."¹³² There was no additional information provided by the Azerbaijani

¹²⁹ IHL database, Rule 40, respect for cultural property, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule40#:~:text=acts%20of%20vandalism-,Rule%2040.,art%20and%20science%20is%20prohibited.>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹³⁰ President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva viewed progress of restoration work at Aghdam Juma Mosque, 14 February 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55438>, accessed on 12 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev received UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Azerbaijan, 9 March 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55588>, accessed on 16 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva visited Yukhari Govharagha Mosque in Shusha, 27 September 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/57390>, accessed on 12 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva attend the opening ceremony of the Urban Planning and Architecture of Azerbaijan Forum, 5 October 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/57481>, accessed on 11 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended the meeting of CIS's councils of heads of state in Astana, 14 October 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/57566>, accessed on 11 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended the opening of the conference under the motto "Along the Middle Corridor: Geopolitics, Security and Economy", 25 November 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/57968>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹³¹ President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels, 12 January 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55243> accessed on 11 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Samarkand hosts 9th Summit of Organization of Turkic States, 11 November 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/57816>, accessed on 11 April 2023; President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva viewed progress of restoration work at Aghdam Juma Mosque, 14 February 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55438>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹³² AzStudies Collective, НПО Азербайджана обратились к гендиректору ЮНЕСКО, 19 December 2020, <https://azstudies-editor.medium.com/documenting-destruction-of-azerbaijani-cultural-heritage-16cff8f3648b>; YouTube Channel Rahal News, Azerbaijani Soldiers Recover an Old Mosque that Armenians Converted into a Pig Pen in Zangwylan, 22 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8-7wthTYwg>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

government to the communication of the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights from October 2021.¹³³

132. In its response to Aliyev's claims, the Monument Watch asserts that (a) *"the data on the number of mosques (65 out of 67 in Nagorno-Karabakh) absolutely does not correspond to the number officially approved by Azerbaijan in the Soviet period and the number is deliberately overestimated. This trend can be traced through a simple comparison of the quantitative data on mosques provided in the pre-Soviet and Soviet times, before and after the war of 2020. The Azerbaijani side speaks of mosques even in Lachin and Kelbajar regions, where none of the mosque or shrine has ever been recorded".* (b) *"Before the war in 2020, Muslim monuments - mosques, tombs, various other buildings that exist on the territory of NK were preserved by the state, restored if possible. Thus, the fortress of Panah Khan was repaired with public financing, the building of the mosque in Shahbulag was straightened, archaeological excavations were carried out in the pool in front of the mosque, the building of the Saatli mosque in Shushi was repaired with private financing, and the Upper Mosque of the same city was repaired due to the charitable programs of "Initiatives for Development of Armenia" (IDeA) and "Revival of the Eastern Historical Heritage" foundations. The entrance to the mosque in the city of Aghdam was closed to prevent animals from entering. The Muslim mosques of Khachen, Vanotsa, the Gharghabazar's caravanserai with its mosque and their surroundings have been renovated several times by the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. (c) The Muslim monuments in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh have been registered, photographed, verified both by the specialists from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of Nagorno-Karabakh and by a large number of Armenian specialists who worked there in different years, especially by the Nagorno-Karabakh Archaeological Expedition. The condition of the monuments and the existing problems has been taken into account. It should be noted that all the work was carried out under the auspices of the state bodies and science of NK, since these monuments have always been considered part of the cultural heritage of NK. In some Muslim monuments, the connection with Armenian culture is also obvious, which was proved by Azerbaijani specialists in the Soviet period. The best examples of this are the tombs of Khachen, Vanotsa and other monuments. In this regard, a booklet dedicated to the Muslim monuments of NK was published in 2010. Many of the Muslim monuments in the territory of NK were well preserved and all damage which was mainly associated with the hostilities of 1991-1994 has been recorded. The damage caused to a number of monuments as a result of the illegal activities of locals, and the use of some monuments for economic purposes, was revealed. Before the war, many attempts were made to prevent such incidents. These issues have never been hidden by the public authorities of NK. Considering Muslim monuments of NK as equally important, the team of "Monitoring of the Cultural Heritage" launched a project to study and present the Muslim monuments of NK. It should be noted that the Azerbaijani side, often demonstrating damaged monuments, forgets to emphasize that many of*

¹³³ UN Special Procedures, Information concerning the alleged destruction of and damage to many cultural heritage sites and objects of religious, historical and cultural importance in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and surrounding regions, 29 October 2021, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=26783>, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TmSearch/RelCom?code=ARM%202/2021> accessed on 16 April 2023.

*them were damaged during the First War in 1990s, when such territories as Fizuli, Jabrayil and others were the scenes of intense hostilities. It should also be added that many Muslim monuments were in a state of disrepair during the Soviet period.*¹³⁴

133. The satellite investigation of the treatment of Azerbaijani cultural heritage in the areas controlled by the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh showed that overall, the patterning of the impacts to Azerbaijani heritage between 1994 and 2020 documented by CHW does not indicate a program of cultural erasure implemented and sustained by a state actor.¹³⁵

International Reactions

134. In September 2021, the issue of the elimination of Armenian heritage has been reflected in the PACE Report on “Humanitarian Consequences of the Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan.” The rapporteur, Paul Gavan, expressed his concerns: *“about the current narrative being developed in Azerbaijan promoting a “Caucasian Albanian” cultural narrative while seeking to negate an “Armenian” cultural narrative. While the whole region was certainly under the influence of different religions and people over history, steps to create such a new narrative, negating Armenian cultural heritage, in particular in the light of and in response to a long running 30-year conflict, should be avoided. This is a matter which UNESCO should look at to avoid manipulation by one side, or the other.”*¹³⁶
135. On 29 October 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights issued a communication addressed to Azerbaijan (Ref AL AZE 3/2021) expressing concern on alleged destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in the region and requesting urgent clarification of the real situation by inviting to respond to the list of questions about the circumstances of the alleged destructions and measures taken by the Azerbaijani Government to protect Armenian cultural heritage as well as readiness to accept technical missions to the region.¹³⁷ However, the response was received only a year and a half later on 21 February 2023.¹³⁸
136. On December 7, 2021, the ICJ indicated provisional measures in the case of Armenia v. Azerbaijan, ruling that Azerbaijan must *“take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts*

¹³⁴ Monument Watch, On the resolution adopted by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, 4 April 2022, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/on-the-resolution-adopted-by-the-organization-of-islamic-cooperation-oic-on-the-cultural-heritage-of-nagorno-karabakh/>, accessed on 12 April 2023; Monument Watch, Gharghabazar: caravanserai and mosque, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/gharghabazar-caravanserai-and-mosque/>, accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹³⁵ Between the Wars, A Satellite Investigation of the Treatment of Azerbaijani Cultural Heritage in the Unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, 1994-2020, Caucasus Heritage Watch, 9 April 2023, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e1c69b7dd46f4c839dfc0fab9248368>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹³⁶ PACE, Humanitarian Consequences of the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, September 13, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3lfVGXu>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹³⁷ UN Special Procedures, Information concerning the alleged destruction of and damage to many cultural heritage sites and objects of religious, historical and cultural importance in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and surrounding regions, 29 October 2021, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=26783>, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TmSearch/RelCom?code=ARM%20/2021>, accessed on 16 April 2023.

¹³⁸ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gld=37390>, accessed on 17 April 2023.

*of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artifacts.*¹³⁹

137. On February 8, 2022, the Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Nadine Maenza, made a statement on the federal government agency's Twitter page. She wrote "We are deeply concerned by Azerbaijan's plans to remove Armenian Apostolic inscriptions from churches. We urge the government to preserve and protect places of worship and other religious and cultural sites."¹⁴⁰
138. On 10 March 2022, the EU Parliament adopted a resolution on "Azerbaijan's continued policy of erasing and denying the Armenian cultural heritage in and around Nagorno-Karabakh".¹⁴¹ The resolution acknowledged that *"it is part of a wider pattern of a systematic, state-level policy of Armenophobia, historical revisionism and hatred towards Armenians promoted by the Azerbaijani authorities, including dehumanisation, the glorification of violence and territorial claims against the Republic of Armenia which threaten peace and security in the South Caucasus."*¹⁴² The resolution acknowledged that *"the elimination of the traces of Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh"* is also achieved *"through the falsification of history and attempts to present it as so-called Caucasian Albanian."*¹⁴³
139. On 26 August 2022, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination issued its Concluding observations on the combined tenth to twelfth periodic reports of Azerbaijan, the Committee expresses its deep concern about "the reports on the destruction of and damage to Armenian cultural heritage, including to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts, and the lack of information on investigations carried out into such allegations." It recommends Azerbaijan to "investigate reports on the destruction of and damage to Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts, adopt measures to prevent such acts, facilitate the mission proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to draw up a preliminary inventory of significant cultural properties, and strengthen its efforts to preserve these sites while ensuring effective and meaningful consultation with ethnic Armenian communities." It denounces the destruction of Armenian and Azerbaijani cultural, religious and historical heritage since the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; urges Azerbaijan and Armenia to refrain from further destroying, neglecting or altering the origins of cultural, religious or historical heritage in the region and instead strive to preserve, protect and promote this rich diversity; calls for accountability regarding such actions; stresses that the destruction of cultural heritage increases tension and hatred between countries and contributes to the destabilisation of the region and thereby undermines the efforts of the bilateral talks held

¹³⁹ International Court of Justice, Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan, 7 December 2021, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹⁴⁰ Azatutyun, U.S. Agency 'Deeply Concerned' About Karabakh Churches, 8 February 2022, <https://bit.ly/3vbR80m>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹⁴¹ EU Parliament, resolution of 10 March 2022 on the destruction of cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh (2022/2582(RSP)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0080_EN.html, para 1., accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹⁴² EU Parliament, resolution of 10 March 2022 on the destruction of cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh (2022/2582(RSP)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0080_EN.html, para. 2., accessed on 12 April 2023.

¹⁴³ EU Parliament, resolution of 10 March 2022 on the destruction of cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh (2022/2582(RSP)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0080_EN.html, para. O. accessed on 12 April 2023.

recently; calls for the restoration of damaged sites in accordance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) standards and indications as well as for the international community's greater involvement in protecting cultural and religious heritage in the region; deplores the fact that two years since the signing of the ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020, the UNESCO mission has not been able to visit the affected areas; calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to fully cooperate with UNESCO and urgently allow and facilitate its mission's visit to both countries without preconditions; takes note of Armenia's expressed readiness to receive such a mission.¹⁴⁴

140. The European Parliament in its resolution of 15 March 2023 on EU-Azerbaijan relations stated that it "deplores the destruction of Armenian and Azerbaijani cultural, religious and historical heritage since the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; demands that Azerbaijan and Armenia refrain from the further destruction and alteration of heritage and guarantee that citizens are not prevented from exercising their freedom of religion or belief in this regard; urges both countries to genuinely commit to preserving, protecting and promoting this rich diversity regardless of its origin and without misappropriation or miscategorisation; calls for accountability regarding all crimes of destruction and alteration and for the preservation and restoration of damaged sites in accordance with UNESCO standards and indications, as well as for the greater involvement of the international community in the preservation of cultural, religious and historical heritage in the region; calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to urgently allow and facilitate a UNESCO mission to both countries without preconditions." It also recalls ICJ's decision of 7 December 2021 "on the application of urgent measures which require Azerbaijan to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts; insists that Azerbaijan and Armenia comply fully with UNESCO's 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, commonly referred to as the 1954 Hague Convention, which requires parties to a conflict to refrain from all acts of hostility directed against cultural property."¹⁴⁵

Impeded Access of International Organisations and Monitoring Missions

141. Azerbaijan continuously poses challenges and impedes the access of international missions to Nagorno-Karabakh before and after the war. Before the war Azerbaijan applied a blacklist of foreign nationals as "personae non gratae" for their "illegal entry" to the territory.¹⁴⁶ Azerbaijan

¹⁴⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the combined tenth to twelfth periodic reports of Azerbaijan, 22 September, 2022, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fAZE%2fCO%2f10-12&Lang=en, accessed on 17 April 2023.

¹⁴⁵ European Parliament, Resolution on EU-Azerbaijan relations [2021/2231\(INI\)](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0082_EN.html), 15 March, 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0082_EN.html, accessed on 17 April 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Wikipedia, List of People Declared Personae Non Gratae in Azerbaijan, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_declared_personae_non_gratae_in_Azerbaijan;LIST_OF_FOREIGN;Citizens_Illegally_Visited_Occupied_Territories_of_the_Republic_of_Azerbaijan, 10 September 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20201004094059/https://mfa.gov.az/files/shares/illegally_visited.pdf, accessed on 11 April 2023.

has blacklisted a number of members of the European Parliament, other foreign dignitaries, and humanitarian aid workers.

142. After the war, the allowance to enter Nagorno-Karabakh was concurred with Russian peacekeepers, while after December 12, 2022 the only liferoad from Armenia to Azerbaijan is blocked for any free movement.
143. Still after the November 10, 2020 ceasefire, UNESCO has proposed both to Armenia and Azerbaijan to send an independent mission of experts to draw a preliminary inventory of significant historical and cultural heritage sites in and around Nagorno-Karabakh - as a first step toward the effective safeguarding of the region's heritage.¹⁴⁷
144. For the same purpose, the intergovernmental Committee of Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Second Protocol (1999), adopted a declaration on December 11, 2020. It welcomed UNESCO's initiative, confirming the need for an independent assessment mission to Nagorno-Karabakh to take stock of the situation regarding cultural properties in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. The Committee requested each of the parties to render the mission possible.¹⁴⁸ The declaration urged: *"taken in conformity with Article 23 of the 1954 Hague Convention, to carry out as soon as possible an independent technical mission, with the agreement of all concerned Parties, with the aim of assessing the status of the cultural property in all its forms as a prerequisite for the effective protection of heritage."*¹⁴⁹ However, the Assistant UNESCO Director-General publicly stated that: "only the response of Azerbaijan is still awaited for UNESCO to proceed with the sending of a mission to the field. The authorities of Azerbaijan have been approached several times without success so far."¹⁵⁰
145. Despite the described efforts and the urgency of the matter as acknowledged by UNESCO throughout 2021, the Azerbaijani Government has not duly responded to the request - thus creating obstacles and hindering access by UNESCO to the region.¹⁵¹
146. In 2020-2021, many UN and international organisations have decried the destruction of cultural heritage sites.¹⁵² While numerous organisations, including UNESCO, have called for Azerbaijan's

¹⁴⁷ Nagorno-Karabakh: Reaffirming the Obligation to Protect Cultural Goods, UNESCO Proposes Sending a Mission to the Field to All Parties, 20 November, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/nagorno-karabakh-reaffirming-obligation-protect-cultural-goods-unesco-proposes-sending-mission>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹⁴⁸ Declaration of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of the Second Protocol to The Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict – Ensuring Cultural Property Protection in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and Setting-up an Independent Technical Mission, 11 December 2020, https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/en_15_com_declaration_haut-karabakh_final_1.pdf, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹⁴⁹ "Declaration of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of the Second Protocol to The Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict – ensuring cultural property protection in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and setting-up an independent technical mission", 11 December 2020, https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/en_15_com_declaration_haut-karabakh_final_1.pdf, accessed on 11 April, 2023.

¹⁵⁰ UNESCO's press release, UNESCO is awaiting Azerbaijan's Response regarding Nagorno-Karabakh mission (21 December 2020), <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-awaiting-azerbaijans-response-regarding-nagorno-karabakh-mission>, accessed on 12 April, 2023.

¹⁵¹ UNESCO is awaiting Azerbaijan's Response regarding Nagorno-Karabakh Mission, 21 December, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3LWTPZO>; Commonsense.eu, UNESCO Hoping to Send Mission to Nagorno-Karabakh, 5 February, 2021, <https://www.commonspace.eu/index.php/news/unesco-hoping-send-mission-nagorno-karabakh>; Newsweek, Christian Heritage at Risk as U.N. Watches in Silence, February 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3heuo82>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Armenia, Remarks of the Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan at the 41st Session of the UNESCO General Conference, 11 November 2021, <https://bit.ly/3t7VG5z>, accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹⁵² Report In response to the destruction and desecration of Armenian religious and cultural heritage property by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces and the denial and erasure of Armenian cultural heritage authored by Armenian Bar Association and Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and submitted to the UN Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights and freedom of religion or belief, 21 January 2021, <https://armenianbar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Armenian-Cultural-Heritage-Report-1.21-2021.pdf>, Blue Shield Statement, 7 October

- cooperation to protect Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan has repeatedly declined to permit entry to or to cooperate with any fact-finding or technical initiative.
147. In December 2022, a delegation of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) was warmly welcomed in the territories currently under control of Azerbaijan¹⁵³, and the cultural sites were shown on a selective basis by neglecting the existence of Armenian cultural heritage as such.
148. In its belated response from 21 February 2023, after 16 months from the communication of the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights dated 29 October 2021, Azerbaijan stated that they welcome missions of UNESCO within sovereign territory of Azerbaijan and accused Armenian side of politicizing the question and impeding the access itself. In the same response, Azerbaijan said it is investigating and prosecuting credible allegations of damage to protected cultural objects and its competent agencies publicly committed to provide support for investigations of all credible allegations and vandalism.
149. In the same response Azerbaijan stated that it had given serious consideration to the Special Rapporteur's proposal for a site visit and joint consultation mechanisms, but, again, showed its unwillingness to agree on the site visit by merely putting forward the reason that it is not possible prior to the UNESCO's visit, which has been under the discussion for almost 2 years.

Conclusions and Call for Action

150. The above-described state policy of Azerbaijan aimed at destruction of Armenian cultural heritage and removal of Armenian traces from the monuments threatens to fully eradicate the rich cultural heritage currently under the control of Azerbaijan, including more than thousand churches and monasteries, sanctuaries and cemeteries, fortresses and castles, khachkars and tomb stones, representing the rich Armenian history of the region. Additionally, the movable cultural heritage is threatened, including thousands of artefacts, books, etc.
151. It is of vital importance for the international governmental bodies, such as the UN (including UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, UNESCO and Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights and on freedom of religion and belief), Council of Europe and OSCE, as well as non-governmental actors (including ICOMOS and ICOM) to react promptly and adequately to the apparent detrimental intents of the Azerbaijani leadership and prevent destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage from any further damage or appropriation.

2020, <https://theblueshield.org/blue-shield-statement-on-fighting-in-nagorno-karabakh/>, UNESCO Statement, 9 October 2020, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/situation-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-zone-unesco-statement>, WMF Statement, 15 November 2020, <https://www.wmf.org/blog/wmf-statement-safeguarding-cultural-heritage-nagorno-karabakh>; ICOM International Statement, 24 November 2020, <https://icom.museum/en/news/icomos-ica-ifla-icom-statement-on-nagorno-karabakh/>; Metropolitan Museum of Art Statement, 17 November, <https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2020/statement-about-armenian-cultural-heritage>; World Council of Churches Statement, 12 October 2020, (1) <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-calls-for-immediate-end-to-military-actions-in-nagorno-karabakh-region>, The Middle East Council of Churches Statement, 23 November 2020, <https://www.mecc.org/mecc/2020/11/23/justice-for-Nagorno-Karabakh?rq=Nagorno-Karabakh>, all accessed on 14 April 2023.

¹⁵³ ICOMOS delegation visits liberated territories, 7 December 2022, <https://www.azernews.az/culture/203266.html>, accessed on 14 April 2023.

152. The international actors shall

- **Condemn** intentional destruction, damage, misappropriation, desecration of Armenian religious, cultural and historical sites and artefacts, demand prompt investigation and punishment of cases of vandalism by Azerbaijan and raise the issue at the levels of the Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly, Council of Europe and OSCE structures;
- **Urge** Azerbaijan to immediately end the targeting of cultural heritage sites and demand recognition, respect and protection of all the cultural property sites under the control of Azerbaijan, in accordance with international conventions as well as UN Resolution 2347 on the protection of the cultural heritage located in conflict zones;
- **Promote** visits of technical missions of relevant bodies and mandate-holders to Nagorno-Karabakh places of threatened cultural heritage and proper reporting on the state of the movable and immovable cultural heritage on the territories under the control of Azerbaijan.