



GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN



Kiel University
Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel



YEREVAN
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KONFESSIONSKUNDLICHES
INSTITUT

APPEAL

THE THREAT OF DESTRUCTION OF ARMENIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Yerevan, 19.07.2022

From 15 to 19 July 2022, a conference on "The Cultural Heritage of Artsakh" was held at the Yerevan State University and the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Vayots Dzor/Armenia. More than 30 international scholars and experts discussed the origin, historical development and current threats to cultural heritage in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh). These are part of the Armenian culture and, thus, amongst the oldest heritage of Christianity.

The motive for the meeting was an appeal by numerous scholars for the [Protection of cultural heritage in Karabakh](#) of 04.03.2021. The appeal pointed out the acute endangerment of the Armenian population and its cultural heritage.

Numerous organisations such as the [World Council of Churches](#), the [Central Committee of German Catholics](#) and the solidarity initiative with the people in Central and Eastern Europe, [Renovabis](#) already published statements on the suffering of the people and the endangerment of the cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in its [Resolution of 27.09.2021](#) and the US State Department in its [Report on Religious Freedom in Azerbaijan of 02.06.2022](#) have also taken a stand.

Meanwhile, the United Nations International Court of Justice, in an [order dated 7.12.2021](#), called on Azerbaijan to take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration of Armenian cultural heritage objects. Most recently, on [10.03.2022, the European Parliament](#) strongly condemned Azerbaijan's continued policy of erasing and denying the Armenian cultural heritage in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

The background to this is that during his visit to the 12th-century Armenian Church of the Holy Mother of God in Tsakuri Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev announced that he would remove the Armenian inscriptions from there. In addition, the Azerbaijani Minister of Culture, Anar Karimov, announced on 03.02.2022 the establishment of a

working group which is apparently intended to legitimise the systematic destruction of all Armenian cultural heritage in the region.

During the 2020 war unleashed by Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani forces attacked and severely damaged the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral of the Holy Savior in Shushi twice with precision weapons. Furthermore, St. John the Baptist Church (Kanach Zham) was partially destroyed after Azerbaijani forces gained control of the city. Other churches, inscriptions and cross-stones were damaged, desecrated or destroyed. Satellite images also show that several (historic) cemeteries were destroyed.

In the recent past, Azerbaijan already erased the cultural heritage of the Armenian population in the Nakhichevan exclave, including the complete destruction of the medieval Armenian cemetery of Djulfa and its thousands of cross-stones and other monuments.

We, the conference participants, consider the Armenian tangible and intangible cultural assets in and around Nagorno-Karabakh to be **highly endangered**.

We call on

1. all political and social actors, as well as international organisations, to commit themselves to the protection of cultural heritage and the endangered population in and around Nagorno-Karabakh;
2. decision-makers to make the protection of cultural property and human rights a condition of any cooperation with Azerbaijan;
3. the delegations to negotiations currently being conducted at various levels on a conflict settlement with the goal to reach a peace agreement to take also into account the legitimate interests of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Only a just peace can guarantee the sustainable safeguarding of cultural heritage and human rights, to which Azerbaijan has committed itself under international law;
4. the European Union and its Member States to ensure that also the issues of historical revisionism, human rights and the threat of destruction of cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh will be raised in light of current negotiations and agreements with Azerbaijan on energy supplies;
5. Azerbaijan to allow scientists, UNESCO and other international organisations unrestricted access to cultural heritage in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and to not deny believers access to places of worship.

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