

**ABOUT THE PROTECTION OF THE ARMENIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF
AZERBAIJAN DUE TO THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT SIGNED ON THE 10TH OF NOVEMBER**

**OFFICIAL LETTER TO Mr. ERNESTO OTTONE RAMIREZ, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR CULTURE
16.11.2020**

Dear Mr. Ernesto Ottone Ramirez ,

As you know, on **the 27th of September, 2020, Azerbaijani Armed forces attacked the Republic of Artsakh**, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh. They were supported by the Turkish military as well as foreign mercenaries and terrorists brought in from Syria and other areas to fight against the people of Artsakh. During the 45 days of the war, the Azerbaijani armed forces utilized numerous sophisticated, internationally banned weapons - such as launching cluster munitions on civilian settlements - and the international society witnessed several targeted attacks against Armenian Christian, historical and archaeological monuments, museums, crosses, and memorials, and even the **Govhar Agha Mosque in Shushi**.

On October 8th, Azerbaijan launched two intentional airstrikes on the masterpiece of Armenian architecture - the **Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral**, located in the cultural capital of Artsakh, Shushi, causing significant damages. **Tigranakert, which is a major Hellenistic and Armenian archaeological site** founded by Tigranes the Great in 95-55 BCE, was targeted, as well. This 2000-year-old city became an area of intensive war activity and was shelled several times, causing serious damages and destruction. The **music school of Stepanakert** also came under attack, and another four cultural houses were destroyed, in addition to several museums and exhibits.

Moreover, the unexpected attack launched on the 27th of September allowed no chance for museums to evacuate the collections, which now poses the threat of smuggling of the valuable objects from the collections of 12 (from 21) museums located on the territories currently under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan. An urgent action on creating **ICOM Red List for those collections is required**.

The Azerbaijani leadership has already begun its policy of falsification of historical facts and misappropriation of Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh; the Acting Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan has already started referring to the Armenian cultural heritage sites and places of worship on the territory of Artsakh as "Caucasian Albanian." This is inarguably the continuation of the cultural genocide committed by Azerbaijan against Armenian cultural heritage, which had earlier manifested itself in the **destruction, between 1997 and 2006, of the 28,000 medieval Armenian churches, ornate cross-stones, and historical tombstones of Nakhichevan**, the unique testimony of the Armenian presence in the region.

The 16th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) adopted a resolution on October 2008 expressing grave concern about these acts of vandalism

regretfully stating: “this heritage that once enjoyed its worthy place among the treasures of the world’s heritage can no longer be transmitted today to future generations.”

These cases are many and have been recorded by both the Ombudsman of Armenia and that of Artsakh. The intentional targeting, destruction, and misappropriation of cultural heritage sites are a gross violation of **the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols.**

This stems from a context of deep Armenophobia and anti-Armenianism, which is prevalent in Azerbaijan at all levels of society. This anti-Armenian sentiment is a diverse spectrum of negative feelings, dislikes, fears, aversion, derision, and prejudice against Armenians and Armenian culture. Hate speech and statements demonstrating intolerance against Armenians are encouraged at the highest political level in Azerbaijan, creating a conducive ground for unprecedented hate crimes. As a result, Armenian cultural heritage becomes a victim of revenge through a policy of cultural genocide, which has been practiced by Turkey and Azerbaijan for over a century.

All the above-mentioned facts and the presence of the **deployed Syrian mercenaries in Azerbaijan** raises a deep concern regarding the fate of the rich Historical Armenia Cultural Heritage that remain on the territories under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan as per the ceasefire signed between Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan on the 10th of November, 2020. The list of the museums and monuments in question is attached to this letter.

Based on the spirit of the **UN Resolution 2347 on the protection of the cultural heritage located in the conflict zones**, it is of utmost importance to create an international group of experts for conducting monitoring and watch activities around the sights periodically.

By Referring to the **UN resolution on “Security Council Condemns Destruction, Smuggling of Cultural Heritage by Terrorist Groups, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2347”** adapted in 2017, we call upon UNESCO to take all the necessary measures for the security and preservation of the Armenian moveable and immovable cultural heritage in the territory of Azerbaijan.

We, the undersigned, urge you to take meaningful action to protect and secure the Armenian Cultural Heritage on the part of the territory of Artsakh under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan from any form of destruction and misappropriation.

Sincerely,

ANI AVAGYAN

Chair of ICOM National Committee of Armenian Museums



GAGIK GYURJYAN

Chair of ICOMOS National Committee of Armenia

