

## **MESG 220211 Appeal on Artsakh Armenian Monuments TEMPLATE**

*[to be sent to public officials.]*

I am writing to express concern and outrage over recent announcements from the government of Azerbaijan, that signal its official plans to desecrate Armenian Christian monuments, and erase evidence of their Armenia origin, in the region of Nagorno-Karabagh.

It is well known that Nagorno-Karabagh has been the subject of a territorial dispute between the Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijan, since the period before the fall of the Soviet Union. Scholars recognize Karabagh (known anciently as Artsakh) as a centuries-old, majority-Armenian region, considered part of historic Armenia since antiquity. For 30 years, starting in the early 1990s, Karabagh was governed as an independent Armenian republic. But in the fall of 2020, Azerbaijan launched a surprise attack on the region, conquered large portions of it through force of arms, and incorporated these lands into its own territory. That event displaced thousands of Christian Armenians from their homes, and left hundreds of Armenia monuments vulnerable to desecration by Azeri military forces.

Earlier this month, the Azeri Minister of Culture announced his government's intention to proceed with another anti-Armenian initiative. According to this announcement, in Azerbaijan a "working group of experts in Albanian history and architecture" has been formed, whose goal is to remove "false traces [sic] left by Armenians" from "Albanian religious temples."

The Culture Minister's statement references a theory, which has become prominent in Azerbaijan—but is categorically dismissed by mainstream scholars—that Armenian inscriptions in churches on Azerbaijani territory are not original, but were late additions to churches built under Caucasian Albania, an ancient Christian kingdom that ruled part of the territory that is today Azerbaijan.

Scholarship testifies to the contrary, however, that the Armenian identity of these Christian holy places has never been in question. That identity is a reality firmly established by scholars across the globe, and not a topic of debate. The supreme authority of the worldwide Armenian Church, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, has strongly condemned this initiative of the Azerbaijani authorities, calling it "an uncivilized act against humanity, which demonstrates an ongoing, underlying enmity and hatred towards Artsakh and the Armenian people."

Now, we join our voices in this cause. We implore all nations concerned with settling the Karabagh conflict, as well as religious organizations and international bodies, to condemn this attempt of "cultural genocide" by Azerbaijan, in the hope of preventing similar acts of vandalism against Christian monuments in Karabagh, and indeed around the world.

We appeal to you to make your condemnation of this outrageous policy known to the public, and especially to the government authorities of Azerbaijan. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this urgent matter.

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