



May 5, 2021

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2  
Email: [pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:pm@pm.gc.ca)

## Re: Reaffirming the Obligation to Protect the Christian Cultural Heritage of Artsakh

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We, the undersigned, write to you, to urge that the Government of Canada take an active stance to reaffirm the obligation to protect the Christian cultural heritage of Artsakh (also known as Nagorno-Karabakh) which is facing currently a serious threat of destruction.

Our call is rooted in our belief that cultural heritage is a witness to history and is inseparable from the identity of peoples<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

After the six-weeks war launched on September 27<sup>th</sup> 2020 by the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Armenian population of Artsakh<sup>2</sup>, Armenia was obligated to cede control of the majority of territories of Artsakh to Azerbaijan.

In January 2021, the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh released a report<sup>3</sup> indicating that at least 1,456 Armenian historical, cultural, and religious sites are now under the control of Azerbaijan.

We are alarmed by numerous reports that after signing the ceasefire agreement on 9 November 2020, the cultural heritage of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh is being destroyed and vandalized<sup>4</sup>.

The Government of Armenia, international scholars, and artists have urged the Government of Azerbaijan and UNESCO to protect the cultural heritage of Artsakh. On 18 November 2020, the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, met Armenia's and Azerbaijan's representatives in the organization. During these meetings, "the Director-General formally proposed the technical support of UNESCO, who has been unable to visit the conflict zone despite past attempts, and who could, with the agreement of all concerned parties, carry out a preliminary field mission, in order to draw up an inventory of the most significant cultural assets, as a prerequisite for effective protection of the region's heritage".<sup>5</sup>

On 21 December 2020, UNESCO released a public statement mentioning 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."<sup>6</sup>

The Government of Azerbaijan has unfortunately a well documented history of systemic destruction of indigenous Armenian cultural heritage. The destruction of 89 medieval churches, 5,840 khachkars (Armenian cross stones) dating back to the sixth century A.D., and 22,000 historical tombstones in Nakhichevan<sup>7</sup>, makes our concern urgent.

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<sup>2</sup> **Statement on the escalation of conflict in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region**, The World Council of Churches, September 29, 2020 - <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-statement-on-the-escalation-of-conflict-in-the-disputed-nagorno-karabakh-region>

**War has broken out on the edge of Europe. What's behind it?**, The Guardian, October 10, 2020 - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/10/war-edge-europe-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-armenia-azerbaijan>

<sup>3</sup> **The Armenian Cultural Heritage in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh): Cases of Vandalism and at Risk of Destruction by Azerbaijan**, 26 January 2021 - <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/792>

<sup>4</sup> **Preserve Artsakh: An Open Letter to the World Community. Academics call on global institutions to save Armenian heritage before it's too late**, 12 November 2020 - <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/11/12/2125920/0/en/Preserve-Artsakh-An-Open-Letter-to-the-World-Community.html>

<sup>5</sup> **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>

<sup>6</sup> **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>

<sup>7</sup> **Monumental loss: Azerbaijan and 'the worst cultural genocide of the 21st century'**, The Guardian, Dale Berning Sawa, 1 March 2019 - <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/monumental-loss-azerbaijan-cultural-genocide-khachkars>

Dear Prime Minister, we appeal to you to take on behalf of Canada all the necessary measures to ensure the security and preservation of the multi-millenary Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh.

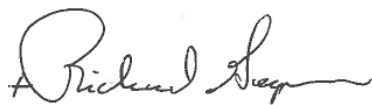
To expand on this urgent issue, we would like to request a meeting with you, or with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or the Minister of Canadian Heritage, to share our thoughts on how Canada can play a leading role in taking all the necessary measures for the security and preservation of the Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh.

We wish to assure you and the members of the government of our prayers as you exercise your responsibility to work for peace and justice.

Prayerfully,



The Rev. Stephen Kendall  
President  
Canadian Council of Churches



+ Richard Gagnon  
Archbishop of Winnipeg and  
President of the Canadian Conference  
of Catholic Bishops



The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls  
Archbishop and Primate  
The Anglican Church of Canada



Rev. Tim McCoy  
Executive Minister  
Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec



Archbishop Sotirios  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada



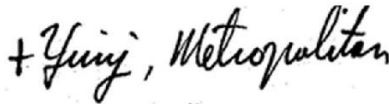
His Grace Bishop Abgar Hovakimyan  
Primate, The Armenian Holy Apostolic Church Diocese of Canada



Rev. Robert Ogilvie  
Executive Minister  
Canadian Baptists of Western Canada



The Most Reverend Lawrence Huculak, O.S.B.M.  
Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy



The Most Rev. Metropolitan Yurij Kalistchuk  
Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada



Beverly Shepard  
Clerk  
Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)



The Right Reverend Dr. Richard Bott  
Moderator  
The United Church of Canada



The Rev. Susan C. Johnson  
National Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada



Rev. Fr. John Benjamin Vic Paradero, OMHS

Apostolic Catholic Church of Canada



Commissioner Floyd J. Tidd  
Territorial Commander  
The Salvation Army, Canada and Bermuda



Lee Nicholas-Pattillo, President  
Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms (CABF)



Archbishop Irene Rochon  
Archbishop of Ottawa and Canada  
Archdiocese of Canada of the Orthodox Church in America



Rev Dr Jennifer Garbin  
Regional Minister  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada



Rev. Rev. Amanda Currie  
Moderator  
The Presbyterian Church in Canada



Reverend Marijke Strong  
Executive Secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada,  
Reformed Church in America



Darren Roorda  
Canadian Ministries Director  
Christian Reformed Church in North America



L.K. (Rev. Fr.) Messale Engeda  
Head Priest and Administrator of  
The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Canada



His Eminence, Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos  
Northeast American Diocese of the  
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church



Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos  
Diocesan Bishop  
Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church

Rev. Douglas Klassen  
Executive Minister  
Mennonite Church Canada



His Grace Bishop Anba Mina  
Bishop of the Diocese of Mississauga, Vancouver and Western Canada  
Coptic Orthodox Church

His Grace Bishop Anba Makar, Papal Vicar  
Archdiocese of Toronto  
Coptic Orthodox Church



Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky  
Diocesan Administrator  
Polish National Catholic Church of Canada

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Chester Searles  
British Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada

CC: The Honourable Erin O'Toole, MP, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada  
Jagmeet Singh, MP, Leader of the New Democratic Party  
Yves-François Blanchet, MP, Leader of the Bloc Québécois  
Annamie Paul, Leader of the Green Party of Canada  
The Honourable Marc Garneau, MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs

***The Canadian Council of Churches*** responds to Christ's call for unity and peace, seeks Christ's truth with affection for diversity, and acts in love through prayer, dialogue and witness to the gospel.

*The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) is a broad and inclusive ecumenical body, now representing 26-member churches including Anglican; Eastern and Roman Catholic; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern and Oriental Orthodox; and Historic Protestant traditions.*

*Together these member churches represent 13,500 worshipping communities and comprise 85% of the Christians in Canada. The Canadian Council of Churches was founded in 1944.*