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Prevention of armed conflict

**Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for
Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and
displaced persons and humanitarian questions**

**Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and
related intolerance**

Promotion and protection of human rights

**The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide,
war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity**

Letter dated 30 September 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am transmitting herewith a letter from the Pan-Armenian Union “Gardman-Shirvan-Nakhijevan”, a civil society organization established to protect the rights of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan, regarding the mass destruction of the Armenian millennia-old cultural and religious heritage in Nakhijevan (see annex).

I kindly ask that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 32, 60, 69, 71 and 132.

(Signed) Mher **Margaryan**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 30 September 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to bring to your attention the issue of the de-Armenianization of Nakhijevan and the alarming acts of vandalism against Armenian historical and cultural heritage in the region. It is imperative that the United Nations takes a more active role in addressing issues of preservation of cultural and historical fabric of this area.

Nakhijevan has a deep historical connection to Armenian people, rich in Armenian cultural and historical presence. In the ancient times Nakhijevan was part of various Armenian kingdoms. The region was historically populated by Armenians and was an integral part of Armenian cultural and political life. Throughout the medieval period, the region was home to a significant Armenian population, and many Armenian churches, monasteries, and cultural sites were established there.

Over time, the region came under the control of various empires, including the Persian and Ottoman Empires. During these periods, the demographic and political dynamics of Nakhijevan changed, with shifts in population and influence.

In the 19th century, Nakhijevan became part of the Russian Empire following the Russo-Persian Wars. The Russian Empire's control further altered the region's demographic composition, with Armenians still present but increasingly alongside other ethnic groups.

After the collapse of the Russian Empire, Nakhijevan became a contested territory during the chaotic period following World War I. It was briefly claimed by the short-lived First Republic of Armenia, but eventually, in the 1920s, it was incorporated into the Soviet Union as an autonomous republic within the Azerbaijani SSR. This decision was part of a broader Soviet strategy to manage ethnic and territorial disputes in the South Caucasus. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Nakhijevan became an exclave of newly independent Azerbaijan. The Armenian population had largely diminished by this time, partly due to conflict and migration.

In 1917, Armenians accounted for more than 40 per cent of the population. Starting in 1918, Nakhijevan, like other Armenian and Armenian-populated regions, became a target for Armenophobia, leading to numerous massacres, including the Agulis massacre in 1919. As a result of economic, social, and political segregation, the Armenian population in Nakhijevan dramatically decreased, ultimately reaching zero by 1988–1989. Despite the changes in political control and demographics, Nakhijevan remains significant in Armenian history and culture. Many historical Armenian monuments and sites, although some have been destroyed or altered, still mark the region's connection to Armenian heritage.

Archaeological evidence and historical records highlight the significance of Armenian churches, monasteries, khachkars (cross-stones), and other cultural artifacts that have existed in Nakhijevan for centuries. This heritage is a testament to the historical Armenian legacy in the region.

In the recent decades, there has been a systematic effort to erase this Armenian heritage from Nakhijevan. The de-Armenianization process has included the destruction of numerous Armenian cultural and religious monuments. Notably, the world witnessed the obliteration of thousands of khachkars in the medieval Armenian cemetery of Jugha (Julfa) by Azerbaijani authorities in 2005. This act of cultural vandalism is a grievous violation of international conventions, including the

UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

The Azerbaijani government's actions extend beyond Jugha. Reports and satellite imagery have shown the continuous destruction and alteration of Armenian historical sites throughout Nakhijevan. These actions not only violate the principles of cultural preservation but also aim to erase the historical identity of the Armenian people from the region. Some notable examples include:

1. **St. Thomas Monastery** – Located near the village of Agulis, this monastery was a significant pilgrimage site believed to house relics of St. Thomas the Apostle. It was reportedly demolished in the early 20th century.
2. **St. Karapet Monastery** – This monastery was located in the village of Abrakunis. It was an important religious and cultural center for Armenians but has since been destroyed.
3. **St. Hakob-Hayrapet Monastery** – Situated in the village of Paraka, this monastery was another key site of Armenian Christian heritage that has been demolished.
4. **St. Sargis Church** – Located in the village of Tsghna, destroyed in the mid-20th century.
5. **Holy Savior Monastery of Julfa** – Once located in Jugha, the monastery, together with the adjacent cemetery is completely destroyed now.
6. **St. Stepanos Church** – Located in the village of Jugha, this church, like many others in the region, has been destroyed.
7. **St. Astvatsatsin Church** – This church in the village of Agulis was one of the many Armenian churches that have been vandalized.
8. **St. Gevorg Church** – Once located in the city Nakhijevan, the church had been destroyed by 2005, and a new large structure has been built in its place.
9. **St. Hovhannes Church** – Founded in the 12th or 13th century, the church was located in Chahuk village and destroyed by 2009.
10. **St. Nshan or Kopatap Monastery of Bist** – The monastery was a well-known medieval cultural center with a scriptorium that produced illuminated manuscripts.
11. **St. Astvatsatsin Monastery of Old Jugha** – The monastery was destroyed sometime between 2003 and 2009.
12. **St. Grigor Lusavorich/Mesrop Mashtots Monastery of Mesropavan** – A place where Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, once lived. The Monastery was destroyed by 2006.
13. **Church of Mijin Ankuzik/Anzur** – The Church of Mijin Ankuzik/Anzur was located in the western part of the abandoned Mijin Ankuzik village, and was destroyed by 2009.
14. **St. Gevorg Monastery of Yernjak** – The monastery was destroyed between 2001 and 2009.
15. **Church of Verin Aza** – The church was destroyed by 2004.

The destruction of these sites has been a significant loss to cultural heritage and has been widely condemned by historians, archaeologists, and cultural heritage organizations.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I urge you to consider the following actions:

1. Conduct an Independent Investigation: Initiate an independent investigation by UNESCO or a similar international body to document and assess the extent of the damage to Armenian cultural heritage in Nakhijevan.
2. Promote Cultural Preservation: Advocate for the protection and restoration of Armenian cultural sites in Nakhijevan, ensuring that these historical treasures are preserved for future generations.
3. Hold Azerbaijan Accountable: Call on the Azerbaijani government to cease all acts of cultural vandalism and to adhere to international conventions that protect cultural heritage.

The preservation of cultural heritage is not only a matter of safeguarding history but also a critical component of fostering peace and stability. The systematic destruction of Armenian heritage in Nakhijevan threatens to erase a vital part of the region's history and identity. The impunity with which Azerbaijan operated in Nakhijevan, leading to the complete erasure of Armenian cultural and historical heritage, set a dangerous precedent that significantly contributed to the subsequent destruction of Armenian heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh. The systematic demolition of Armenian monasteries, churches, and khachkars in Nakhijevan without international repercussions emboldened similar actions in Nagorno-Karabakh. This pattern of cultural erasure not only targeted the physical manifestations of Armenian history but also sought to undermine the Armenian identity and presence in the region, perpetuating a cycle of conflict and heritage destruction.

I trust that under your leadership, the United Nations will take decisive action to address this pressing issue. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I remain hopeful for a future where cultural heritage is respected and preserved.

Vilen Gabrielyan
