STATEMENT ON THE VATICAN'S COMPLICITY IN AZERBAIJAN'S FALSIFICATION AND ERASURE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH HISTORY AND HERITAGE

Posted on April 26, 2025 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Source: Avedis Hadjian, Facebook

On April 10, 2025, the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome hosted a conference titled "Christianity in Azerbaijan: History and Modernity." It was organized by the Baku International Multiculturalism Center, the Bakikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Holy See, and the Albanian-Udi Christian Religious Community.

This event served not as an academic endeavor but as a platform for pseudo-scholarly revisionism. It advanced state-sponsored narratives aimed at erasing the historical presence of the Armenian Church and appropriating its monuments by falsely attributing them to the ancient Caucasian Albanians—an entirely different people unrelated to modern Albanians of Europe. The true aim was clear: to delegitimize the indigenous roots of Armenians and portray them as foreign to their own ancestral lands.

The papers presented were part of a well-documented, decades-long propaganda campaign aimed at distorting the millennia-old legacy of the Armenian Church—on Armenian soil now occupied by a regime with a proven record of cultural eradication. These falsifications are far from being benign errors of scholarship but stand as deliberate acts of historical aggression. They come less than two years after Azerbaijan's nine-month inhuman blockade and then genocidal assault on Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, which resulted in the ethnic cleansing of 120,000 indigenous Christian Armenians. This atrocity followed the 44-Day War of 2020, when Azerbaijan, supported by foreign mercenaries affiliated with ISIS and Al-Qaeda, launched an unprovoked offensive targeting civilians and religious sites—including the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi.

Azerbaijan's assault on Armenian cultural heritage is nothing new. It is part of a long-standing policy of cultural genocide modeled on Turkey's example that has been carried out everywhere on its territory. The most outstanding examples were offered between 1990 and 2009, when some 10,000 khachkars—sacred Armenian cross-stones—were razed in Julfa, Nakhichevan, in what UNESCO and scholars have called one of the worst acts of cultural destruction in the 21st century.

What makes this episode uniquely alarming is the Vatican's glaring complicity. The conference enjoyed the full knowledge—and in some cases, participation—of high-ranking Vatican officials. These included Fr. Mark Lewis, S.J., Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University; Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches; and Bishop Vladimir Fekete, Prefect of the Apostolic Prefecture of Azerbaijan.

The Pontifical Gregorian University has said that it was not involved in any way in the organization of the conference, nor did it grant any patronage or any collaboration. No academic authority or professor of the Pontifical Gregorian University delivered greetings, lectures or attended the event. The university has said that it merely rented the classroom.*

Although the University maintains that it merely rented the auditorium, the prominent display of the

Vatican and Azerbaijani flags on stage unmistakably lends the event the appearance of official sponsorship.

While Azerbaijan's use of denialist propaganda is expected, it is unacceptable that such revisionism was allowed to take root within a major academic institution of the Holy See. Conferences like this have long been staged in Baku for propaganda purposes, and this happened to be the twelfth conference on the subject. But to host one in Rome, under the Vatican's auspices, lends a false legitimacy to lies that serve a genocidal agenda.

In a letter sent to the conference, Cardinal Gugerotti—himself a noted Armenologist— shamefully parroted Azerbaijani regime talking points. He made no mention of the hundreds of Armenian churches, cemeteries, and cultural monuments under occupation or the regime's current efforts to erase their Armenian identity. Instead, he sang the praises of Azerbaijan.

"Azerbaijan, a crossroads of peoples and faiths, is an ancient land on which a Christian tradition was preserved that has its roots in the era of Caucasian Albania," Cardinal Gugerotti wrote. "The sacred monuments, churches, manuscripts and memories of the whole represent not only artistic testimonies, but tangible expressions of the soul of a people who knew how to honor God in a variety of forms and in the faithfulness of their faith."

The conference itself was cloaked in secrecy, announced publicly only the day before it occurred. Its proceedings were not made available online, nor was any list of speakers or participants published—an affront to all norms of transparency in academic life. This deliberate opacity suggests that both organizers and Vatican officials were fully aware of the conference's disingenuous objectives and sought to minimize public scrutiny.

This event is part of Azerbaijan's relentless campaign of cultural genocide, following the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh and state-sponsored hate speech calling for the erasure of Armenia. The regime's rhetoric—referring to the Republic of Armenia as "Western Azerbaijan"—is not empty talk. It is paired with a systematic policy of violence, denial, and erasure, backed by a military and financial apparatus committed to Armenophobia.

The Vatican's decision to collaborate with such a regime is not just a moral failure—it is an alarming betrayal of its own foundational values. It is a grave scandal that undermines the Holy See's credibility as a voice for peace, justice, and the dignity of persecuted peoples. It also betrays the profound spiritual and historical bonds that have long united the Armenian people and the Catholic Church. That bond is now threatened by political expediency and material gain: the Vatican has cultivated increasingly close financial ties with the authoritarian regime of Azerbaijan in recent years. As documented by IrpiMedia, Azerbaijan has funded restoration projects at the Roman catacombs, the Vatican Museums, the Vatican Apostolic Library, and even St. Peter's Basilica. In February 2020, Mehriban Aliyeva—spouse of Ilham Aliyev and Vice President of Azerbaijan—was awarded the Order of Pope Pius IX, the highest Papal order of knighthood. The Vatican's decision to honor the

representative of such a regime has rightly provoked international outrage.

The involvement of senior Vatican officials in an act that effectively legitimizes cultural genocide against Armenia—the world's first Christian nation—is a demonstration of profound moral bankruptcy. It stands in stark contradiction to the core Christian values of justice, truth, and solidarity, as well as the historic fraternal ties that have long united the Armenian people and the Holy See.

We, the undersigned, call on the international community to unequivocally condemn the Vatican's decision to host this conference on the premises of the Pontifical Gregorian University—in the wake of the brutal ethnic cleansing of 120,000 Christian Armenians.

Furthermore, we urge the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, and Protestant Churches, along with their parishes around the world, the Armenian government, institutions both in Armenia and throughout the Diaspora, and all Armenian organizations and political parties globally, to take a firm and united stand: declare Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, Fr. Mark Lewis, and Bishop Vladimir Fekete personae non gratae. Through their participation in, or complicity with, this act of historical falsification and moral betrayal, they have forfeited any standing or welcome among the Armenian faithful. They must not be permitted to set foot in Armenia, nor be received in any Armenian church, institution, or community.

This is not merely a political or academic issue—it is a moral and spiritual crisis. Silence and inaction are no longer options.

* *This petition was updated adding the paragraph marked by an asterisk on April 14, 2025, with this clarification by the Pontifical Gregorian University about its involvement in the conference.*

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11 Christina Maranci, Harvard University
12 Prof. Talinn Grigor, University of California, Davis
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15 Carlos Antaramián, El Colegio de Michoacán

16 Liza Yessaian
17 David Boyajian, Journalist, investigative reporter
18 David Davidian, Lecturer, American University of Armenia
19 Stephan Pechdimaldji
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21 Mihran Toumajan, Advisory Board, Global ARM
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92 Bati Chétanian, Aix-Marseille Université
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95 Tatève Thomas, Comparative literature student
96 Dr. Levon Marashlian, Glendale Community College
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99 Dr. Ruth Gornandt, University of Oxford
100 Dr. David Zakarian, California State University, Fresno
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103 Polina Ivanova, Harvard University
104 Gabriele Damm
105 Dr. Felipe Morales Carbonell
106 Mari Firkatian, University of Hartford
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111 Carine Sukiasyan, Assistant, Issy-Les-Moulineaux, France
112 David Barsamian, Journalist, radio broadcaster
113 Mariam Dadyan, American University of Armenia
114 Alessandro Orengo, University of Pisa
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167 Frits Zwart, Nederlands Muziek Instituut
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170 Jonathan Gorman, Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy

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174 Vassiliki Sakka, Association for History Education in Greece
175 Dr. Ani Kalayjian, ATOP MeaningfulWorld
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177 Maria Grever, Erasmus University Rotterdam
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181 Ezio Albrile, Independent scholar
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183 Melanie Keledjian, Inalco, Paris
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276 Dr. Anahit Khosroeva, Harvard University
277 Ani Manukyan, Independent researcher
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292 Agnes Pahle, Philologist, Germany
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315 Frank Ankersmit, Diplomat
316 Seda Manukyan
317 Anush Grigoryan, Yerevan State University
318 Albina Sislyan, University of Vienna
319 Vazgen Sislyan
320 Gegine Davtyan
321 Edoardo Gautier di Confiengo, University of Guelph

322 Nelly Matevossian, Medical Doctor, Germany
323 Karine Sahakyan, Matenadaran
324 Nare Gabrielyan, Service operator in the digitalization department
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352 Antonia Arslan, Università di Padova
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354 Grachia Margarian, University of Fribourg, White Cross Foundation

355 Ivan Foletti, Masaryk University
356 Vittorio Robiati Bendaud, Scrittore e saggista

Comments

G Yanikian – 2025-05-07 18:02:18
We went from General Antony Ozanian, to Secretary Antony Blinken in one generation.

Almara – 2025-05-03 11:33:01
Azerbaijan carrying Holy values of Christianity? Has there ever been more absurd thing to say than this? Ha, as Paruyr Sevak would say it is like "surb nshkhar shan beranum". Shame!

Harry H Avanessian – 2025-04-29 12:33:07
It seems Vatican has been compromised by Hydar Aliyev foundation, and it is no surprise

H – 2025-04-27 15:58:01
Davo justly questions the silence of Armenian Catholics. The only retribution could mainly be excommunicating them which could help return the Catholic Armenians in masses to their origin of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. That said, we need to thank all those who wrote and did raise their voices against the Vatican support of Azerbaijan. Perhaps this is an appropriate time to find out the origin of all those who "serve" the Vatican, starting with the cardinals.

Davo – 2025-04-26 23:27:45
What has been the response of the Catholic Armenian hierarchy worldwide and its priests, lay persons, churches, publications, and congregations? I have seen nothing. Perhaps others know. Behind-the-scenes objections by Catholic Armenians don't count. This is a problem, particularly if silence is caused by fear of retribution by the Vatican.