

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES: WE APPEAL FOR RESPECT FOR HOLY SITES, CULTURAL HERITAGE OF NAGORNO- KARABAKH/ARTSAKH

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The executive committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting by video conference on 9-13 November 2020, is gathered at a pivotal and acutely painful moment for the people of the land of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and for all Armenian people, following the announcement of an agreement between the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia to bring an end to six weeks of intense armed conflict. We make an appeal for an end to the bloodshed and destruction this conflict has brought. The WCC noted this in a [statement](#), which also reads as follows:

"We join with His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, in praying for wisdom, unity and calm. We grieve with all those who have suffered terrible losses not only in the renewed fighting since 27 September, but throughout the long history of the struggle for self-determination in the region, entrenching antagonism more deeply with each precious life lost.

We stand in solidarity with the Armenian communities that are threatened by the renewal of the genocide against their people, particularly in light of the egregious comments made by Turkish President Erdogan vowing to "fulfil this mission, which our grandfathers have carried out for centuries, in the Caucasus region" and in light of Turkey's role in the current conflict. The WCC condemns any such threats, explicit or implicit, and the actions of those who have insinuated themselves in the conflict and exacerbated its violence, including by supplying internationally-banned weapons, sending mercenaries and jihadists from Syria and elsewhere, and seeking to turn it into a religious conflict. The WCC condemns the use of chemical weapons and cluster munitions, the targeting of civilians, hospitals and public infrastructure, and all other war crimes, beheadings, torture and other atrocities witnessed in the past weeks.

Furthermore, we appeal for respect for the holy sites and cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, though the repeated shelling of the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi on 8 October and the numerous reports being received of other more recent desecrations indicate a different reality. We urge UNESCO to take all possible and appropriate measures to protect these sites.

We call urgently upon all members of the international community to join in supporting efforts for the protection of such holy sites, for the return in safety and dignity of all refugees and displaced people, for protection of the Armenian people from the threat of genocide, for a lasting peace founded on justice and human rights for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and the wider region, and to refrain from instigating or encouraging antagonism, conflict and injustice.

We lift up and accompany the continuing ministry and witness of the churches of the region, and pray that the church leaders may be given strength and wisdom to guide their people through this crisis."

Armenia's Ministry of Education and Culture calls on relevant international structures to stop the cultural vandalism in Artsakh

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The Armenian Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport is in constant contact with the UNESCO and other international cultural heritage organizations, to draw their attention to the issue that the Armenian historical and cultural heritage and archeological sites in Artsakh are endangered once they are handed over to Azerbaijani.

"Given the previous violations of international norms on intentional destruction of cultural heritage by Azerbaijan and its failure to adhere to the UN and Council of Europe commitments, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport has appealed to international structures, demanding to adhere to their adopted mission, take practical and decisive steps to prevent and condemn the cases of vandalism by Azerbaijan," the ministry said in a statement on Saturday.

As reported earlier, Azerbaijanis had vandalized the Ghazanchetsots (Holy Savior) Cathedral in the town of Shushi.

Photos showing the Azerbaijani vandalism have been circulating on social media. The Artsakh town was handed over to Azerbaijan under the Russia-brokered truce deal signed by the Armenian and Azeri leaders on 9 November.

There are no comments yet.