



**Arbeitsgruppe Anerkennung –  
gegen Genozid, für Völkerverständigung e.V.  
(AGA)**

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January 4, 2006  
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Conseil de l'Europe  
Sous-commission du patrimoine culturel  
À l'attention de  
Monsieur Jacques Legendre  
Président de la Commission de la Culture,  
de la science et de l'éducation

F - 67075 Strasbourg Cedex  
(France)

- Continued Destruction of cultural heritage in Nakhijevan (Republic of Azerbaijan)

Sir,

It has been brought to our attention, that the **ancient Armenian cemetery of Julfa** (Jugha in Armenian) in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhijevan (Azerbaijan) has been exposed to renewed systematic attacks by members of the Azeri forces.

This cemetery in the borderland between Iran and Nakhijevan (Azerbaijan) is culturally and historically unique. With originally more than 10,000 monuments, it offered the largest collection of Armenian tombstones and cross-stones (*khachkarners*), many of them bearing historically relevant inscriptions. These monuments covered a period from the early middle ages (5<sup>th</sup> century) until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Most cross-stones date from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and represent a style, which is both typical for the region Nakhijevan and for Armenian craftsmanship of the late middle ages.

Having survived massacres and expulsions of the indigenous Armenian population in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, this outstanding site had been repeatedly attacked and ruined during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in particular during railway constructions in 1903/04



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and after the final massacre and expulsion of the Armenians of Nakhijevan in 1919-1922. In 1928-29, there were still up to 3,000 *khachkarner* and a few thousand flat, two-edged, cap-shaped tombstones. The decisive destruction process, which began in 1998 when 800 *khachkarner* were removed, was temporarily halted following protests from UNESCO, but from November 2002 until February 2003 it was taken up again. During the most recent destruction of December 2005 even those broken monuments, whose fragments were already laying on the ground, or smaller tombstones were removed, broken and carried away.

In all three phases, the destruction has been thoroughly documented from the Iranian side by representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church (in particular, the bishop of Tabris), Iranian journalists and various scholars of art history. There are also video documentations about the ongoing destruction, which we published on our website:

<http://www.aga-online.org/de/aktionen/detail.php?newsId=87>

Sadly, the case of Julfa is not the only one in the remote province of Nakhijevan. We would also like to draw your attention to the case of the **monastic complex of Surb Karapet (Saint John the Forerunner) in the town of Abrakunis** in the historic Armenian region of Yernjak.

According to historical and lithographic date Surb Karapet monastic complex was built in 1381 over the already existing construction's ruins by Maghakia Ghrimetsi, medieval remarkable thinkers Hovhan Vorotnetsi and Grigor Tatavtsi. After founding the monastery they transferred Yernjak's theological centre from the Surb Khach (Holy Cross) monastery to Surb Karapet, and started active cultural and theological works there.

However, when the Scotsman Steven Sim visited Surb Karapet in summer 2005, he witnessed complete destruction. He told independent Armenian journalist Gayane Mkrtchyan:

“They razed it to the ground, they did not leave even the slightest thing reminding of the church, it was totally cleared. When I asked the locals where the village church was, they showed the empty territory situated near the entrance. The only thing that reminds of the existence of a church in the past was the pieces of brick buried in the ground,” says Sim.



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After Abrakunis he went north and visited the villages of Khanega, Ilandagh (Odzasar) and Khachi Sar. There he also found ruined and destroyed Armenian monuments and churches. The following day he took a bus to Ordubad to go to on to Agulis from there. However, the police prohibited him from going to Agulis. They even prohibited him to leave the center of the town.

'I did not oppose the ban, as tension was already obvious. Officially the purpose of my visit there was to see Islamic and Armenian holy places. In Nakhijevan they treat foreigners with suspicion. It does not matter whether you are an Armenian or a representative of another nationality. In Ordubad, too, every Armenian thing was destroyed,' he says.

Thereafter, Sim went to one of the remotest regions of Nakhijevan to see whether such a situation was everywhere. He went to the village of Shorut. What Sim saw there brought him to one conviction: "It is a special state policy being implemented throughout Nakhijevan."<sup>1</sup>



COURTESY OF STEVEN SIM

The ground has been levelled where an Armenian church used to stand in Nakhijevan.

As a non-profit NGO, focusing on problems, related to genocide, we are alerted by crimes of cultural genocide, or ethnocide. In the given case, we are the more worried, since this particular case of ethnocide can easily turn into an immense obstacle for the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace-finding process towards Nagorno Karabakh. The systematic and repeated destruction of Armenian architectural heritage, which includes important religious and spiritual sites of the Armenian population of Nakhijevan is completely contra-productive to the OSCE peace process in Nagorno Karabakh and to a policy of confidence building. We understood that this process is just now entering a meaningful phase.

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<sup>1</sup> Mkrtychyan, Gayane: Monumental Effort: Scotsman wants to prove Azeri policy of cultural destruction in Nakhijevan. "ArmeniaNow", Issue 33 (155), September 2, 2005. -

<http://www.armenianow.com/?action=viewArticle&AID=1045&IID=1040&lng=eng>



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For all these reasons we appeal to the Sub-commission to take immediate and effective steps to call on Azerbaijan to fulfil its international obligations for the protection of cultural heritage. Furthermore, we urge you to send a fact-finding commission to Nakhijevan as soon as possible and to discuss and decide with the appropriate Azerbaijani institutions the necessary steps for the implementation of a more effective protection system and the preservation of the still existing remains of Armenian culture in Nakhijevan.

We hope to hear from you soon,

Sincerely, Dr. Tessa Hofmann (Chair)

Copy:  
General Rapporteur for the Cultural heritage  
Mr. Eduard O'Hara

APPENDIX 1

Azerbaijani servicemen destruct the remains on the Armenian cemetery of Julfa (Jugha), December 2005.

APPENDIX 2

Two videoclips document the recent destruction of December 2005: