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**Security Council  
Seventy-sixth year**

## **Letter dated 4 May 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

Among the devastating humanitarian, economic and social consequences, the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan and the three-decades-old unlawful occupation of the territories of my country have also caused irreparable damage to Azerbaijani cultural heritage, including thousands of cultural objects, including monuments of world and national importance, mosques, temples, mausoleums, museums, exhibits, art galleries, archaeological sites, libraries and rare manuscripts. Azerbaijani historical and cultural heritage on the territory of Armenia has suffered the same fate.

The Government of Azerbaijan has consistently provided the United Nations with voluminous evidence attesting to Armenia's purposeful actions aimed at consolidating and cementing the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan by changing their demographic, cultural and physical character and preventing the hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced Azerbaijanis from returning to their homeland, in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.



As a matter of particular importance and concern, Azerbaijan has repeatedly brought to the attention of the international community the atrocities committed against its cultural heritage,<sup>1</sup> requesting the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other international organizations to dispatch fact-finding missions to the occupied territories and undertake urgent measures to ensure the protection of cultural property there. However, in order to conceal its hate crimes, Armenia has consistently denied access to such missions over the years of occupation. Thus, for example, in its report on the activities undertaken from 1995 to 2004 on the implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1954 and 1999 Protocols, UNESCO pointed out the following:

54. The Government of Azerbaijan has informed the Secretariat of its concern over the protection of cultural property in Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied territories adjacent to it, and has requested the despatch of a fact-finding mission. However, the Secretariat has been prevented from sending a mission to verify the state of cultural property in the area, as other specialized agencies of the United Nations have not been able to enter these territories since their occupation by Armenian military forces. The Secretariat will reconsider sending a mission once a peaceful settlement has been reached by Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>2</sup>

The resumption of hostilities that followed Armenia's renewed act of aggression at the end of September 2020 has resulted in the liberation of more than 300 cities, towns and villages of Azerbaijan from Armenian occupation. The liberated areas have provided vast evidence of the horrifying scale of destruction and looting carried out by the aggressors. Among other civilian objects, hundreds of historical, cultural and religious sites in those territories were looted, vandalized and destroyed. Out of 67 mosques and Islamic religious shrines, 64 have been destroyed or significantly damaged and desecrated. Defiled by Armenian graffiti, the mosques in the Aghdam, Gubadly and Zangilan districts of Azerbaijan were used as pigsties and cowsheds (see annex, images 8–12, 13–17, 18–21, 30–34 and 35–36). More than 900 graveyards were destroyed and vandalized in those territories.

Furthermore, the traces of unlawful “archaeological excavations” and so-called “reconstruction” works were revealed in the liberated territories, confirming previous reports of Armenia's attempts to conceal and falsify cultural, historical or scientific evidence. In the same vein, a modern workshop producing “ancient” khachkars, Armenian cross-stones, was found in the liberated Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan. These khachkars were oxidized and treated with vinegar so that they appeared old, then buried as “undeniable” proof of Armenian centuries-long roots in the region.

The armed forces of Armenia and Armenian illegal settlers did not refrain from further destroying and stealing cultural property while hastily vacating the occupied territories to be returned to Azerbaijan under the terms of the 10 November 2020 agreement. Thus, the mosque in the Giyasly village of the Aghdam district was burned down by the armed forces of Armenia before they withdrew from the district by 20 November 2020 (see annex, images 13–17). Likewise, the Khudavang cloister complex located in the Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan was looted as the armed forces

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, [E/CN.4/2001/107](#) (22 November 2000), [A/58/594-S/2003/1090](#) (13 November 2003), [A/62/491-S/2007/615](#) (23 October 2007), [A/62/691-S/2008/95](#) (13 February 2008), [A/64/475-S/2009/508](#) (6 October 2009), [A/64/760-S/2010/211](#) (28 April 2010), [A/70/1016-S/2016/711](#) (16 August 2016), [A/71/782-S/2017/110](#) (7 February 2017), [A/71/880-S/2017/316](#) (26 April 2017), [A/72/508-S/2017/836](#) (5 October 2017), [A/72/725-S/2018/77](#) (1 February 2018), [A/73/878-S/2019/406](#) (20 May 2019) and [A/74/676-S/2020/90](#) (7 February 2020).

<sup>2</sup> See p. 7 of the report.

of Armenia were withdrawing from that area. The fresco on the east wall of Arzu Khatun Church inside the complex (see annex, images 37–39), as well as crosses, bells and icons were removed and illegally transferred to Armenia.

Armenia's wantonly destructive conduct in relation to Azerbaijani cultural heritage constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, under which, firstly, cultural property must not be the object of attack; secondly, special care must be taken to spare items of cultural property during hostilities; thirdly, seizure, destruction, wilful damage, theft, pillage and misappropriation of, as well as acts of vandalism directed against, cultural property are prohibited; and, fourthly, an occupying Power must prevent the illicit export of cultural property from occupied territory and must return illicitly exported property to the competent authorities of the occupied territory.

Armenia's actions against Azerbaijani cultural heritage during the conflict also constitute a violation of international human rights law and amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity under international criminal law. Furthermore, along with ethnic cleansing, confiscation of land and property and changing place names in the territories depopulated of their Azerbaijani population, the destruction, desecration, plunder and misappropriation of Azerbaijani cultural heritage were an integral part of Armenia's deliberate policy and practice of erasing the traces of Azerbaijani historical and cultural roots in those areas in a discriminatory manner.

The Government of Azerbaijan will repair and restore all historical and cultural sites damaged during the years of conflict and occupation, without distinction of any kind. The works are under way in the liberated territories, with the participation of experienced specialists and architects.

At the same time, as Armenia continues to disseminate falsehoods, stir up enmity and seek solidarity, it is important that, with a view to promoting durable and lasting peace and advancing justice and reconciliation, the international community remember and insist on accountability for the war that Armenia unleashed, the tens of thousands of civilians whom it killed and thousands of cities, towns and villages that it razed to the ground with the sole purpose of fulfilling its unlawful territorial claims based on fabricated historical narratives and racial prejudices.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 15, 34, 35, 40, 64, 70, 72, 86 and 135, and of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Yashar Aliyev  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative

**Annex to the letter dated 4 May 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Azerbaijani historical and cultural heritage in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan**

**Images 1–4: Ashaghi Govharagha Mosque, Shusha** (*XVIII century. Destroyed and desecrated after the occupation of Shusha in 1992*)





**Images 5–7: Saatli Mosque, Shusha** (*XVIII century. The interior of the mosque was completely demolished and its minaret was partially destroyed after the occupation of Shusha in 1992*)





**Images 8–12: Juma Mosque, Aghdam** (*XIX century. Was used as a pigsty and cowshed after the occupation of Aghdam in 1993. Its interior and exterior walls were desecrated with insulting graffiti*)







**Images 13–17: Giyasli Village Mosque, Aghdam (XVIII century. Was used as a cowshed. The mosque was burned by the armed forces of Armenia before they withdrew from the district by 20 November 2020)**





**Images 18–21: Qochahmadli Village Mosque, Fuzuli (XVIII century. Vandalized and partially destroyed after the occupation of Fuzuli in 1993. Was used as a cattle shed)**





**Images 22–23: Haji Alakbar Mosque, Fuzuli (XIX century. Destroyed after the occupation of Fuzuli in 1993)**



**Images 24–25: Qarghabazar Village Mosque, Fuzuli (XIX century. Destroyed after the occupation of Fuzuli in 1993)**



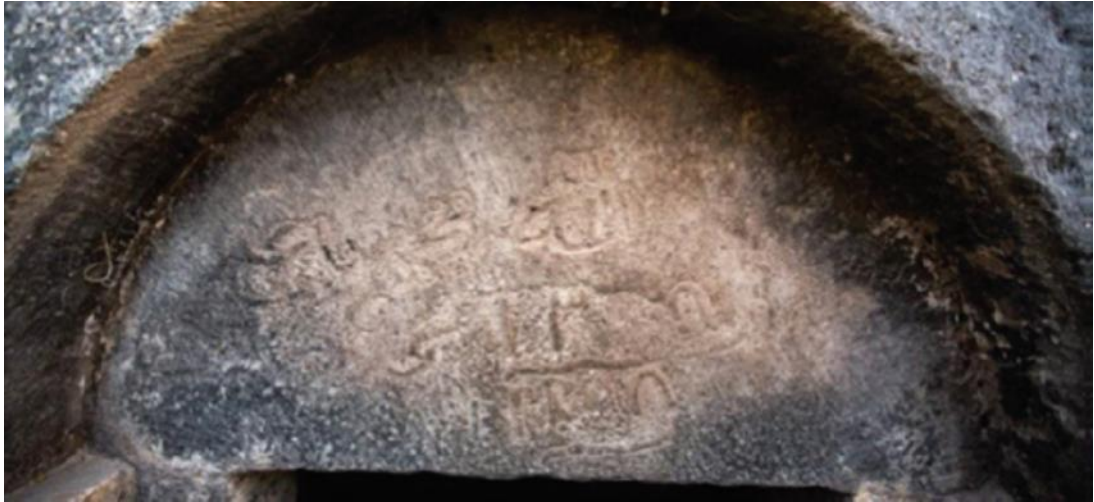
**Images 26–29: Malatkeshin Village Mosque, Zangilan (XVII century. Destroyed after the occupation of Zangilan in 1993. Only the walls are left)**





**Images 30–34: Yusifbeyli Mosque, Gubadly (XVIII century. Was used as a pigsty after the occupation of Gubadly in 1993)**





**Images 35–36: Mamar Mosque, Gubadly (XVIII century. Was destroyed and used as a pigsty after the occupation of Gubadly in 1993)**



**Images 37–39: Khudavank Cloister, Kalbajar (VI, XII, XVIII centuries. As the armed forces of Armenia were withdrawing from the Kalbajar district in December 2020, the crosses, bells, icons and the fresco on the east wall of Arzu Khatun Church were removed and illegally transferred to Armenia)**



*Fresco on the east wall of Arzu Khatun Church*



*The east wall of Arzu Khatun Church from which the above fresco was removed*



**Images 40–44: Orthodox Church, Khojavand (XIX century. Destroyed after the occupation of Khojavand in 1992)**



