

**Mandate of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights**

Ref.: AL AZE 2/2023  
(Please use this reference in your reply)

22 September 2023

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 46/9.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning the **alleged recent destruction of and damage to many cultural heritage sites, the attempt to erase the traces of the presence of Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions and the discriminatory narrative against Armenians** that seriously impact the cultural rights of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Concerns over allegations of human rights violations in the Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions, have been the subject of previous communications from Special Procedures, including JUA AZE 1/2023, about the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor and its deleterious impact on the exercise of the numerous human rights, and AZE 3/2021, regarding the intentional destruction of and damage to many cultural heritage sites and objects of religious, historical and cultural importance in the mentioned regions. I thank the Government for its detailed responses to communications, received on 21 February 2023, and take note of the information therein. However, I remain concerned in light of numerous reports concerning developments that have allegedly occurred between 2021 and present.

A ruling by the International Court of Justice on 7 December 2021 ordered Azerbaijan to “take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalisms and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artifacts”.<sup>1</sup> The International Court of Justice's ruling also ordered Azerbaijan, in accordance with its obligations under CERD, to “take all necessary measures to prevent the incitement and promotion of racial hatred and discrimination, including by its officials and public institutions, targeted at persons of Armenian national or ethnic origin”.<sup>2</sup> The Court stressed that propaganda promoting racial hatred and incitement to racial discrimination or to acts of violence against any group of persons based on their national or ethnic origin, are prohibited under article 4 of CERD, as they can generate a pervasive racially charged environment within society that may lead to harm<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>, para 92.

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, para. 83.

According to the information received:

*Acts of vandalism and destruction affecting religious and cultural sites between 1 November 2021 and present*

Despite Azerbaijan's affirmed commitment to protecting cultural heritage on an equal basis and its obligations to prevent and punish acts of vandalisms affecting Armenian cultural heritage, it is alleged that such vandalisms and destruction have continued after the International Court of Justice Order and reception of the previous communication by the Special Rapporteur.

On 17 January 2022, reports raised concerns about the Kanach Zham Church (the Green Church) in Susha, that has been desecralized and converted into a restaurant. Photos demonstrate the dome was destroyed, the holy throne and the holy altar were damaged, the candlesticks for lighting candles were broken, and the sacred stones of the temple were turned into a pile of garbage. It is also reported that the Susha stone museum, culture center and carpet museum, where culturally significant ancient artifacts and centuries old Armenian rugs and cultural records were kept, have been intentionally targeted and destroyed.

Between March and July 2022, reports have documented the destruction of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Saint Sargis Armenian Church, in the village of Susanlyg, which was on Azerbaijan's monument list. New evidence from April 2023 confirms the destructions debris have been partially cleared.

Allegations have been raised concerning the removal of crosses from Armenian churches and destructions of cross-stones, known as khachkars, as unique symbols of the Armenian Orthodox Church. On 8 January 2022, the cross from the Spirak Khach Church, in the Hadrut region, was removed by the Azerbaijani authorities. On 28 April 2022, the cross on the dome of Surp Harutyun, in Hadrut, was removed. On 9 May 2022, the cross of the dome of a church in Tugh was also removed.

On 30 March 2022, a video presented on an Azerbaijani media outlet showed Azerbaijani soldiers unearthing Armenian graves in the Armenian cemetery of Parukh/Farukh, dating back from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and falsely claiming the area to be a mass graves of Azerbaijanis from the 1992 hostilities. According to specialists, the bones found near the village of Parukh/Farukh originate from the Medieval (9-13th centuries) Armenian cemetery. Similarly on 21 April 2022, Azerbaijani military would have destroyed an Armenian cemetery in Sighnag. Destruction of cemeteries is of particular significance, as tradition requires Armenians to visit the graves of their loved ones several times a year, including during Easter and Christmas. The members of the affected families were not able to transport their relatives' graves or return to the cemeteries, despite the commitment of the government of Azerbaijan in its response that "all persons who are lawfully present in Azerbaijan, including Armenians, will be able to visit historical, cultural and religious sites [...] on an equal basis". I have also received information that some residents have preventively exhumed their family graves and have moved the remains to other places, because of fear that the Azerbaijanis may vandalize those graves. It is alleged that the aim would be to erase the traces of their presence and to prevent Armenians from

claiming these lands.

It is reported that on 14 May 2022, the Teacher's Park, built in memory of the teachers of Böyük Tağlar and Sokrat Aghabekyan, and a statue in Böyük Tağlar were demolished by Azerbaijani soldiers.

Between October 2022 and April 2023, the 14th-16th century cemetery near Hajisamly, containing carved cross stones (khachkar), including one inscribed in Armenian dating to the 14th century, has been reportedly encroached into the northeastern and southern areas by road work. During the same period, the cemetery near Gizil Kangarli was reportedly damaged by excavation and construction works from the military. Should further hostilities occur, the vicinity of the military installation to this heritage site would place it at high risk of destruction, in violation of article 4(1) of the 1954 Hague Convention. Further heritage sites are also considered as increasingly threatened by ongoing works in their direct vicinity.

By 14 June 2023, evidence was published that the 1835 Halevor bridge, situated 2 km southwest of Böyük Tağlar, had recently been destroyed, presumably in connection with nearby road works.

To date, and notwithstanding multiple requests by UNESCO and the European Parliament's resolution of March 2022 (paras. 7 and 8), a UNESCO monitoring mission to assess the damage, destruction and threat to cultural heritage in the Nagorno-Karabakh region could not be organized, allegedly due to lack of access to certain areas under the control of Azerbaijan.

The renewed military offensive of 19 September 2023 has again heightened the risks of destruction and damage towards all cultural and religious sites.

#### *Acts of appropriation and erasure of Armenian presence*

In its response of 21 February 2023, the Government of Azerbaijan reaffirmed its commitment to protecting cultural rights and heritage on an equal basis, which includes respecting and protecting the expressions of the identity of Armenians. It is however reported that various efforts have been made since the communication of the Special Rapporteur in October 2021 to remove the traces of Armenian presence in the region or to re-interpret them as belonging to Caucasian Albanians.

On 23 December 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a formal request to Google's parent company, Alphabet Inc., to change the "fake" Armenian names on Google maps in the Nagorno-Karabakh region to Azerbaijani names. A multicultural approach would rather consider a multiplicity of place names in the region as a result of its cosmopolitan past.

On 3 February 2022, the Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan announced that a working group had been set up consisting of "both local and international experts" and including representatives of government agencies, which would be responsible for removing "the fictitious traces written by Armenians" from "Albanian" religious buildings. On 7 February 2022, the Minister of Culture referred to "Armenian forgery" that would have affected the Albanian

churches in the Caucasus. On 12 March 2022, the Azerbaijani state media misrepresented the Armenian Church Mknatami Khach as “Caucasian Albanian”.

This narrative, which emerged in the 1960s and intensified shortly after the 2020 ceasefire, has been referred to as the “Albanization” of Armenian monuments and history and is promoted by Azerbaijani leadership. Over the years, it has been challenged by international research as implying a falsification of history, a revisionism theory applied to the region. The International Court of Justice, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe have all expressed concerns about a developing narrative in Azerbaijan promoting a ‘Caucasian Albanian’ heritage to replace ‘Armenian’ cultural heritage and the revisionist tendency negating Armenian cultural heritage and presence. The vast majority of experts in the region’s art, architecture, and archaeology have all rejected the revisionist claims as false.

On 23 February 2022, a member of the Azerbaijani parliament visited the Blue Mosque in Yerevan and referred to the 18<sup>th</sup> century building as an Azerbaijani monument. That statement ignores the history of the building, the fact that it was constructed as a Shia mosque during the period when Yerevan was under Persian rule, that it was secularized during the Soviet period, that it was renovated and returned to a place of Muslim worship after Armenia’s independence, and that it was at no point an Azerbaijani building.

On 27 April 2022, Azerbaijani media published news on marking the Holy Easter in Hadrut city of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan’s State Committee for Work with Religious Structures organised a visit of Udi community to Surb Harutyun, church of Hadrut and Surb Hovhannes Mkrtych church of Tugh village. An “Albanian” religious ceremony was conducted in these Armenian churches. It is reported that the images also show how the Armenian scripts have been erased and the cross has been removed from Surb Harutyun church.

On 26 June 2022, representatives of the Udi community of Azerbaijan performed a worship service in the Armenian Apostolic Christian Church of Surb Yeghishe in Sugovushan village of Martakert. This state-organized visit of representatives of Udi communities to Armenian churches reportedly aimed to alter the Armenian origins of the church and demonstrate its Albanian origin. Azerbaijan presented the church as an Albanian building of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, that was rebuilt, restored and armenianized by Armenians in 1898.

In August 2022, after the deportation of the Armenians living in Lachin, Azerbaijan announced it would convert Surb Hambardzum church of Lachin into a mosque. According to the plan presented by the Azerbaijani organisation Public Association for Monument Protection, the top of the dome will be demolished, the bell tower will be dismantled, and two minarets will be built on the northern facade. All Armenian inscriptions on the walls will also be removed. The project was allegedly approved by the order of Azerbaijani President.

On 24 December 2022, the President of Azerbaijan announced the creation of a community organization of “Western Azerbaijan” to “return to Western Azerbaijan”, which refers to territory situated in current Armenia. On

29 December 2022, it is reported that the National Academy of Science of Azerbaijan opened three departments devoted to “Western Azerbaijan” (current Republic of Armenia): “History of Western Azerbaijan” in the Institute of History, “Western Azerbaijan Folklore” in the Institute of Folklore, and “Toponymy of Western Azerbaijan” in the Institute of Linguistics.

In May 2023, the Chairman of the State Committee on religious associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan stated that the Armenian clergy should leave the historic Dadivank Monastery, as it belonged to Caucasian Albania and should be managed by the Albanian-Udi religious community. This statement was made despite the Armenian inscriptions dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century AD, the cross-stones inserted in the walls in the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD, and the various historical records of its continued importance as Armenian apostolic monastery and religious center over the centuries.

Removing historical traces of Armenian writings and scriptures from the walls of Armenian churches and monasteries not only erase the traces of the presence of Armenians on these lands, but also raises issues concerning property.

Respect for the cultural rights of Armenians also implies respecting and protecting their right to manifest, in private and in public, their cultural and religious practices. According to information received, by the end of 2022, religious activities in churches and monasteries in Nagorno-Karabakh region, including baptisms and weddings, have completely stopped. This is reportedly due to the blocked access to certain religious sites, including for pilgrims.

While the history of Susha and Nagorno-Karabakh have been widely documented, it is reported that established historical facts have been denied and partial or modified alternative narratives about the region and its Armenian inhabitants have been circulating on social media, without any response from the Azerbaijani authorities.

In its response dated 21 February 2023, the government of Azerbaijan stated that Azerbaijan is a “multicultural society”, with “more than fifty ethnic groups” and “has a long-standing policy and practice of promoting multiculturalism, including to promote and protect the cultural heritage of all”. This statement however does not address the reports that the destruction and erasure have been targeted against Armenian culture and is in direct contradiction of the anti-Armenian rhetoric that has been documented from high-ranking state officials.

#### *Persistence of a discriminatory discourse against Armenians*

On 31 January 2022, the President of Azerbaijan made a public statement in which he labelled Armenians as “fascists” and the Armenian government as promoting and protecting Nazis, and committed to immediately destroying such movement if it were to manifest itself in Azerbaijan.

On 26 March 2022, a member of the Azerbaijani Parliament labeled Armenians in Karabakh as “terrorists” who needed to be either removed from the territory or punished by law.

In August 2022, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its review of Azerbaijan's compliance with the obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns about reports that school textbooks promote prejudice and incite racial hatred, particularly against ethnic Armenians, and that ethnic minorities are marginalized in history education in the State party. The Committee recommended that the State party adopt measures to ensure that history is taught in such a way as to prevent a dominant historical narrative and ethnic hierarchizing, while ensuring the effective and meaningful participation of the ethnic minorities.

Since early 2022, reports have been filed concerning the targeting of civilian communities by Azerbaijani military. On 28 July 2022, such harassment was recorded in the villages of Karmir Shouka/Girmizi Bazar and Taghavard/Taghaverd of Martouni region. It has been reported that Azerbaijani soldiers used psychological terrorization measures, calling on Khramort/Pirlar, Parukh/Farukh, Karmir Shouka/Girmizi Bazar, Taghavard/Taghaverd, Nor Shen/Yenikend and other civilian communities to leave their homes under threat of the use of force.

Since 12 December 2022, the Lachin corridor connecting Nagorno-Karabakh, to Armenia has been blocked, in violation of the obligations assumed by Azerbaijan through trilateral ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020 (point 6). As a direct result of the road blocking, reportedly 120.000 people have been isolated and deprived of various goods and services, which has created a humanitarian crisis and has had devastating consequences on multiple human rights.

During the period of the blockade, various high level Azerbaijani state officials, including the President of Azerbaijan, have made public statements indicating that the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh pursued the aim of demonstrating to the ethnic Armenian population that their lives were at risk and depended on the willingness of Azerbaijan to protect them. The crisis would therefore be the direct manifestation of a discriminatory approach of the Azerbaijani government towards Armenians.

On 10 January 2023, the President of Azerbaijan stated that those who wished to become Azerbaijani citizens would be protected and helped, but that others could leave the region. Some alleged that this statement affirmed the aim to subject Armenians in the region to physical and psychological attacks, disrupt their normal lives and terrorize them into leaving the region. The military attacks of 19 and 20 September 2023 have also been referred to as aiming to reach the full surrender of Armenians. Once the region is cleansed of ethnic Armenians, it is alleged that Azerbaijan has planned to further remove all physical indications of the presence of Armenians.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, I wish to express my concern towards what appears to be an ongoing pattern of destruction and appropriation of Armenian historically, culturally and religiously significant sites and objects, of organised reinterpretation of the history of Nagorno-Karabakh to erase the traces of the presence of Armenians and of discriminatory narrative against and

harassment of Armenians in the region, in violation of international human rights standards regarding cultural rights and of international humanitarian law.

I am particularly concerned about the allegations that the combined attacks to people, monuments and symbols, the falsification of the historical narrative and erasure of place names and the negative discourses about Armenians may amount to cultural cleansing and will have a profound negative impact on the possibilities to restore lasting peace in the region.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandates provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, I would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please explain the circumstances surrounding the destruction of and damage to all sites of religious, historical and cultural significance for Armenians or people of Armenian origin in the Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions, as mentioned above, and how such destructions and damage were compatible with the human rights and international humanitarian law standards and obligations of Azerbaijan mentioned in the Annex.
3. Please provide detailed information, and where available the results, of investigation, judicial or other inquiries carried out to clarify all credible allegations of vandalism, destruction, of unauthorized alteration of historical and cultural monuments used by Armenians or people of Armenian origin and desecration of cemeteries and of human remains.
4. Please indicate what steps were and are being taken by Azerbaijan to protect cultural heritage in accordance with international obligations. What actions are being taken to protect the integrity of, and access to, cultural and religious sites and practices for all, including Armenians and people of Armenian origin?
5. Please provide information concerning the organization of the agreed UNESCO monitoring mission to Nagorno-Karabakh to investigate allegations and make recommendations on accountability, restoration and reparation.
6. Please provide detailed information about all immediate and positive measures that have been taken by your government to combat hate speech and discriminatory narratives against Armenians or people of Armenian origin, both in public media and in the educational context.

I would appreciate receiving a response within 60 days. Past this delay, this communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#). They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, I urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

I may publicly express my concerns in the near future as, in my view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. I also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that I have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Alexandra Xanthaki  
Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

## **Annex**

### **Reference to international human rights law**

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I would like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Azerbaijan acceded on 13 August 1992. These articles protect the right of all to freely take part in cultural life, including the right of persons belonging to ethnic, linguistic or religious community to maintain and practice their cultural expressions.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its 2009 general comment 21 on the right to take part in cultural life (E/C.12/GC/21) recalled that the protection of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and requires the full implementation of cultural rights, including the right to take part in cultural life (para. 40). Thus, States are reminded that in many instances, the obligations to respect and to protect freedoms, cultural heritage and diversity are interconnected (para. 50). It also stressed that States must refrain from interfering with the exercise of and the access to cultural practices, goods and services.

The right of persons belonging to minorities to take part in the cultural life of society, and also to conserve, promote and develop their own culture, entails the obligation of States parties to recognize, respect and protect minority cultures as an essential component of the identity of the States themselves. Consequently, minorities have the right to their cultural diversity, traditions, customs, religion, forms of education, languages, communication media (press, radio, television, Internet) and other manifestations of their cultural identity and membership" (general comment 21, para. 32). The obligation of States to fulfil this right requires them to take appropriate legislative, administrative, judicial, budgetary, promotional and other measures aimed at the full realization of the right for everyone.

The Committee also recalled the right of everyone not to be subjected to any form of discrimination based on cultural identity, exclusion or forced assimilation, to express their cultural identity freely, to exercise their cultural practices and way of life and to access to their own cultural and linguistic heritage and to that of others. States parties should consequently ensure that their legislation does not impair the enjoyment of these rights through direct or indirect discrimination (E/C.12/GC/21, paragraphs 44, 48, 49).

I would like to recall that the Committee noted the obligation of States to respect and protect cultural heritage in all its forms. Cultural heritage must be preserved, developed, enriched and transmitted to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, in order to encourage creativity in all its diversity and to inspire a genuine dialogue between cultures (paragraph 50.a). They underscored that the right to participate in cultural life implies that individuals and communities have access to and enjoy cultural heritages that are meaningful to them, and that their freedom to continuously (re)create cultural heritage and transmit it to future generations should be protected.

Successive Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights stressed that the right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage includes: (a) the right to know, understand, enter, visit, make use of, maintain, exchange and develop cultural heritage, as well as to benefit from the cultural heritage and the creation of others, and (b) the right to participate in the identification, interpretation and development of cultural heritage. In this connection, they have recommended that States recognize and value the diversity of cultural heritages present in their territories and under their jurisdiction, and acknowledge, respect and protect the rights of individuals and groups to feel associated (or not) with specific elements of cultural heritages; to access, enjoy and continuously (re)create the cultural heritages that are meaningful to them; and to transmit this heritage to future generations.

Regarding intentional destruction of heritage, the former Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights emphasized that, given the largely irreversible nature of the destruction of cultural heritage, which is a prima facie violation of cultural rights, effective efforts must be made to prevent and stop it. (A/71/317, para. 5). Past damage to cultural heritage does not justify or excuse current or future attacks.

In its resolutions 33/20, 37/17 and 49/7 on cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage, the Human Rights Council noted that “the destruction of or damage to cultural heritage may have a detrimental and irreversible impact on the enjoyment of cultural rights.” The 2003 UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage stresses the responsibility of States to take all appropriate measures to protect cultural heritage in conformity with the principles and objectives of, inter alia, the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, ratified by your Excellency’s Government on 1 September 1977, the 1968 Recommendation concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works, the 1972 Recommendation concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 1976 Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (Section IV), as well as not to intentionally destroy their own heritage, “whether or not it is inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international organization” (Section VI). Intentional destruction also clearly contravenes relevant provisions of international humanitarian law protecting cultural property, including article 4 of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict acceded to by Azerbaijan on 20 September 1993.

Furthermore, UN Security Council resolution 2347 (2017) stresses that “the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, looting and smuggling of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, including by terrorist groups, and attempts to deny historical roots and cultural diversity in this context, can fuel and exacerbate conflicts and impede post-conflict national reconciliation...”.

In this regard, I draw the attention of your Excellency’s Government to the reports of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights on the issue of historical and memorial narratives in divided societies, relating to a) history textbooks (A/68/296) and b) memorials and museums (A/HRC/25/49). In both reports, the Special Rapporteur stressed the importance of a setting out the conditions to ensure a multi-perspective approach in history teaching and memorialization processes. History teaching and memorial practices should foster critical thought, analytic learning and open spaces for debate. In ensuring that sufficient space is available for various narratives and perspectives to be expressed, she recommended that States and

other stakeholders should neither engage in nor support policies of denial that prevent the construction of memorials or memorialization processes; nor should they build, support or finance works that may incite violence (A/HRC/25/49, §105.).

I would also like to remind Your Excellency's Government of article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which Azerbaijan has acceded to on 16 August 1996. Under this provision, propaganda promoting racial hatred and incitement to racial discrimination or to acts of violence against any group of persons based on their national or ethnic origin, are prohibited. We would like to reiterate the concerns of the Committee at the repeated and unpunished use of inflammatory language by politicians speaking about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to echo the Committee's demand that the State party to condemn and investigate, where appropriate, statements by politicians that vilify or incite racial hatred against any ethnic minority, prosecutes those responsible, as well as strengthens its efforts to promote tolerance and to combat existing stereotypes and prejudices against any ethnic minority (CERD/C/AZE/CO/7-9, paras. 25-26).

Finally, I would like to recall the European Parliament resolution TA 9 of 10 March 2022. As stated in the resolution, the destruction of cultural heritage sites, artefacts and objects contributes to the escalation of hostilities, mutual hatred and racial prejudice between and within societies (para. d) and the elimination of the traces of Armenian cultural heritage in the Nagorno-Karabakh region is being achieved not only by damaging and destroying it, but also through the falsification of history and attempts to present it as so-called Caucasian Albanian; (para. o). The resolution recalls that the safeguarding of cultural heritage has a key role in promoting lasting peace by fostering tolerance, intercultural and inter-faith dialogue and mutual understanding, as well as democracy and sustainable development (para. j), and strongly condemns Azerbaijan's continued policy of erasing and denying the Armenian cultural heritage in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, in violation of international law and the recent decision of the International Court of Justice (para. l).