

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community
259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068
Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898
Email: info@anc.net.au

15 February 2006

The Honourable Alexander Downer MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

BY FAX CONFIRMATION BY MAIL
Facsimile: (02) 6273 4112
(7 pages)

Dear Minister

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We are writing to convey our great alarm and profound outrage over the ongoing destruction by the Azerbaijani armed forces of the remnants of the historically and religiously significant medieval Armenian cemetery and carved stone crosses known as *khatchkars* in the southern Nakhichevan region of Djulfa.

This area of Nakhichevan, situated between present day Armenia and Iran, is a historic part of the Armenian homeland, and was home to a majority Armenian population for generations. While it had been an integral part of the first Armenian Republic of 1918-1920, the area of Nakhichevan was arbitrarily severed from Armenia and placed under Azeri control under Soviet rule. During the Soviet era, the indigenous Armenian population was driven out of Nakhichevan due to discrimination, economic pressure, and other policies advanced by the Soviet Azeri authorities

The historic Armenian cemetery in question held more than 10,000 individually carved, artistically unique stone crosses some dating as far back as the 7th century. It is revered as a cultural and architectural treasure. The Azerbaijani government began their destruction in the 20th century, continued with great force in 2002, and during December 2005 has resumed this work with a vengeance - to attempt to wipe out all traces of Armenian presence on those lands.

This most recent destruction of the Armenian cemetery has been secretly recorded on video and may be viewed at

http://www.hairenik.com/Haireniktv/HA_TV_Clip04.htm.

Further, a related report entitled "*Destruction of the Armenian Cemetery of Djulfa*", prepared by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) - the leading non-governmental organization working preserve the world's cultural and religious landmarks - has been posted on its website at <http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2002/azerbaijan2002.htm> and is attached for your perusal.

We call upon our Government strenuously to protest to the Azerbaijani government this action and to bring an end to this assault on our common cultural heritage. In particular, we respectfully urge you to take the following steps:

1. Immediately to instruct the Australian Ambassador to Azerbaijan to travel to Djulfa personally to survey the damage and intervene against any continued demolition.
2. In the name of the Australian government and on behalf of the conscience of the international community, to demand an end to this destruction and impress upon the Azerbaijani government that it must respect the terms of its 1993 agreement to join the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.
3. Demand that these sites be restored, to the extent possible, under the appropriate supervision of Armenian experts and other internationally recognised authorities on Armenian religious monuments.
4. Offer a full and public reporting on this systematic, state-sponsored eradication of these treasures of world cultural heritage.
5. Instruct the Australian Ambassador to UNESCO to raise this matter at all appropriate fora at UNESCO.

This destruction of the Armenian cemetery at Djulfa, Nakichevan, is just another example of the Azerbaijan's nearly century-long policy of destroying Armenian culture and heritage. It is the most recent example of the criminal policy of cultural destruction and elimination against the Armenians that Azerbaijan has carried out during its 88 years of existence.

Furthermore it is worthwhile underscoring, this most recent "cultural ethnic cleansing" by the Azerbaijani government, together with the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait in 1998 and Baku in 1990, as well as the avowed (but hitherto unsuccessful) ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabagh in response to their wish for self-determination, must surely make it clear to the international community that Azerbaijan has forfeited having any say on the fate or governance of Nagorno-Karabagh.

The Armenian-Australian Community, many of whom have already watched the abovementioned video documenting the destruction of the Armenian cemetery in Djulfa, feel a profound sense of loss and acute moral outrage. In light of the Australian government's strong commitment to tolerance for religious diversity and its appreciation of the need for adherence by all parties to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the Armenian-Australian community looks to the Australian Government to add its voice in taking decisive action against Azerbaijan's criminal policies and to bring this outrage to an end.

We thank you for consideration and await your response.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Kortian
President

Copy:

The Hon. Dr. Brendan Nelson
Minister for Defence
Member for Bradfield
(02) 6273 4118

The Hon Joe Hockey
Minister for Human Services
Member for North Sydney
Fax: (02) 6273 4406

Senator Marise Payne
Chair, Armenian-Australian Parliamentary Friendship Group
Fax: (02) 9893 5150

The Hon Kim Beazley MP
Leader of the Federal Opposition
Fax: (02) 6277 8495

Mr Kevin Rudd
Opposition Spokesperson of Foreign Affairs and Trade,
International Security
Fax: (02) 6277 8508

Mr Robert Tyson
Australian Ambassador to Azerbaijan
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Permanent Delegation of Australia to UNESCO
Ms Jane Madden
Australian Ambassador to UNESCO

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL
ON MONUMENTS AND SITESCON
DES M
[About ICOMOS](#) - [Membership](#) - [Addresses of committees](#) - [Secretariat](#) - [FAQ](#) - [Contact us](#)

NOR 2002-2003

Azerbaijan

[Photographs]

Destruction of the Armenian Cemetery at Djulfa

For a long time there have been complaints about the destruction of Armenian monuments and sites in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, three of the neighbouring countries of Armenia. A particularly sad example is the destruction of the Armenian cemetery in the former town of Djulfa, situated in the south of Nachitchevan, a region under the sovereignty of Azerbaijan. This cemetery, which had been in use from the early Middle Ages to the destruction of the town in 1605, was an outstanding testimony of Armenian culture because of thousands of tombstones mostly from the 15th and 16th centuries in the shape of so-called Khatchkars. The destruction process, which began in 1998 when 800 Khatchkars were removed, was temporarily halted following protests from UNESCO, but in November 2002 it was taken up again. When ICOMOS was informed and given photos of this barbaric act in a remote frontier area by RAA (Research on Armenian Architecture) in January 2003 and by ICOMOS Armenia in February 2003, the destruction, which cannot have been carried through without the consent of the Azerbaijan government, was already completed: "On January 10th Mr Hagnazarian [author of the following report] was called by the very distressed Armenian Bishop of Tabriz (Iran) who informed him that he went to the Iranian side of the river Araxes opposite the cemetery of Djulfa some days ago to see with his own eyes what had seemed incredible to him: The 1500-year-old cemetery had completely been flattened in the meantime."

There only remains the hope that under the guidance of UNESCO it will be possible to investigate the situation on the spot and to take care of the remains of the tombstones, transported away by Azerbaijan railways probably to be used as material for building measures. Hopefully, strong protest will at least prevent the demolition of more Armenian heritage sites in Azerbaijan

- General Assembly
- National Committees
- International Scientific Committees
- Charters and other doctrinal texts
- ICOMOS and the World Heritage
- Documentation Centre
- Publications
- "ICOMOS News"
- Heritage at Risk (HAR)
- International Day for Monuments and Sites (18th April)
- Other activities:
 - 20th Century Heritage
 - Blue Shield
- Calendar of events
- Internships
- Links

in the future. The intentional destruction of the cemetery of Djulfa should be considered as a crime against the common heritage of humanity. Apart from that all that remains is deep sorrow for the irreplaceable loss.

Here is the report of RAA:

Khatchkars are cross-stones about one metre wide and up to 2.50 metres high, richly decorated with Christian symbols, flowers and arabesque climbing plants as well as with subjects from daily life. These delicately engraved stones represent a 1500-year-old tradition of Armenian stone masons. Khatchkars are unique and were used as free-standing steles but also as ornaments in the masonry of Armenian churches and cloisters. Since the early Middle Ages they have been used as tombstones on cemeteries.

One of the outstanding cemeteries because of the unusually great number of Khatchkars is the one in the former town of Djulfa (old name Djughha) in the south of Nachitchevan right on the bank of the river Araxes which forms the border to Iran. Alexander Rotes mentions this cemetery in his description of journeys in 1648 and reports of 10.000 fully decorated cross stones. In 1605 the Armenian people of Djulfa were forced by Shah Abbas to settle in Persia in order to have trade and commerce developed by them in his country. He destroyed the town to prevent their return, however left the cemetery untouched. At the beginning of the 20th century 6000 reclining and standing Khatchkars were still counted.

After Armenia was incorporated into the Soviet Union Nachitchevan in the south of Armenia was declared a part of Azerbaijan at Stalin's and Lenin's behest in 1922. Nachitchevan is still under Azerbaijan's political sovereignty.

During the Soviet reign this historically and culturally unique cemetery of Djulfa was not at all under the protection of historical monuments of Azerbaijan. On the contrary. After 1922 a large number of Khatchkars disappeared. Considering the close watch of the border of the prohibited military zone this could not have happened without the government's knowledge. And more destruction was yet to come.

In November 1998 eye witnesses from the Iranian border zone observed tombstones being excavated by a crane and loaded onto railroad wagons on the cemetery grounds across the river Araxes. The ripped-up ground was then made even again by bulldozers. This destruction lasted for three weeks and about 800 Khatchkars were taken away. There is reason to believe that these cross-stones - if not destroyed right away - were used as building material for foundations of new houses to hide their removal. The transportation by the State Railway is clear evidence of the planned action by the Government of Azerbaijan. Protests on behalf of UNESCO and affiliated organisations finally put a stop to these barbarous

activities.

To our great regret the cultural outrage is going on. Reliable sources informed us that the destruction not only of the tombstones but also of the still existing, though greatly reduced churches and cloister grounds in the area was resumed on 9 November 2002. A great number of workmen are again dismantling valuable relics of Middle Age Christian culture partly by demolishing them and partly by taking them away on trucks to an unknown destination. And yet again this cannot be done without the permission of the government.

One cannot avoid drawing a parallel to the fundamentally motivated destruction of the Buddha statues by the Taliban in Afghanistan, which was accompanied by world-wide protest. Similar to that case we are here confronted with the systematic obliteration of religious monuments of a foreign culture, the only difference being that the destruction in Nachitchevan concerns the European history of civilisation.

Azerbaijan signed the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1993 and is represented in the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe. Azerbaijan consequently committed itself to the aims of this institution and should be asked to account for its action in Nachitchevan.

**Dr. Armen Haghazarian
Dr. Dieter Wickmann**

<p>[Introduction] [National Reports] [International Scientific Committee Reports] [Thematic Reports] [Appendices] [Report 2000] [Report 2001] [Report 2002]</p>

© ICOMOS
<http://www.international.icomos.org>
secretariat@icomos.org

Dernière mise à jour: 30/06/2003 - Web map - Web design -
webmaster@icomos.org

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community

259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068

Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898

Email: info@anc.net.au Web: www.anc.net.au

15 February 2006

The Hon Kim Beazley MP
Leader of the Federal Opposition
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

BY FAX CONFIRMATION BY MAIL

Facsimile: (02) 6277 8495

(8 pages)

Dear Mr Beazley

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We attach a copy of our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Kortian
President

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community

259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068

Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898

Email: info@anc.net.au Web: www.anc.net.au

15 February 2006

Senator Marise Payne
Chair, Armenian-Australian Parliamentary Friendship Group
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

BY FAX CONFIRMATION BY MAIL

Facsimile: (02) 9893 5150

(8 pages)

Dear Senator

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We attach a copy of our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Kortian
President

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community

259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068

Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898

Email: info@anc.net.au Web: www.anc.net.au

15 February 2006

The Hon. Dr. Brendan Nelson
Minister for Defence
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

BY FAX CONFIRMATION BY MAIL

Facsimile: (02) 6273 4118

(8 pages)

Dear Minister

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We attach a copy of our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Kortian
President

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community

259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068

Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898

Email: info@anc.net.au Web: www.anc.net.au

15 February 2006

The Hon Joe Hockey
Minister for Human Services
Member for North Sydney
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

BY FAX CONFIRMATION BY MAIL

Facsimile: (02) 6273 4406

(8 pages)

Dear Minister

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We attach a copy of our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Korian
President

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community

259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068

Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898

Email: info@anc.net.au Web: www.anc.net.au

15 February 2006

Mr Kevin Rudd
Opposition Spokesperson of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

BY FAX CONFIRMATION BY MAIL

Facsimile: (02) 6277 8508

(8 pages)

Dear Mr Rudd

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We attach a copy of our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Kortian
President

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community

259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068

Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898

Email: info@anc.net.au Web: www.anc.net.au

15 February 2006

Ms Jane Madden
Australian Ambassador to UNESCO
Australian Permanent Delegation to UNESCO
4, rue Jean Rey
75724 Paris Cedex 15
France

Dear Ms Madden

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We attach a copy of our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Korian
President

Armenian National Committee of Australia Inc.

The Peak Public Affairs Committee of the Armenian-Australian Community

259 Penshurst Street, P.O. Box 768, Willoughby NSW 2068

Tel: (02) 9419 8264 Fax: (02) 9411 8898

Email: info@anc.net.au Web: www.anc.net.au

15 February 2006

Mr Robert Tyson
Australian Ambassador to Azerbaijan
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
10A/2 Podkolokolny Pereulok
Moscow 109028
Russia

BY FAX CONFIRMATION BY MAIL

Facsimile: 7- 495 - 956 6170

(8 pages)

Dear Mr Tyson

**Re: Destruction of Historic Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa by
Azerbaijan Army**

We attach a copy of our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Dr Tro Kortian
President