

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT**

**The Erasure of Memory: A Report on the Systematic Destruction of  
Armenian Cultural Heritage  
(As of February 2026)**

*Report Prepared for the UK Parliament Inquiry on Cultural Destruction in Nagorno-Karabakh*

**Lilit Harutyunyan**, Supervising Lawyer  
**Sharmagh Mardi**, Supervising Lawyer  
**Narine Vlasyan**, Project Coordinator

[info@cftjustice.org](mailto:info@cftjustice.org)  
[www.CFTJustice.org](http://www.CFTJustice.org)



[@CFTJustice](https://twitter.com/CFTJustice)



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## Acknowledgement

The Center for Truth and Justice extends its sincere gratitude to the organizers of the UK Parliamentary Inquiry into cultural destruction in Nagorno-Karabakh. We thank the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on International Law, Justice and Accountability and its Chair, Brendan O’Hara MP, as well as the APPG on Armenia and its Chair, Jessica Morden MP. We also express our appreciation to the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) for inviting the Center for Truth and Justice to contribute to this Inquiry.

NB: For references, see full report.

## Overview: The Systematic Liquidation of Armenian Identity

This report, submitted by the Center for Truth and Justice, documents a coordinated and ongoing campaign by the Republic of Azerbaijan to systematically erase Armenian cultural, religious, and historical presence in Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions. As of February 2026, this campaign has transitioned from accidental damage during hostilities to a deliberate, state-sponsored policy of “cultural sanitization.”

The evidence indicates that cultural destruction is not a byproduct of conflict but a structural tool of ethnic cleansing. By annihilating the material evidence of Armenian history, Azerbaijan seeks to render the 2023 forced displacement of 120,000 Armenians irreversible, ensuring that even if a right of return were legally secured, no physical or spiritual “home” remains to return to.

## The Three-Phase Model of Erasure

The report identifies a recurring “Nakhichevan Model” that has now been exported to Nagorno-Karabakh:

1. **Phase I (Nakhichevan):** The total elimination of 108 medieval churches and thousands of khachkars (98% of the cultural landscape) between 1997 and 2011, conducted in total secrecy.
2. **Phase II (Nagorno-Karabakh):** The recent destruction of landmarks like “Kanach Zham” Church (St. John the Baptist) and the “Albanization” of sites like Dadivank and Gandzasar, where Armenian origins are denied through revisionist “restorations.”
3. **Phase III (Republic of Armenia):** The expansion of these policies into Armenian sovereign territory under the irredentist “Western Azerbaijan” narrative poses an existential threat to regional stability.

## Key Findings and Forensic Evidence

- **Targeted Demolition:** High-resolution satellite imagery confirms the complete leveling of 19th-century churches and cemeteries (e.g., St. John the Baptist Church and Ghazanchetsots Cemetery in Shushi) years after active combat ceased.
- **State-Led Revisionism:** High-level officials and state-funded “experts” are actively removing Armenian lapidary inscriptions and rebranding 4th–13th century Armenian

monasteries as “Caucasian Albanian.” This constitutes cultural appropriation and falsification—a violation of the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994).

- **The Monitoring Vacuum:** In 2025, Azerbaijan completed the diplomatic isolation of the region by ordering the withdrawal of the ICRC and four major UN agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF). By denying UNESCO access, the state has created a “closed zone” where cultural erasure proceeds with total impunity.

### Legal Thresholds and State Responsibility

The conduct documented herein triggers several overlapping international legal regimes:

- **War Crimes:** The intentional targeting of religious and cultural monuments (Article 8, Rome Statute).
- **Crimes Against Humanity:** Cultural destruction as a component of persecution and a mechanism for forcible transfer (Article 7, Rome Statute).
- **State Responsibility:** Azerbaijan is in direct breach of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) 2021 Order on Provisional Measures, which specifically mandated the prevention of “vandalism and desecration” of Armenian heritage. These breaches constitute “continuing wrongful acts” under international law.

### Recommendations for the UK Parliament

The United Kingdom is uniquely positioned to lead the way in prevention of further cultural erasure in Nagorno-Karabakh. CFTJ recommends the following measures:

1. **Leading a UN Security Council Resolution:** Moving for a formal mandate to protect cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh, characterizing its destruction as a threat to international peace and security.
2. **Diplomatic Conditionality:** Tying bilateral trade and diplomatic cooperation to the unhindered access of a UNESCO technical mission to all Armenian heritage sites.
3. **Targeted Sanctions:** Considering the implementation of targeted sanctions against officials directing the “Albanization” and demolition of sites, treating these acts as severe human rights violations.
4. **International Cultural Heritage Protection Program:** Inclusion of the Nagorno-Karabakh area in the International Cultural Heritage Protection Program by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in order to foster and deliver cultural heritage protection activities.

### Conclusion

Silence in 2026 risks the final completion of the Nakhichevan Model in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Center for Truth and Justice remains ready to assist the UK Parliament in achieving these recommendations, ensuring that memory is not the final victim of this conflict.