

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
“ISSUES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE  
POST-SOVIET PERIOD”\*

On August 29, at the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, an international conference titled “Issues of Cultural Heritage in the Post-Soviet Period” took place, organized by the “Geghard” Scientific Analytical Foundation. Experts from Armenia, Georgia, Russia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary participated in the conference.

During the event's opening, the participants and guests were welcomed by the director of the foundation, *Robert Ghazaryan*; the coordinator of the “Orbeli” Analytical-Research Center, *Mikayel Yalanuzyan* and *Karen Pahlevanyan*, the director of the Sardarapat Memorial Complex, the Museum of Armenian Ethnography and the History of the National Liberation Struggle.

*Robert Ghazaryan* noted that there is an organized policy of falsifying and distorting historical events and facts in the region. “There is an attempt to appropriate and alienate the history and culture of indigenous peoples. I believe this is not just simple falsification but a crime against civilizational values, an attempt to distort the memory and historical heritage of generations. One of the goals of the conference is to highlight such cases”, – said Ghazaryan.

He paid special attention to Azerbaijan’s state policy, which deliberately destroys and distorts the Armenian cultural heritage of Artsakh. “Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policy and cultural vandalism were evident even during the Soviet years. Today, similar processes are taking place in the occupied territories of Artsakh”, – added Ghazaryan.

The director of the foundation emphasized that one of the conference's goals was to once again draw the attention of academic institutions, university bodies, and international cultural preservation organizations to these phenomena. “Azerbaijan should adhere to the international conventions and declarations it has signed, and follow its obligations, namely, to preserve the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage under its control, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation”, – he stated.

*Mikayel Yalanuzyan* remarked: “Armenia’s adversaries have spared no effort in falsifying and distorting Armenian history and culture, fully understanding that the loss of past cultural layers leads to a distortion of identity

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*Karen Pahlevanyan* noted: “The former Soviet republics found themselves in a situation where they needed to reassess their priorities and challenges regarding cultural heritage. Some republics attempted to reinterpret their cultural values, often at the expense of their neighbors”.

The conference was another opportunity to draw the attention of foreign partners to the issue of preserving Armenian cultural heritage, presenting the ongoing cultural vandalism committed by Azerbaijan in a substantiated manner.

We, participants of the international conference organized by the “Geghard” Scientific Analytical Foundation, having discussed the issues raised during the conference and recognizing the importance of cultural heritage in terms of national identity, historical memory, and the right to cultural heritage, declare the following:

*Protection of Cultural Heritage in Times of Armed Conflicts.* Protecting cultural heritage is one of the most critical issues in times of armed conflict. Cultural heritage is not only evidence of the past but also an essential component of the identity, values, and collective memory of peoples. During armed conflicts, cultural heritage becomes a target for destruction, looting, and vandalism. The targeting of cultural heritage is an assault on ethnic and cultural identity.

*Current Threats against Armenian Heritage in Artsakh.* Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh is endangered. During the 44-day Artsakh War and after, Azerbaijan has systematically destroyed and distorted Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh at the state level. Documented evidence, including videos, photos, and statements, appears periodically on various social platforms and in analytical publications. Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policy and cultural vandalism against Armenian heritage did not begin during the 2020 war; it has a century-long history. Since the Soviet era, with the central Soviet authorities' tolerance, Azerbaijan has destroyed many Armenian churches. The extreme manifestation of this anti-Armenian policy was the complete destruction of the

Armenian cemetery of Julfa in 2005–2006, with its thousands of unique khachkars (cross-stones) and gravestones.

We, the conference participants, alert to the threats and issues of protecting Armenian cultural heritage in the occupied territories of Artsakh. Azerbaijan is violating international norms and conventions, including the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Second Protocol (1999).

*Call to International Organizations.* We call on the international community, including UNESCO, the United Nations, and other cultural preservation organizations, not to be satisfied with merely condemnatory calls and appeals or display indifference, but to apply preventive mechanisms to halt the policy of forced appropriation of Armenian heritage.

*Documentation and Preservation.* We emphasize the importance of documenting, accounting, and archiving cultural heritage as essential tools for protecting endangered heritage. Using digital resources in the humanities, as emphasized in the conference, plays a significant role in preserving historical data and making it accessible to future generations. We also urge academic institutions, university bodies, and cultural preservation organizations to cooperate in creating and disseminating digital archives, which can serve as means to protect cultural memory.

*Protection through Political and Legal Frameworks.* We call for the strengthening of the legal framework for protecting cultural heritage at both national and international levels. This also includes developing legal tools and implementing new mechanisms for heritage protection.

Concluding the outcomes of the international conference “Issues of Cultural Heritage in the Post-Soviet Period”, we, the participants, emphasize that protecting historical and cultural heritage is a universal duty.

We call on the Azerbaijani authorities to follow the international conventions, declarations, and obligations they have signed, namely, to preserve the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage under their control, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation.

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