

Heritage of Displaced Communities

The Republic of Azerbaijan was the recipient of a mass influx of IDPs resulting from Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh conflict at an early stage of independence when the country had little capacity to cope with the unfolding humanitarian crisis. Fourteen years later, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains contested and, according to Government statistics, over 600,000 Azeri citizens remain displaced.

As a result of the occupation of Nagorno Karabakh and neighboring territories, the larger part of the country's rich cultural heritage is threatened. This conflict has forced over 1 million people to leave their centuries' long lived native lands by making them to become internally displaced persons within their own country. The United Nations Security Council has passed the resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 in 1993 demanding immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troupes from the occupied Nagorno Karabakh and surrounding territories. There are also relevant resolutions adopted by UN General Assembly, PACE, OSCE, European Parliament, OIC and other organizations. The armed conflict has deprived many people from their right on tangible cultural heritage. Over 20 years, 1 million of persons remain unable to visit cultural monument created centuries ago in their native lands. This should be qualified as a blatant violation of cultural rights. Hundreds of religious cultural monuments, sanctuaries and cemeteries remain under the occupation by depriving those persons to make their religious practices in holy places. On the backdrop of acute social and economic challenges, the cultural life became paralyzed. Recognition and creation of all relevant conditions.

Due to the fact that the cultural heritage of Azerbaijan is the integral part of the universal culture, the preservation of historical and cultural monuments inherited from the centuries' long past remains as a problem that has an international significance. The region of Nagorno Karabakh and seven adjacent districts (Kalbajar, Lachyn, Gubadly, Zanghilar, Jabrayil, Fizuli and Agdam), including seven villages of h district and the Karki village of Nakhchivan located on the frontier with Armenia far from the Nagorno Karabakh itself contain in total 738 historical monuments, 9 mosques, 927 libraries, over 83,500 artifacts in 28 museums, 4 art galleries, 14 memorials and 1107 cultural institutions comprising 1891 cultural

resources remain in the occupied territories. All of these constitute a very big loss for the culture of Azerbaijan.

The principal cities of Nagorno Karabakh, the city of Shusha that sets the cultural identity of the Azerbaijani people, has always been playing the main inspiring role in preserving and developing the national musical heritage. The folk musical art should be qualified as the integral part of Azerbaijan's intangible cultural heritage. Spanning several centuries, the city of Shusha has indeed been the lighthouse preserving, maintaining and developing this folk art of singing. The occupation of this city by the Armenian armed forces in the course of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has deprived the Azerbaijani people of the access to this cultural heritage by severely altering its cultural rights.

The program of the Great Return to the de-occupied territories is among national priorities. As part of successfully implementing the program, the displaced persons' return has been ensured to the cities of Lachin and Fuzuli and the villages of Aghali, Zabukh and Talish. Nearly 100 hundred thousand displaced persons are envisaged to be returned to their homes in the coming three years. Along with the revival of Karabakh and East Zangazur economic regions and ensuring sustainable resettling of the population, implementing the projects also enables conditions for turning these areas into a developed region.

It is well known to everyone that a deliberate destruction of the cultural heritage undermines the future of the entire people and the region. The cultural heritage is the spotlight leading any nation towards its future. Proclaiming the universality of human rights, Azerbaijan relies on its commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage upon the respect to the history and cultural rights of all social groups. Azerbaijan firmly deplores any attempt to destroy the cultural heritage, to delete historical values and rewrite the history by considering it as the act of vandalism.

UNESCO support is vital in preventing the distortion of the region's history: "Hundreds of Azerbaijani mosques, dozens of caravanserais, fortresses, historical monuments, as well as about five hundred cemeteries in the territory of present-day Armenia have either been destroyed or are in danger of being destroyed. This constitutes an injustice and a crime against humanity. The damaged monuments of Western Azerbaijan do not solely pertain to us; they are part of the world's.

heritage. Consequently, they must be safeguarded through international endeavors to thwart their complete obliteration," the statement asserted.

It is crucial to emphasize that the community will continue to actively collaborate with UNESCO to enhance its capacity to protect Azerbaijan's cultural heritage in Armenia. This includes maintaining a registry of cultural monuments using contemporary methods, evaluating their state, and taking essential measures for restoration.

On December 29, 2022, the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan decided to establish departments with a focus on "History of Western Azerbaijan" at the Institute of History named after A. A. Bakhikhanov, "Folklore of Western Azerbaijan" at the Institute of Folklore, and "Toponymy of Western Azerbaijan" at the Institute of Linguistics named after Nasimi.

As a country of multiculturalism, Azerbaijan promotes the cross-cultural dialogue inside the country, but also at the regional level. The 2009 World Report of UNESCO indicates that the recognition of cultural diversity helps to strengthen the universal nature of the human rights in our societies. In its turn, Azerbaijan not only acknowledges the cultural diversity, but also undertakes concrete measures to preserve and pass it to future generations.

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Nevertheless, the Azerbaijani State has managed to ensure temporary living places for IDPs and refugees that were forced to leave their homes. With the State support, it becomes possible to create an environment to continue even partially their cultural practices and traditions. As it goes with other cities and regions of the country, the cultural institutions that fulfill cultural functions for IDPs from the occupied lands continue their activities. These institutions are financed by the State and service citizens that left Nagorno Karabakh and adjacent districts for

safer places. Such entities have local libraries, musical schools, clubs, theaters, cultural courses, movies, museums etc.

Reference

Information by Azerbaijan to the study on intentional destruction of cultural heritage. Available at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CulturalRights/DestructionHeritage/States/Azerbaijan.pdf