



**ARTSAKH BRIEF**

# The Fall of Artsakh and the Ancient Roots of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict

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## INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes the contemporary conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Artsakh considering the history of conflict between Christendom and Islam. The first section of this report studies the national and religious identity of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and its implications for understanding the present. The second section provides a timeline of the conflict from the origins in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the fall of Artsakh in 2023. The report concludes with an assessment of the current situation in the context of centuries of Islamic persecution and dispossession of Armenian Christians. Knowing the sources of religious conflict rooted in national and religious identity and understanding the nature of persecution throughout history is necessary to respond effectively today.

**Etchmiadzin Cathedral (301-303): Birthplace of the Armenian Church**



**Source: Public Domain**

## Christendom and Islam: A History of Conflict

Relations between the nations of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been tense since the late 1980s, as the USSR collapsed along with its rule over the South Caucasus region. Contemporary tensions, however, reach deep into national and cultural identities rooted in ancient history.

### *The First Christian Nation*

Armenia became the first nation to formally adopt Christianity as its religion in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. Membership in the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) — an Eastern Christian tradition — constitutes more than 90% of the population in Armenia, with other Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians in the minority. The AAC claims apostolic authority according to tradition from the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus, who proselytized the first Armenians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century after Christ's resurrection. The Holy See affirms that “in 301, thanks to the apostolate of St. Gregory the Illuminator, Armenia became the first nation that embraced Christianity and proclaimed it a state religion even before the Edict of Milan of 313, by which the Roman Empire tolerated Christianity, and the Edict of Theodosius by which in 380 the Empire recognized Christianity as a state religion.”<sup>1</sup>

After the 2023 conflict with Azerbaijan, a report from International Christian Concern (ICC) stated that the “collective sense of Christian identity as the world's first Christian nation” is evident in the Armenian nation. Following the defeat in Artsakh in September 2023, the heart of Armenians cries out to “defend not only their land but also the Christian faith of their people,” the report added.<sup>2</sup> According to the Armenian Prelacy, the mission of the Armenian Church “to integrate all aspects of Armenian life with the Gospel remains fundamentally the same as that of St. Gregory the Illuminator at the Armenian Church's beginning.”<sup>3</sup>

For much of its history in the centuries after the Christ, the Armenian nation remained under the rule of the great powers of the region and era — from the Roman and Byzantine Empires of late Classical Antiquity to the Islamic Caliphate that overran the heart of the Christian world during the early Middle Ages to the Ottoman and Russian Empires into the Modern Era. The Armenian nation finally declared its independence after the Bolshevik Revolution overthrew Czar Nicholas II of Russia in 1917. However, the Soviet Red Army soon captured Armenia in 1920 and incorporated it into the USSR until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1991, when Armenia became independent once again, along with its neighboring nations in the South Caucasus.

### *Centuries of Persecution and Dispossession*

Besides a long history of political subjugation, violent religious persecution remains a scar in the memory of the Armenian nation. Out of approximately 2.5 million Armenians living in Eastern Anatolia at the outbreak of the Great War (WWI), at least 1 million Armenians lost their lives at

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<sup>1</sup> “A Brief History of the Church in Armenia,” *Holy See Press Office*, June 23, 2016, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/06/23/160623b.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “Armenians Navigate the Horrors of the 2023 Artsakh War,” *International Christian Concern*, December 6, 2023, <https://www.persecution.org/2023/12/06/armenians-navigate-the-horrors-of-the-2023-artsakh-war/>.

<sup>3</sup> “History of the Armenian Church,” *Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church*, <https://armenianprelacy.org/education/church-history/> (accessed April 25, 2024).

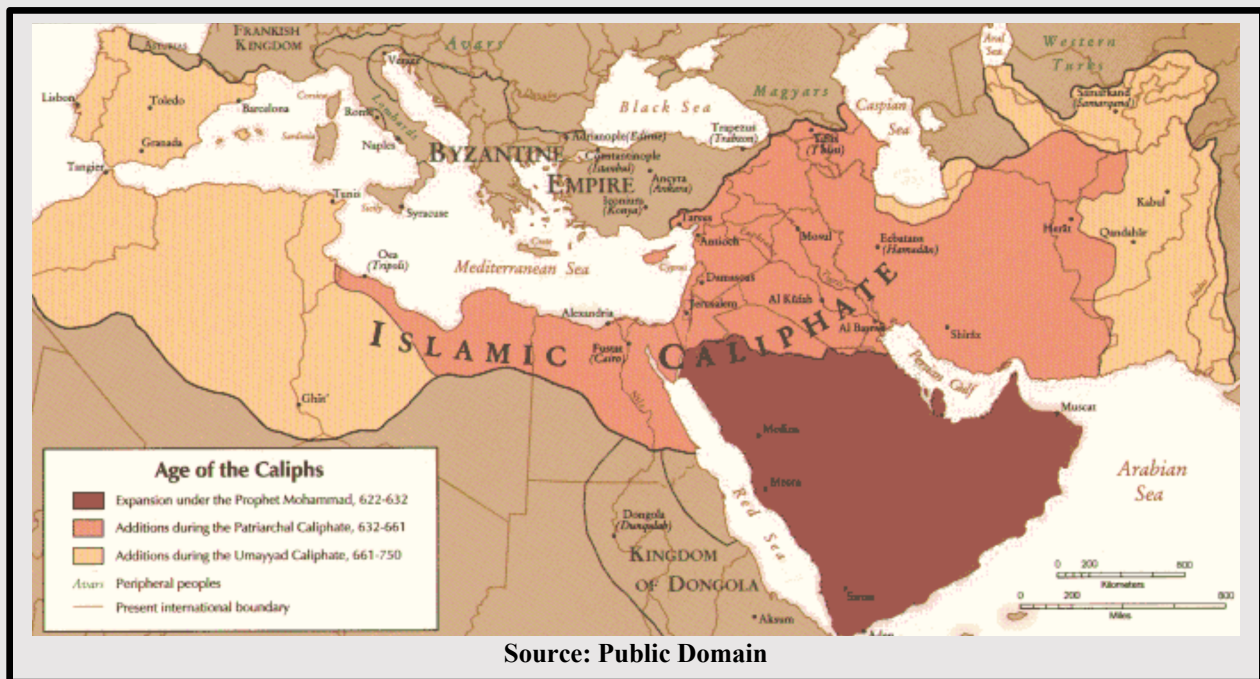


the hands of the Ottoman Turks in what is recognized by more than 30 countries as the Armenian Genocide.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, the Turkish government still contends that “the Armenian deaths do not constitute genocide,” citing Armenian resistance against the state and not their ethnic or religious identity as the cause.<sup>5</sup> The Azerbaijani government likewise denies the charge that the Ottoman Turks committed genocide.

A closer look at current events in the South Caucasus reveals that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is part of the centuries-old history of Christendom and Islam, which is one of almost continuous warfare from the Battle of Yarmuk in 636 to the Siege of Vienna in 1683. Furthermore, the persecution and dispossession of the Armenian nation by the Islamic Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire, and the Azerbaijani state is part of a long history of Muslim belligerence toward Christianity. While the current conflict in the Caucasus is a rightful recovery of territory occupied by Armenia in the eyes of Azerbaijanis, it is yet another painful loss of historic Christian lands to Azerbaijan in the hearts of Armenians.

### *The Nature of Islamic Hostility*

The map sourced below shows the Islamic conquests of Christian lands throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and even part of Europe from the time of Muhammad to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.



<sup>4</sup> “Countries that Recognize the Armenian Genocide,” *Armenian National Institute*, [https://www.armenian-genocide.org/recognition\\_countries.html](https://www.armenian-genocide.org/recognition_countries.html) (accessed April 25, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> “The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The Issue and the Facts,” *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-armenian-allegation-of-genocide-the-issue-and-the-facts.en.mfa> (accessed April 25, 2024).

As the map illustrates, expanding Islam throughout the world by conquest is part of obeying Allah and his prophet, Muhammad, according to the Quran. It is the privilege of participating in a longstanding holy war — the jihad against the infidel. Following the 7<sup>th</sup>-century death of Muhammad, who himself besieged and conquered neighboring tribes, Muslim hordes swept from Morocco in the west to Persia in the east, and from Arabia in the south to Anatolia in the north. By the 8th century, the Islamic Caliphate had stretched as far east as the Indus River Valley and reached into Europe through the Iberian Peninsula, continuing to threaten Christendom militarily as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

Since its inception, Islam has sought to convert the world to Allah by force, conquering Christian lands throughout the Middle East and North Africa. As the noted Medieval historian Raymond Ibrahim observes, “Fourteen hundred years of sporadic jihad and dhimmitude has seen the slow decimation and forced conversion of Christians to Islam, making that region [the Middle East and North Africa] nearly purely Islamic.” To confront to the religious conflict and persecution of Christians in our time, particularly under Islamic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, Christians in every nation must recover a clear understanding of church history and dispel ignorance about the nature of Muslim hostility toward the Church throughout the ages.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Stern, “Raymond Ibrahim on Academic Myths about Islam,” *Middle East Forum*, February 11, 2002, <https://www.meforum.org/63059/raymond-ibrahim-on-academic-myths-about-islam>.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, “Crucified Again: Exposing Islam’s New War on Christians,” May 1, 2013, <https://www.raymondibrahim.com/2013/05/01/crucified-again-exposing-islams-new-war-on-christians-an-interview-with-author-raymond-ibrahim/>.



## The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict over Artsakh

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Artsakh dates back more than a century. As with any subject of geopolitical study, understanding the present and gaining insight into the future requires situating it within its appropriate historical context.

### *Origins of Contemporary Conflict*

The contemporary conflict over Artsakh originated during the constitution of the USSR after the Bolshevik Revolution. The Soviet government established the region as an autonomous oblast, or province, within the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan in 1923. However, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 90% of the region's inhabitants had been Armenians. Despite its official location within Azerbaijan, the legislature of Artsakh in 1988 passed a resolution stating its intention to formally become part of Armenia.

After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Moscow's hegemony throughout the rest of the Soviet Union began to disintegrate. By 1991, conflict erupted in the South Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway region of Artsakh. Supported by Armenia, the Artsakh resistance forces successfully secured their territory and captured parts of southwestern Azerbaijan during the next few years. In 1994, the Russian Federation brokered a ceasefire that left Artsakh as a de-facto independent republic with close economic and political ties to Armenia.

Brief confrontations occurred sporadically between 1994 and mid-2020, after which large-scale combat resumed. In late-2020, Russia brokered another ceasefire that included provisions for 2,000 Russian security forces to deploy to the region to ensure peace and stability. Azerbaijan also reclaimed most of the territory it previously lost to Artsakh forces in the 1990s, leaving Artsakh surrounded by Azerbaijani-controlled territory. The ceasefire also established the Lachin Corridor, a small stretch of territory monitored by Russian forces that connected Artsakh to Armenia.

### *The Siege and Conquest of Artsakh*

In December 2022, Azerbaijani activists occupied the Lachin Corridor, reportedly protesting environmental contamination resultant from mining in Artsakh. They blocked all traffic except International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) shipments and Russian military convoys. Despite the ceasefire agreement, Russian forces did not restore the integrity of the Lachin Corridor, causing shortages and rationing of supplies in Artsakh. The Azerbaijani government reportedly backed the protestors.<sup>8</sup>

In April 2023, the Azerbaijani government established a checkpoint on the road traversing the Lachin Corridor claiming the need to prevent military shipments from potentially reaching Artsakh from Armenia. In response, the Armenian government condemned the action, stating that it violated the 2020 ceasefire agreement and accused Azerbaijan of attempting to isolate Artsakh.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 20, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

<sup>9</sup> "New Azerbaijani-Armenian Tensions Flare Around Nagorno-Karabakh," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 25, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-lachin-checkpoints/32375862.html>; Azerbaijan Sets up Checkpoints on the Lachin Corridor," *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, April 27, 2023, <https://www.eiu.com/n/azerbaijan-sets-up-checkpoints-on-the-lachin-corridor/>.

The protests ended shortly after, indicating that the original goal had always been to disrupt Armenian passage to Artsakh and secure Azerbaijani control of the corridor.<sup>10</sup>

In July 2023, the Azerbaijani government closed the corridor to all traffic, citing alleged smuggling via ICRC shipments to Artsakh.<sup>11</sup> A report from the ICRC detailed the crisis caused by the action: “The civilian population is now facing a lack of life-saving medication and essentials. ... Fruits, vegetables, and bread are increasingly scarce and costly, while some other food items such as dairy products, sunflower oil, cereal, fish, and chicken are not available.”<sup>12</sup> Medical records indicated that the miscarriage rates in Artsakh quadrupled because of the dire shortages caused by the Azerbaijani blockade.<sup>13</sup>

Adding insult to injury, the Azerbaijani government offered to provide fuel, food, and supplies to the besieged Armenians in Artsakh, who rejected the offer, recognizing the subtle attempt by Azerbaijan to further assert control by making Artsakh dependent by coercion. The head of the Artsakh resistance government said then: “How can we accept humanitarian aid from the country that has led us to this disaster? It is using one hand to strangle us and the other hand to feed us.”<sup>14</sup> Another Artsakh official asked: “What would you do if a terrorist blocks your access to a water wellspring in a desert, tortures you for a while, then offers you his urine to drink?”<sup>15</sup> The blockade persisted despite the ICRC denying the allegations and the Armenian government urging international action and calling the blockade a policy of “ethnic cleansing.”

Following the slow, systematic siege of Artsakh, the Azerbaijani military overran resistance forces in September 2023 after pounding the region with air strikes and artillery fire. The swift offensive forced the Artsakh government to surrender and accept a Russian-brokered ceasefire entailing

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<sup>10</sup> “Azeri Protestors Say They’ll End Blockage of Key Road,” *The Associated Press*, April 28, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-lachin-corridor-nagorno-karabakh-649b7bfc785d9aa13f870c7eea985ad>.

<sup>11</sup> “Azerbaijan Closes Only Road Linking Breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh Region to Armenia,” *France 24*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230711-azerbaijan-closes-only-road-linking-breakaway-nagorno-karabakh-region-to-armenia>.

<sup>12</sup> “Azerbaijan/Armenia: Sides Must Reach ‘Humanitarian Consensus’ to Ease Suffering,” *International Committee of the Red Cross*, July 25, 2023, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/azerbaijan-armenia-sides-must-reach-humanitarian-consensus-to-ease-suffering>.

<sup>13</sup> Joel Veldkamp, “The Persecution of Armenian Christians is not just a Religious Freedom Issue,” *First Things*, October 3, 2023, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2023/10/the-persecution-of-armenian-christians-is-not-just-a-religious-freedom-issue>.

<sup>14</sup> Joshua Kucera, “With Tightening of Blockade, Azerbaijan Presents Karabakh Armenians with a Choice: Surrender or Starve,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 31, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-armenia-blockade-humanitarian-situation/32527892.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Artak Beglaryan, “On the Az offer to provide humanitarian aid to Artsakh via Aghdam,” *Twitter*, July 26, 2023, [https://twitter.com/Artak\\_Beglaryan/status/1684138067169546241](https://twitter.com/Artak_Beglaryan/status/1684138067169546241).



disarmament and potential integration into Azerbaijan, leaving the future of Armenians in Artsakh uncertain.<sup>16</sup>

While the Azerbaijani government promised to offer full citizenship to Armenians in Artsakh and to recognize them as an ethnic minority under Azerbaijan's constitution, Armenians questioned the legitimacy of integration into a hostile nation.<sup>17</sup> One survivor of the Azerbaijani invasion said that "almost everyone decided to flee because there was no hope and no trust in Azerbaijani and international guarantees for our security," noting that the "coercive environment and history of violations and threats" made it impossible to live in liberty under Azerbaijani control.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the more than 100,000 Armenians in Artsakh fled to Armenia within one month of the invasion.

### *A Tenuous Diplomatic Response*

Yerevan and Baku engaged in several negotiations throughout 2023 aimed at resolving the conflict brokered by Brussels, Moscow, and Washington, D.C. Diplomatic attempts at protecting Armenians and their homeland in Artsakh proved to be largely futile, however, even when Armenia offered territorial concessions to Azerbaijan. While the former expressed willingness to concede its claim on disputed territories several times, the latter remained intent on reintegrating Artsakh without compromising its demands.<sup>19</sup>

The response from the two nations' respective allies was likewise disproportionate. As Turkey openly backed Azerbaijan during the 2020 conflict, Russia remained allied to Armenia in principle but vacillated in countering violations of the 2020 ceasefire agreement that established the Lachin Corridor. The Russian invasion of Ukraine further distanced Moscow from Yerevan, causing Armenia to turn to the West for support.<sup>20</sup> This was to no avail since neither the EU, NATO, the U.K., nor the United States intervened decisively in the conflict, issuing only tenuous diplomatic statements calling on Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve the conflict peacefully.

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Kirby, "Azerbaijan Launches Operation against Nagorno-Karabakh and Demands Surrender," *BBC News*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66851975>; Gabriel Gavin, "Azerbaijan Declares Victory in Lightning Nagorno-Karabakh Offensive," *Politico*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/azerbaijan-advance-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-armenia-military-offensive/>; "Fact Sheet: Azerbaijan Moves to Retake Artsakh," *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, September 21, 2023, <https://acleddata.com/2023/09/21/fact-sheet-azerbaijan-moves-to-retake-artsakh/>.

<sup>17</sup> Joshua Kucera, "With Victory Assured, Azerbaijan now Seeks 'Reintegration' of Karabakh Armenians," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 22, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-seeks-reintegration-karabakh-armenians/32605005.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Artak Beglaryan, "My short testimony on the Artsakh genocide for @MorenoOcampo1's latest report," *Twitter*, December 19, 2023, [https://twitter.com/Artak\\_Beglaryan/status/1737143274547085566](https://twitter.com/Artak_Beglaryan/status/1737143274547085566).

<sup>19</sup> Abigail McGowan, "Azerbaijan's Pressure on Nagorno-Karabakh: What to Know," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 14, 2023, [https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/azerbaijans-pressure-nagorno-karabakh-what-know.](https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/azerbaijans-pressure-nagorno-karabakh-what-know;); "Tensions Remain as Negotiations Stall over the Armenia-Azerbaijan Border," *International Christian Concern*, April 3, 2023, <https://www.persecution.org/2024/04/03/tensions-remain-as-negotiations-stall-over-the-armenia-azerbaijan-border/>.

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Gavin, "We Can't Rely on Russia to Protect us Anymore, Armenian PM Says," *Politico*, September 13, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/we-cant-rely-russia-protect-us-anymore-nikol-pashinyan-armenia-pm/>.

## After the Fall of Artsakh, the Specter of Genocide Haunts Armenians

After the fall of Artsakh in September 2023, more than 100,000 Armenians fled from Artsakh to Armenia within one month of the Azerbaijani invasion fearing the prospects of forced disarmament and reintegration into Azerbaijan.

### *The Specter of Genocide*

At the time, International Christian Concern (ICC) reported that “there is a deep sense of the history of the Armenian Genocide repeating itself” indicated by the actions of the Azerbaijani government in besieging and conquering Artsakh. Further, the report added that “there is documentation of Azerbaijani forces destroying and desecrating Armenian churches in territories seized, and efforts to change the historical narrative of the millennia of Christian heritage in Artsakh.”<sup>21</sup>

As the fog of war dissipates, the Azerbaijani campaign in Artsakh hearkens back to the Ottoman policy to eradicate the Christian peoples within its Empire more than a century ago. The persecution and dispossession resulted in the deaths of 3 million Christians — including 1.5 million Armenians and 1.5 million Greeks and Assyrians (Syriacs). Under Ottoman rule, the Christian population in Asia Minor decreased from approximately 20% of the population in 1894 to near 2% in 1924. The Armenian Genocide, which occurred from 1915-1916, represents only part of a larger jihad by the Muslim empire to destroy Christianity.<sup>22</sup>

The modern states of Türkiye and Azerbaijan are united by a common national identity rooted in Islam. On the 101<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Azerbaijan’s founding, a Turkish official referred to their peoples collectively as “one nation, two states.”<sup>23</sup> In 1915, the German ambassador in Constantinople noted that “the government is indeed pursuing its purpose of eradicating the Armenian race from the Turkish Empire.”<sup>24</sup> In 2012, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev declared that “the Armenians of the world” as the principal enemy of the Azerbaijani state.<sup>25</sup> Now, Turkey and Azerbaijan share a history of genocide against the Armenian nation in particular and Christianity in general.

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<sup>21</sup> “Homeland Lost,” *International Christian Concern*, February 26, 2024, <https://www.persecution.org/2024/02/26/homeland-lost/>

<sup>22</sup> Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, “When Turkey Destroyed its Christians,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/when-turkey-destroyed-its-christians-11558109896>.

<sup>23</sup> “‘One Nation, two States’: Turkey Congratulates Azerbaijan on 101<sup>st</sup> Republic Day,” *Daily Sabah*, May 29, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2019/05/28/one-nation-two-states-turkey-congratulates-azerbaijan-on-101st-republic-day>.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Gust, *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 230.

<sup>25</sup> “Closing Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Conference on the Results of the Third Year into the ‘State Program on the Socioeconomic Development of Districts for 2009-2013,’” February 28, 2012, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/4423>.



### *Genocide of Christians Then and Now*

According to the Armenian foreign ministry, the Muslim Turks under the Ottoman Empire “implemented a premeditated and planned destruction of the material testimonies of the Armenian culture” because they “realized the role of the church and the Christian faith for the Armenian nation.” In 1973, UNESCO reported that out of 913 Armenian historical monuments remaining in Eastern Anatolia after 1923, 464 had vanished completely, 252 were in ruins, and 197 needed to be completely repaired. Fewer than 40 Armenian churches remain today out of more than 2,000 that stood before the Armenian Genocide in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup>

The legacy of Armenian Christian culture under Azerbaijani Muslim rule is similar. From 1997 to 2006, Azerbaijan destroyed 89 Armenian churches, 5,840 *khachkars* (Armenian cross stones), and 22,000 tombstones in Nakhichevan — a historically-Armenian land that the Soviet Union made part of Azerbaijan in the 1920s.<sup>27</sup>

In April 2024, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention — a U.S.-based non-governmental (NGO) organization — denounced that Azerbaijan indicated it had “genocidal intent against Armenians and particularly against Armenians in Artsakh” and called the continuing destruction of Armenian churches and other historical monuments in Artsakh a “cultural genocide” intending “to erase the historical presence” of Armenian heritage in the region.<sup>28</sup>

### *International Jurisprudence on Genocide*

The Lemkin Institute institution bears the name of Raphael Lemkin, who coined the word “genocide” and advocated for what eventually became the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention), which the General Assembly of the United Nations (U.N.) adopted in December 1948. As of April 2022, 153 states have ratified the convention.

The convention defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group as such” and includes “killing,” “causing serious bodily or mental harm,” and “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.” The convention also stipulates that states must enact legislation to prevent genocide and provide penalties for genocide. According to the U.N., because the International Court of Justice (ICJ) affirms that “the convention embodies principles that are part of general customary international law,” all states are “bound as a matter of law by the principle that genocide is a crime prohibited under international law.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Cultural Genocide,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/4423> (accessed April 25, 2024).

<sup>27</sup> Alex Galitsky, “Christians Under Assault: The Reverberations of the Armenian Genocide,” *Providence*, July 1, 2020, <https://providencemag.com/2020/07/christians-under-assault-the-reverberations-of-the-armenian-genocide-nagorno-karabakh-artsakh-azerbaijan/>.

<sup>28</sup> “Lemkin Institute Director Urges to Call Azerbaijan’s Actions in Karabakh as Genocide and Apply Relevant Convention,” *Armenpress*, April 8, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1134238.html>.

<sup>29</sup> “Genocide,” *United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect*, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml> (accessed April 25, 2024); *Convention on the Prevention*

In 1998, a U.N. delegation adopted the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court in The Hague to judge “the most serious crimes of concern to the international community” that it listed as “genocide,” “crimes against humanity,” “war crimes,” and “the crime of aggression.” The statute reiterated the definition of genocide outlined in the Genocide Convention. More than 100 states have ratified the statute.<sup>30</sup>

### *Empty Promises*

In December 2023, Luis Moreno Ocampo, a former prosecutor from the International Criminal Court, published a report exposing the consistent practice in the international community to “deny the commission of genocide.” The report cites that the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, Israel, and Russia “ignored for different reasons the precise and available information” warning of the Azerbaijani commission of genocide in Artsakh and instead sought to “facilitate an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan to avoid new hostilities and achieve particular economic and geopolitical national interests.” Many of the same countries neglected multiple opportunities to intervene despite the duty to prevent and punish genocide purportedly incumbent upon them as signatories of the Genocide Convention.

This followed a previous report from Luis Moreno Ocampo in August 2023 asserting that that “the blockade of the Lachin Corridor by the Azerbaijani security forces impeding access to any food, medical supplies, and other essentials should be considered a Genocide under Article II, (c) of the Genocide Convention.” Nonetheless, as the report also pointed out at the time, the passive position taken by the international community provided tacit approval allowing Azerbaijan to continue its campaign of conquest.<sup>31</sup>

Many Armenians sensed betrayal not only from the international community that simply reprimanded the Azerbaijani state while it openly committed genocide, but also from the Armenian state itself, which failed to decisively act to prevent the siege and conquest of Artsakh. When Artsakh fell in 2023, Armenians assembled *en masse* in the capital to denounce the failure of the Armenian state to protect Artsakh and its citizens there, with some calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.<sup>32</sup>

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*and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1\\_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf) (accessed April 25, 2024).

<sup>30</sup> “Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,” *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court> (accessed April 25, 2024).

<sup>31</sup> Ocampo, “Expert Opinion: Genocide Against Armenians in 2023,” [https://luismorenocampo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Armenia-Report-Expert-Opinion.pdf?utm\\_source=Web&utm\\_medium=Landing&utm\\_campaign=Downloads](https://luismorenocampo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Armenia-Report-Expert-Opinion.pdf?utm_source=Web&utm_medium=Landing&utm_campaign=Downloads) (accessed April 25, 2024).

<sup>32</sup> “Armenia Protestors Demand PM Resign After Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire,” *Al Jazeera*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/20/armenia-protesters-demand-pm-resign-after-nagorno-karabakh-ceasefire>.



## CONCLUSION

Many Armenians who lived in Artsakh and fought to resist the Azerbaijani campaign felt great dishonor from their defeat, and lament having failed to defend their homeland from its enemies and preserve the heritage of their forefathers for posterity.<sup>33</sup> An Armenian survivor who escaped Azerbaijani persecution in Artsakh after the September 2023 invasion testified to the sense of guilt that his generation of Armenians had in having lost the homeland and the heritage passed down to them by previous generations of Armenians who lived and died for it. He added that “the most difficult part of our suffering is the mental suffering of our people wanting to return but cannot return ... wanting to protect the graves, the heritage, the identity but cannot do that because all of them are under Azerbaijani genocidal control.”<sup>34</sup>

The fall of Artsakh is another chapter in a long history of Islamic belligerence against Christianity, following centuries of Islamic persecution and dispossession of Armenian Christians. Armenians from Artsakh lost their heritage and homeland despite a courageous stand for liberty that lasted more than three decades. It is a story of betrayal, for neither the empty promises of the international community nor the compromises of the Armenian government prevented the Azerbaijani siege and conquest of Artsakh. Nothing changed one century after the Armenian Genocide. It is now left to the survivors in Armenia to preserve their lost heritage and homeland in their memory. Many in the West have ignored the plight of Armenian Christians. It is the duty of Christians in every nation to honor the fall of Artsakh.

## BYLINE

Marcos Dalton is a tradesman with writing focusing on history, theology, and politics as his present craft. His alma mater is Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia, where he met his wife and received a classical education majoring in intelligence and national security. He aims to practice various trades and thus lead his family in building a faithful household by cultivating goodness, truth, and beauty through productive dominion and fruitful discipleship in every area of life.

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<sup>33</sup> “Armenians Navigate the Horrors of the 2023 Artsakh War,” *International Christian Concern*, December 6, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Artak Beglaryan, “My short testimony on the Artsakh genocide,” *Twitter*, December 19, 2023.