

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 24, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We appreciate your leadership and dedication to advancing the U.S. interests of protecting the security of American people, expanding economic prosperity and opportunity, and defending democratic values around the world. Our nation, as well as our allies and partners, have benefited greatly from this Administration's diplomatic efforts.

We write this letter to bring to your attention the continued destruction of Armenian cultural, historical, and religious sites by Azerbaijan in Artsakh, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh, and urge the Administration to take swift action. According to Cornell University's Caucasus Heritage Watch (CHW), Azerbaijan was responsible for the destruction of 98 percent of Armenian cultural heritage sites in the Nakhchivan exclave between 1997 and 2011. With the Azerbaijan military offensive against Artsakh in September 2023, there is already evidence Azerbaijan is continuing its strategy of erasing Armenian culture within and around this region as well. In many cases, Azerbaijan has attempted to mask the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage by calling its activities "restoration" of historical sites and has made efforts to claim Armenian heritage sites have "Caucasian Albanian" origins or simply do not exist. Azerbaijan's recent reconstruction of the St. John the Baptist Church, also known as Kanach Zham/Green Church, located in Shushi is an example of the quiet destruction of sites that have significant value to Armenians. These activities are not benign and ultimately result in the erasure of Armenian culture and a systematic cleansing of the region of its historic Armenian roots.

There are nearly 500 Armenian cultural heritage sites in Artsakh and surrounding regions that have significant value not only to the global Armenian community, but also to the entire world. In 2010, UNESCO inscribed the Armenian "*khachkars*", intricate stone crosses that Armenians have been carving since the early medieval era, on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, an indication of the significant cultural value of these artifacts. Many of the Armenian cultural heritage sites in Artsakh and elsewhere include these medieval "*khachkars*."

The destruction of Armenian cultural heritage is also a subject of a case against Azerbaijan at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The case was initially brought by Armenia in September 2021. Although the case has not concluded, the ICJ felt compelled to issue a provisional measure in December 2021 due to the credible risk of further destruction and potential erasure of

Armenian cultural heritage from the region. The provisional order calls on Azerbaijan to refrain from “suppressing the Armenian language, destroying Armenian cultural heritage or otherwise eliminating the existence of the historical Armenian cultural presence.” Following Azerbaijan’s military attack into Artsakh, the ICJ issued another provisional measure in November 2023, calling on Azerbaijan to adhere to its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by taking “all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts.” Endangered are numerous sites of historical, architectural, and aesthetic importance, including the 9th century Dadivank Monastery, countless “*khachkars*,” and the 4th century Amaras Monastery.

In the face of these significant risks to Armenian cultural heritage, we write this letter to express our deep concern that the Department of State must do more to prevent Azerbaijan’s actions. Even as your senior diplomats meet with Azerbaijani officials, it is unclear if these concerns are being raised, or are raised with the appropriate level of seriousness that the issue deserves.

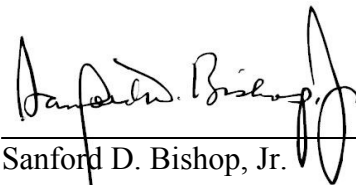
For this reason, we urge the Department of State to ensure that **all U.S. diplomats prioritize this issue by raising the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage at every meeting with officials at all levels of the government of Azerbaijan.** We ask that you urge the government of Azerbaijan to fully comply with the ICJ provisional measures and to refrain from actions that would lead to the further destruction of Armenian cultural heritage. It is vital that the Administration calls for an immediate cessation of Azerbaijani activities that would eradicate the rich history and culture of the Armenian people. These sites must be protected.

We again thank you for your leadership of the Department of State and its diplomatic mission around the world. The destruction of Armenian cultural heritage sites is a tragedy that must end. We ask for your support in ensuring that Armenia’s past is available to future generations.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



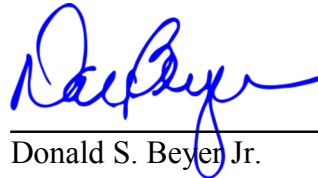
Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
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J. Luis Correa
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Donald S. Beyer Jr.
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Katie Porter
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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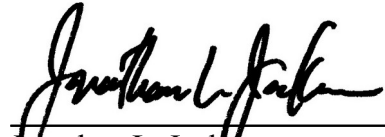
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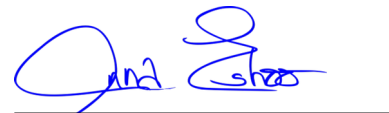
Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



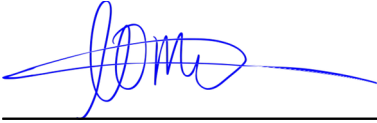
Scott H. Peters
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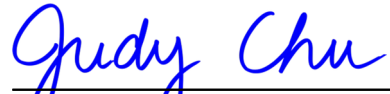
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Anna G. Eshoo
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Ilhan Omar
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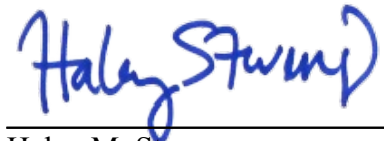
Jake Auchincloss
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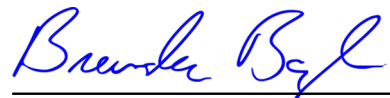
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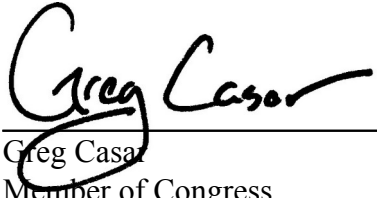
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Dwight Evans
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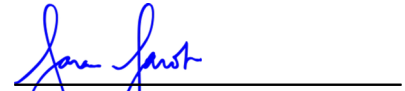


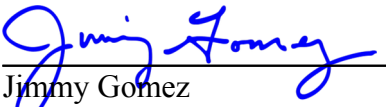
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