



Press release

*Embargo until 17 October, 4:15 pm*

## **A MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN CEMETERY ERASED FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH**

Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006, an international delegation comprised of representatives of different National Parliaments and a Scottish history-of-art specialist, will be received by Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, from whom they will be solemnly requesting an international investigation and open denunciation of the crime perpetrated on the memorial site of Jugha (Djoulfa/Julfa) by the army of Azerbaijan. The delegation was formed at the behest of the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-Armenia – mainly the Co-Chairmen – the National Councillors Dominique de Buman (Vice-Chairman of the Christian Democratic-Party) and Ueli Leuenberger (Vice-Chairman of the Green Party) – with the support of Mr. Charles Aznavour, Ambassador of Armenia to UNESCO.

The Parliamentarians will submit to the Director-General exhaustive documentation on the subject, as well as a signed Memorandum in which five recommendations will be presented to the state of Azerbaijan.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2006, the Azeri authorities refused permission to a delegation of European Parliamentarians to go to Nakhijevan and to certify the massive destruction of the ancient « Crosses of Stone » (Khatchkars) of the cemetery of Jugha.

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### **A CULTURAL GENOCIDE**

A few months before the launch of the « Year of Armenia » celebrated by France, a cultural genocide (or ethnocide) occurred: the systematic elimination, by the Azeri army, of more than 3,000 tombs on the medieval Armenian site of Julfa (Jugha in Armenian), situated in the enclave of the autonomous Republic of Nakhijevan, a territory of approximately 5,500 square kilometres situated between Armenia, Iran and Turkey. Previously a historic Armenian province, that was annexed by Russia in 1826, Nakhijevan was arbitrarily ceded by Soviet Russia to Azerbaijan on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1921 according to the bilateral Turkish-Russian Treaty of Moscow.

From 1918 to 1920, Nakhijevan was situated within the borders of the first Republic of Armenia.

From 1919, the Turco-Azeris orchestrated a brutal ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population and its culture in order to realise the corridor between Turkey and Azerbaijan, while ensuring the disappearance of all Armenian traces from the region. This destruction comprises an integral part of the Armenian Genocide.

The pillage of the archeological site began in 1903, in order to facilitate the construction of a railway section tying Jugha to Hamadan (Iran). Thus already, nearly 6,000 Khatchkars (1)

were pulverised by the Russians. In 1998 and 2002, the Azeri army re-initiated the destruction with general indifference despite the fact that NGOs, Diaspora associations and the Armenian government collectively alerted UNESCO for several months. Within a few weeks (December 2005), all that remained of the prestigious treasures of the Armenian cultural heritage was a firing and training ground of the Azeri army: in fact, a military zone – today off limits.

Despite being signatory to the Convention on the Protection of Global Heritage (signed in 1993), this has not stopped Azerbaijan in its determination to eradicate the Armenian memory, eliminating with one fell swoop a true archeological treasure and a cultural testimonial of inestimable value.

After the Genocide of 1915, this profanation has been experienced as part of the collective truth of 7.8 million Armenians on the planet, as they have been veritably torn from their history.

On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, French deputy François Rochebloine (UDF), recalled in his intervention at the Council of Europe: [...]

*We have been made aware that the methodical destruction of khatchkars has begun again in the cemetery of Djougha, in the south of Nakhijevan: we see again the violation of tombs, the broken crosses, the emptied debris... The disregard for human rights and the insult to human memory converge in a somber picture that brings us back in distress to the saddest of periods in our contemporary history.*

On August 30<sup>th</sup>, the Baku authorities refused access to a delegation from the European Parliament to the Armenian cemetery of Djoulfa. This inspection had been planned and scheduled for several months.

Among the grievances contained in the Memorandum submitted to UNESCO, features an option to disbar/expulse Azerbaijan from the organisation of UNESCO until the implementation of all the recommendations included therein.

**Moreover, the delegation will present its findings at a Press Conference immediately following the meeting accorded by UNESCO, from 4:15pm, in Room 113, 113 avenue de la Bourdonnais 75007.**

For more information:

In the framework of the « Year of Armenia » celebrated in France in 2006 and 2007, the Louvre Museum will be offering to visitors an exhibition of 40 celebrated Khatchkars brought directly from Armenia. This will feature from 17<sup>th</sup> February to 14<sup>th</sup> May 2007.

(1) Khatchkar: literally « Cross of Stone », pillars of Armenian art

Finely chiselled, their appearance reminds one of lace.

The first Khatchkars appeared in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The cemetery of Jugha was divided into three sectors.

The first sector included tombs from the period of the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the second sector from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the third from the 14<sup>th</sup> century through 1605 – covering a total area of 1600 square meters.

Jean Eckian  
Press Officer - Paris  
+33 6 62 45 89 79

Please find attached additional necessary elements for your information

**\* DELEGATION:**

Canada

**Jim KARYGIANNIS**

Member of Parliament – Liberal,

Vice-Chairman of the Canadian-Armenian Interparliamentary Friendship Association

France

**Roland BLUM**

Member of Parliament – UMP

**Frédéric DUTOIT**

Member of Parliament – PCF

**Christophe MASSE**

Member of Parliament – PS

**Richard MALLIÉ**

Member of Parliament – UMP

**André SANTINI**

Member of Parliament, Mayor of Issy-les-Moulineaux – UDF

Greece

**Evgenios HAITIDIS**

Member of Parliament – Nea Dimokratia

United Kingdom

**The Baroness FLATHER JP DL FRSA**

Member of the House of Lords – Conservative,

Vice-Chairman of the British-Armenian All-Party Parliamentary Group

**Steven SIM** – Art Historian

Russian Federation

**Pavel VORONIN**

Member of Parliament – Russian Federation

Switzerland

**Dominique de BUMAN**

National Councillor

Vice-Chairman of the Christian-Democratic Party

Co-President of the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-Armenia

**Ueli LEUENBERGER**

National Councillor

Vice-Chairman of the Greens

Co-President of the Parliamentary Group Switzerland-Armenia

**M. Ernst ITEN**

Ambassador, Head of the Swiss Mission to UNESCO

Accompanying the international delegation

**Deputy Contact on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Oct. / Sarkis Shahinian (SAA) from the 14<sup>th</sup> Oct.**  
Hôtel Bedford  
17 rue de l'Arcade 75008  
Tel: **01 44 94 77 77**  
<http://www.hotel-bedford.com/>

With:

ASA/GSA/SAA SWITZERLAND-ARMENIA ASSOCIATION / Association Suisse-Arménie  
Sarkis Shahinian, Co-Chairman  
P.O. Box 497  
CH-3000 Berne 14 (Switzerland)  
Phone: + 41 76 399 16 25  
[shahinian@armenian.ch](mailto:shahinian@armenian.ch)

Coordination Council of Armenian Organisations in France (CCAF)  
Alexis Govciyan, President  
[alexis@govciyan.com](mailto:alexis@govciyan.com)  
34, avenue des Champs-Élysées  
75008 Paris  
Tel: 01 44 16 80 59  
[contact@ccaf.info](mailto:contact@ccaf.info)

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UNESCO: 17 Octobre 2006, 15h30 / 3:30 pm – 7 Place Fontenoy 75015 Paris:  
Press Office: 01 45 68 17 06

Press Conference: 17 October, 16h15 / 4:15 pm  
Room 113 – 113 Avenue de la Bourdonnais 75007 Paris  
Tel: 01 40 62 98 10

London Times  
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,13509-2144112.html>

ICOMOS (photos)  
[www.international.icomos.org%2frisk%2f2002%2fazerbaijan2002photos.htm](http://www.international.icomos.org%2frisk%2f2002%2fazerbaijan2002photos.htm)