

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church May 2025- February 2026

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan unleashed an unholy attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church, the foundation of the first Christian nation that was established in 301 A.D. This unprecedented assault, by the government, on the country's cornerstone and guardian of Christianity, is a calculated attempt to undermine the very foundation of Armenian heritage, culture and unity. To the Armenians, *it is eerily reminiscent of Soviet Era repression*. The prime minister's war vastly widened the gap between his government and the Armenian people, resulting in an 8.2% approval rating.

Timeline of Repression

On May 26, 2025, The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, in cooperation with the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church of Switzerland, held an international conference in Bern, Switzerland. Catholicos Karekin II, the titular head of the Armenian Apostolic Church located at the Mother See in Etchmiadzin addressed the preservation of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Artsakh following Azerbaijan's September 2023 invasion and ethnic cleansing of the region and other matters, such as the prisoners in Baku. The conference drew international attention to the destruction of Armenian Christian monuments and the broader cultural erasure underway in historically Armenian territories, prompting criticism from Azerbaijani religious leadership shortly after.

On May 30, 2025, Prime Minister Pashinyan began posting a series of abusive and vulgar statements against the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II, calling for his forced removal.

Following his public verbal attacks, PM Pashinyan dramatically escalated his crackdown, arresting, detaining and imprisoning high ranking archbishops and numerous clergy.

On June 11, 2025, Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the spiritual leader of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Office, sent a formal letter to the World Council of Churches condemning the Bern conference. In the letter, he accused the Armenian Apostolic Church of inciting Armenians to "fight until death" through its advocacy for the protection of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Artsakh. remarks were widely interpreted by observers as reflecting hostility toward the continued institutional presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church and its efforts to safeguard Armenian identity in the region.

On June 18, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government arrested Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, owner of the Electric Networks of Armenia "ENA", moments after Karapetyan publicly condemned the government's escalating attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church. Shortly after the arrest, Pashinyan called to nationalize the country's

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Electrical Network Grids. This act is viewed as a politically motivated attack rather than an economic reform. On July 23, 2025, Karapetyan won an international arbitration case on behalf of ENA, which only temporarily stymied Pashinyan's nationalization plans, yet he still remains imprisoned without release. The case of Samvel Karapetyan has become a telling story of Armenia's recent persecution campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church and internal democratic struggles — all by one man's decision to simply stand for his faith and Church.

On June 25, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan arrested alongside 13 others over an alleged coup plot. This act is seen as retaliation against the Armenian Apostolic Church as the Church has been largely outspoken against Pashinyan's concessions of land and lack of demanding justice for the Armenian people. Galstanyan is responsible for organizing and leading protests calling for Pashinyan's resignation in 2023 after 4 border towns had been conceded to Azerbaijan.

On June 28, 2025, Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan was arrested also over the alleged coup plot. He is now being held in pre-trial detention for two months and his lawyer Ara Zohrabyan calls the decision "obviously illegal and unfounded."

On July 20, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called for the resignation of the Catholicos on Facebook, claiming it is time to free Veharan, referring to the Catholicos by his lay name in an attempt to demoralize the leader of the Church and his followers. Pashinyan planned and executed a gathering in Etchmiadzin, the Mother See of the Armenian Apostolic Church, to place pressure on the Catholicos, saying "Be ready."

The same day, The Armenian Apostolic Church released a statement condemning Pashinyan's actions against the Catholicos. They affirm they will not waver in their mission and emphasize the failure of Pashinyan as leader of the country, leaving them vulnerable to external political forces.

On July 23, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan posted on Facebook the need for the purification of the Church and outlined the standards the new leader should meet. To accomplish this, Pashinyan created the "Veharan is great" movement which he leads himself, asserting he meets the very criteria he established.

On October 3, 2025, Archbishop Mikayel Ajapahyan was sentenced to two years in prison over an alleged coup plot. His lawyer calls the arrest "obviously illegal and unfounded."

On October 15, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan took another bold step in cracking down on the Church which he sees as political opponents. His government arrested and jailed Bishop Mkritich Poshyan, the third Bishop in the campaign of arrests of high level clergy and detained 12 priests in his diocese and are held in pre-trial detention along with 50% of Armenia's prison population.

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On October 26, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended a liturgy at the ancient Hovhannavank Monastery led by a priest who had been formally defrocked by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin just days before the Prime Minister's attendance. Many perceive this as a shameless act of state interference in church affairs as Pashinyan announced on the day of Father Aram's defrocking he would attend his liturgy. The event was attended by top government officials, strong police presence, and Pashinyan supporters. This gathering was denounced by clergy as a “soul destroying initiative” and a direct challenge to the Armenian Apostolic Church's independence. Pashinyan’s attendance at such a service has become a symbol of his growing intolerance toward the clergy.

On November 3, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan furthered escalated his campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church, by ordering the arrest of His Holiness Karekin II’s 68 year old brother, Gervorg Nersisyan, and his nephew, Hamvardzum Nersisyan. Both men are falsely accused of hooliganism and obstruction of pre-election campaigning, stemming from an alleged incident during local elections in Vagharshapat. Despite testimony and video evidence that disproves the claims, Judge Arman Babakanyan ordered Gevorg Nersisyan’s detention for one month, while the court is expected to review the motion for Hambardzum Nersisyan’s arrest.

On December 5, 2025, Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, Chancellor of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, was arrested in Yerevan on drug-related charges, accused by authorities of participating in the illegal sale of narcotic substances as part of a group allegedly acting in prior conspiracy. The arrest came after authorities detained him outside the Investigative Committee and a court ordered him held in two months of pre-trial detention amid the charges, which he has denied and his lawyer has criticized as baseless and politically motivated.

On December 9, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan shamelessly intensified his campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church by actively undermining its internal autonomy and fomenting divisions within the clergy. Pashinyan has been affirming rogue priests who openly defy Church canons and Catholicos Karekin II, while simultaneously attending (services) liturgies led by defrocked clergy, accompanied by significant security presence.

The clergy has described such actions by the Prime Minister as unprecedented state intrusion into sacred spaces, noting that the churches were locked, access was restricted, and traditional procedures were disrupted. Many view this strategy as a deliberate attack to weaken the Mother See by provoking internal disruptions and asserting political power over Christian life. This disturbing pattern marks a new danger point for escalation. Shifting from targeted arrests of clergy to even broader political efforts to erode the Church’s autonomy and reshape Armenia's religious landscape under direct government pressure.

On January 25, 2026, state authorities prevented Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan from receiving Holy Communion during a Divine Liturgy held at Izmirlian Medical Center, where he was being

held under detention. Prison service personnel reportedly obstructed the sacrament despite the service taking place in a controlled medical setting, and no compelling security justification was presented. Religious and legal observers have noted that denying a detained clergyman the ability to participate in worship and receive sacraments is a serious violation of freedom of religion, which is protected under international law even in detention. Many clergy and observers view this as another escalation between the Armenian state and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 3, 2026, the European Forum for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FOREF Europe) publicly condemned actions by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government toward the Armenian Apostolic Church, further describing such actions as a serious threat to freedom of religion and to the constitution of Armenia. FOREF Europe President Ján Figel warned that public calls for the removal of Catholicos Karekin II and other measures taken against clergy constituted unprecedented state interference in Church autonomy, raising major concerns about violations of Armenia's international human rights obligations. The organization also condemned escalating pressure on clergy, termination of military chaplaincy programs, and travel bans preventing bishops from attending a scheduled episcopal assembly abroad, developments that many outside observers view as a part of a very broad pattern of political pressure on the Church and major source of instability within Armenian society.

On February 5, 2026, a coalition of more than twenty Armenian human-rights and civil society organizations circulated an open letter addressed to the U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance ahead of his visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan. The letter urged the United States to prioritize the release of Armenian political prisoners, prisoners of war, and civilians held in Baku. The coalition highlighted that at least nineteen Armenians remain detained and ongoing judicial proceedings against them were heavily criticized by observers as failing to meet fair proceedings, warning that continued unlawful detention undermines trust in the peace process and prolongs suffering for the prisoners and their loved ones.

The organizations argued that resolving humanitarian issues such as the release of detainees is crucial for building confidence between Armenia and Azerbaijan and for achieving a lasting peace deal. To appeal to the U.S. administration the signatories argued they must use their diplomatic influence to help secure their return and address these ongoing unlawful detentions.

On February 7, 2026, The Armenian Center for Political Rights published an urgent report describing a further escalation in pressure on the Armenian Apostolic Church. Armenia's National Security Service pressured priests not to mention the name of Catholicos Karekin II during the Divine Liturgy. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan openly supported a faction of bishops calling for the Catholicos' removal. At the same time, Armenian courts have intervened and reinstated Bishop Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, who had been removed and later defrocked by the Catholicos, and authorities have initiated criminal proceedings against six bishops involved in the case, imposing travel bans that prevented them from attending a planned

episcopal assembly scheduled on February 16th in Austria. Many clergy and outside observers view these actions as a serious escalation, highlighting a new shift from political pressure and arrests to direct state interference in the religious practice of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 13, 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly warned against what he described as attempts to remove the Catholicosate of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the treasures of Holy Etchmiaszin from Armenia. Pashinyan, speaking at briefing, claimed that plans to convene a Council of Bishops outside the country were aimed at relocating the Catholicosate and using it as a political instrument against the Armenian state, and he warned that any such efforts would face strong resistance. The remarks came amid already rising tensions between state authorities and church leadership, and many observers viewed the statement as another sign of deepening conflict and mistrust between the government and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 14, 2026, representatives of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin strongly condemned the initiation of criminal proceedings against Catholicos Karekin II and the decision to impose travel bans on him from leaving Armenia to attend an episcopal assembly scheduled on February 16th in Austria. Clergy further described the situation as a grave national and spiritual crisis arguing that such actions taken against the head of the Armenian Apostolic church constituted an unprecedented intrusion into the Church and a profound escalation in tensions between State and Church leadership. Outside observers and various Church figures have warned that such developments like travel restrictions and legal pressure highlighted a further erosion in Church and State relations. Observers also noted serious concerns of interference in the religion and the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 15, 2026, Armenian law-enforcement authorities indicted Catholicos Karekin II, marking the first time in Armenia's post-Soviet history that the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church had been formally prosecuted. The charges followed escalating tensions between Nikol Pashinyan's Government and Church leadership, including disputes over the defrocking of a bishop, court intervention in internal church matters, and travel bans imposed on senior clergy that prevented them from attending a planned episcopal assembly abroad. Church representatives and legal observers described the indictment and restrictions as direct interference in the internal affairs of the Church and an unprecedented escalation in the conflict between state authorities and religious leadership.

The developments came amid broader political tensions, with critics accusing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of using law-enforcement measures to pressure the Church and prevent gatherings of senior clergy that could consolidate opposition to his campaign against Catholicos Karekin II. These events marked a significant turning point, shifting the conflict from public rhetoric and administrative pressure to formal criminal proceedings against the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Conclusion

The numerous actions explained above point to increasing repression of the Church's religious leaders, family members and anyone who stands up for them. They demonstrate a sustained strategy to intimidate and dismantle the church's independence, their voice and their influence. As one source noted, "Pashinyan and his counterpart Aliyev act in tandem, fearing the unifying power of the Armenian Apostolic church – the very institution that has held the Armenian nation together throughout history."

These authoritarian measures are understood to be a calculated destruction of the last bastion of resistance to Pashinyan and the Turkification of Armenia. Many believe that Armenia and the Church, which is Armenia's cultural and spiritual foundation, are on the brink of catastrophic extinction.

Armenia's state is now the greatest threat to its own official Christian church

by David A. Grigorian, opinion contributor - 01/12/26 1:30 PM ET



Grigor Yepremyan/PAN Photo via AP
Armenian Apostolic Church leader Catholicos Karekin II in 2021.

This Christmas, the world's oldest Christian church was under attack. The church in Armenia — a small country in the Caucasus and the first nation to adopt Christianity as its state religion in A.D. 301 — has been the object of a brutal campaign unleashed by the country's authoritarian ruler, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Recently, a striking headline — “In God's name, what is going on in Armenia?” — dominated page nine of the Financial Times as part of a full-page advertisement accusing the country's government of Christian persecution. It is an extraordinary accusation in a country where more than 90 percent are followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The country's constitution gives the church a formal role in the preservation of its national identity, although the official separation of state and religion allows it to function independently.

In short, the country's oldest and most respected institution, which has sustained the identity of this small country for centuries while it has fallen under the rule of Romans, Persians, Byzantines, Arabs, Mongols, Turks and Russians now finds itself on a collision course with its country's own government.

Pashinyan — a college dropout turned yellow journalist, whose sudden ascent to power in 2018 is widely attributed to Russia — makes no secret of the fact that he wants to overthrow the church's spiritual leader, the Catholicos Karekin II. His elaborate campaign of pushing out the church leadership has involved the arrest of three archbishops, a bishop, several clergy and supporters. The aim is to divert attention of the country away from its existential problems.

People from across Armenia are deeply dissatisfied with Pashinyan's leadership and believe that the nation is drifting in the wrong direction. Nearly three-quarters of citizens now struggle

with poverty and Pashinyan's approval rating was measured in the single digits last summer — one of the lowest ratings of any head of government in the world.

A significant factor in dissatisfaction with his governance is the sense that Pashinyan has been unwilling or unable to safeguard Armenia's national security and sovereignty during a period of exceptional geopolitical vulnerability. Armenia now confronts the coordinated pressure of Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan — three powers whose cooperation threatens the country's existence.

Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh in Armenian), its main strategic defense buffer, in 2020 and the subsequent exodus of its 120,000 Armenian population in 2023 remains a national trauma. Pashinyan has attempted simultaneously to deny responsibility and deflect blame, while many view the church's firm stance on this tragedy as a principal catalyst for his feud with the clergy. The church has vigorously defended the rights of the refugees and highlighted Pashinyan's culpability for this national humiliation.

Despite his highly unpopular attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church and his low approval rating, Pashinyan is laying the groundwork for an attempt to stay in power for another five years. Citing widespread abuse of administrative resources and government crackdowns on its critics, Transparency International's Anti-Corruption Center stated in a recent report that these problems are calling into question the freedom and fairness of this year's Armenian parliamentary elections.

In a recent interview, one of Armenia's most prominent human rights advocates warned of escalating repression by the regime ahead of the June 2026 elections. As a measure of control over the judiciary by Pashinyan, she mentioned the publication, one day prior to the court's decision, of a court verdict extending the pre-trial detention of church benefactor and leading businessman Samvel Karapetyan, on a website owned by the Pashinyan family.

Ironically, with their blind and unconditional support of Pashinyan's anti-Christian and defeatist policies on Artsakh and his corruption record, EU member states are pushing the people of Armenia closer to Russia. By crushing dissent inside the country and cozying up to Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping, Pashinyan has shown time and time again that he is not a reliable partner for the West.

His visit to China, with which he recently signed a strategic partnership agreement, is a testament to that, coming only days after the historic Aug. 8 peace deal he had pre-signed in the White House. The Trump administration should not fall for Pashinyan's continuous flip-flopping.

This would be a good time for the Trump administration to extend a helping hand to Armenia and Armenian Americans, most of whom remain faithful followers of Christian values and the Armenian church. A strong U.S. statement denouncing Pashinyan's actions against the Armenian Apostolic Church would go a long way in helping the people of Armenia remove him from power and force new elections.

Conversely, allowing Pashinyan to keep attacking the church and dividing his country risks jeopardizing the deal that the Trump administration worked so hard to seal. It might even backfire during midterm elections in November 2026.

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Statement on the Suppression of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Historical Continuities of Identity Erasure within Victim Groups

The Lemkin Institute
December 28, 2025



The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention expresses deep concern over the ongoing state repression against the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia, including the arrests and intimidation of clergy, the targeting of ecclesiastical institutions, and the state's increasing use of the legal system to silence religious leadership. These developments represent a dangerous challenge to Armenia's democratic institutions as well as an

encroachment on the core institutions of Armenian identity. They are an unfortunate example of how genocidal processes can become internalized during periods of threat.

Tensions between the Armenian government and the Armenian Apostolic Church were exacerbated by education reforms in 2023, which eliminated the History of the Armenian Church as a standalone mandatory subject and incorporated it into broader, generalized curricula. More recently, the state's recent attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church coincided with an international conference organized by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin together with the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church of Switzerland. The conference was held in Bern, Switzerland from May 26 to 28, 2025, with the goal of addressing the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in the historically Armenian region of Artsakh, which was invaded and fully depopulated by Azerbaijan in September 2023.

This conference was criticized by Azerbaijan's spiritual leader Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, who is close to the Azerbaijani government, for allegedly inciting Armenians "to fight to the death" by advocating for the integrity of Armenian cultural heritage.

A couple of weeks later, in late June, the Armenian authorities detained two archbishops of the Armenian Apostolic church, Bagrat Galstanyan and Michael Ajapahyan, and charged them with attempting to overthrow the government and destabilize the state. These arrests were followed by detentions of several priests as part of a widening investigation into clergy accused of political interference and corruption.

In October 2025, Armenian authorities arrested Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan, head of the Aragatsotn Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. On December 4 2025, Armenian authorities detained the third Armenian Archbishop, Arshak Khachatryan. Two weeks later, on December 18, a protest was initiated by a small number of archbishops and bishops in the

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Armenian Apostolic Church's administrative headquarters, calling for the removal of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II. Although Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan did not appear at the protest, he expressed his approval through a morning briefing where he claimed that the Catholicos has links to unnamed foreign intelligence services. Combined with the Prime Minister's published plans to remove Catholicos Karekin II, this protest appears to have been a tactic employed by the Pashinyan Administration to undermine the independence of the Armenian clergy and usurp its power.

While the government claims its actions are based on evidence of criminal wrongdoing, Church leaders have denounced the arrests as politically motivated, calling them an attack on religious freedom and a deliberate effort to weaken the Church.

Taken together, these developments, especially the detentions of individual members of the senior clergy, raise serious concerns about the weakening of rule-of-law safeguards. The state has produced no evidence to substantiate the charges against clergy members. At the same time, documented conduct by state authorities, including efforts to influence religious services, exert pressure on clerical leadership, and intervene in the Church's internal governance, has drawn strong criticism from civic groups and human rights organizations as exceeding lawful state authority and undermining constitutional principles of church-state separation.

The combination of selective prosecutions, limited transparency, and direct state intervention in religious affairs raises serious concerns that legal mechanisms are being used not to uphold the law but to undermine the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Moreover, the Armenian government's recent decision to remove Shoghakat television channel (a media outlet established by and historically co-financed by the Armenian Apostolic Church) from the national digital package represents a further step in the ongoing efforts to marginalize the Church. Shoghakat now no longer has public broadcaster status. While the government frames this decision as a mere technical adjustment grounded in a new law, its effect is the selective removal of the Church's key platform for cultural and spiritual expression—no other channel has been impacted by the law.

Due to the selective nature of the legislative change, the decision raises serious concerns under Article 18.1 of the Constitution, which recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church with an exclusive historical mission in spiritual life, development of national culture, and national identity. By depriving the Church of its primary public platform, the decision also undermines Article 42.2, which guarantees freedom of the press and requires the state to ensure that public broadcasters provide diverse informational, educational, and cultural programming. More broadly, the removal of this distinct religious and cultural voice risks undermining the principle of political and ideological pluralism protected by Article 8 of the Constitution, thereby calling into question the state's commitment to a democratic and pluralistic society. The crackdown comes amid heightened tensions over Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's handling of relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, which Church leaders have criticized.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has for centuries served as the spiritual, cultural, and historical foundation of the Armenian people. From the fourth century, when Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion, the Church has been the principal guardian of Armenian continuity, preserving language, culture, and memory during centuries of foreign domination. Its survival through periods of colonization, genocide, and exile has long symbolized the endurance of the Armenian nation itself.

The current wave of repression echoes a familiar and tragic historical pattern deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Armenian people. During the Armenian Genocide (1915–1923), the Ottoman authorities did not merely seek to murder or remove a population; they aimed to obliterate an entire civilization by severing its identity from its moral and spiritual core. The first phase of the genocide began with the systematic targeting of Armenian intellectuals, clergy, and community leaders, a deliberate strategy to decapitate the nation's leadership and erase the voices that could organize resistance or preserve cultural cohesion.

The Ottoman leadership understood that Armenian Christianity was not merely a religion but the vessel of Armenian national identity, a center of education, and a vehicle for collective memory. Ottoman assaults on the Church were not collateral damage; they were the deliberate destruction of a people's spiritual infrastructure. By destroying the Church, Ottoman leaders sought to dismantle the very mechanism that had enabled the Armenian identity to survive centuries of imperial domination and cultural suppression.

This calculated campaign against Armenian Christianity reveals that genocide operates not only through physical annihilation but also through cultural and spiritual identity erasure. The eradication of the Church as the moral compass and unifying institution of the nation was central to the genocidal logic. It sought to produce a population stripped of its historical consciousness, its sacred geography, and its communal bonds. The scars of this destruction persist today as thousands of Armenian religious monuments remain in ruins or under threat in Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The ideological continuity is clear. Both then and now, the Apostolic Church, as a moral and social institution capable of unifying people beyond political lines, is perceived by those in power as a potential threat to state control.

Historically, the Turkish state viewed Christianity as the heart of Armenian distinctiveness and thus as an obstacle to national homogenization. Today, the Armenian Apostolic Church is being framed by some political actors in Armenia as a competing power center, a vestige of the old order, or a destabilizing force. Such rhetoric, combined with the use of legal instruments to dismantle or intimidate the clergy, reflects a deeply troubling attempt to weaken the Church's role as a moral authority and protector of national identity.

These developments reflect multiple early warning indicators of identity-based repression: the criminalization of moral authorities, the framing of religious leadership as a national security threat, the delegitimization of institutions that embody collective memory, and the use of the law

to weaken institutions outside state control. History shows that such patterns often manifest before broader campaigns to divide society and erase cultural identity.

Compounding this crisis is Armenia's current geopolitical trajectory. In light of recent peace talks and normalization efforts with Turkey, as well as the growing diplomatic influence of Azerbaijan, Armenia's internal strategy toward its main religious institution appears increasingly aligned, intentionally or otherwise, with the long-term goals of these neighboring states. The marginalization of the Apostolic Church, the very institution that has historically embodied national resilience, mirrors the strategies historically used by Ankara and now Baku to undermine Armenian identity and cohesion. If unchecked, this alignment risks eroding the moral and cultural foundations that have safeguarded Armenian survival for centuries, effectively advancing the objectives of powers that have sought to weaken Armenia's independence and unity.

While the current situation cannot be equated with the genocidal violence of 1915, the parallels in logic and method must be recognized. Early warning signs of identity-based repression often begin with efforts to delegitimize and criminalize institutions that embody collective memory and moral resistance. The systematic discrediting of the Church, the arrests of priests, and the state's growing hostility toward religious expression create a hostile environment that endangers not only freedom of religion but also the cultural and existential security of the Armenian people.

The Lemkin Institute calls on the Armenian government to immediately cease all politically motivated actions against the clergy and to reaffirm its commitment to the constitutional principles of religious freedom and pluralism. The Institute further urges international observers and human rights organizations to monitor developments in Armenia closely, recognizing that the erosion of religious institutions has historically preceded broader campaigns of societal fragmentation and identity erasure.

The strength of Armenia's democracy and sovereignty rests not in the suppression of its moral institutions, but in their protection. A nation that has survived genocide cannot afford to repeat, in any form, the mechanisms of its historical destruction.¹

¹ This material is distributed by Sovereign Global Solutions on behalf of National Democratic Alliance of Armenia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

February 2, 2026

Mr. Vice President,

I greet you in the name of our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

I do so from Yerevan Kentron Prison in Armenia, as a political prisoner of the regime of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Using the time-honored methods of his communist predecessors, Pashinyan has ordered his security apparatus to spy on me, to falsify evidence, to interrogate me, to slander me and incarcerate me.

Why? The answer is simple. I have spoken uncomfortable truth to power on the byways and highways of Armenia, all in the non-violent spirit of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

In doing so, I have exercised my fundamental human right to bring my Christian faith and testimony into the public arena, in the hope that the Armenian nation and state remain true to their historic Christian tradition at a time of national crisis.

I am not alone. Others are similarly incarcerated by the Pashinyan regime, and for much the same reason. Some are my brothers in the clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Archbishop Mikael Ajapajyan, Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan and Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan.

There is also the lay patron of the Church, Samvel Karapetyan. Not only has he been imprisoned, but his company has been nationalized by the state, Soviet-style.

Prime Minister Pashinyan has imprisoned us as part of his campaign to assert state power over the Armenian Apostolic Church. Violating the constitution and all principles of religious freedom, he is demanding that the Catholicos, the head of the worldwide Armenian church, be replaced by someone under his influence.

The reason is simple: the church is defending our flock. We are speaking for the right of Armenians from Artsakh to return to their homes, after they were ethnically cleansed by Azerbaijan two years ago. We are demanding the

return of our hostages from Azerbaijan. We are speaking out against the abandonment of our homeland and its sovereignty to Azerbaijan.

For this, both Prime Minister Pashinyan and the Azerbaijani government have labeled the church “an obstacle to peace.”

But the Apostolic Armenian Church is simply doing what it has done for 1,700 years: safeguarding the Armenian nation, the world’s first Christian nation. For most of those 1,700 years, the church was the only national institution which bound Armenians together.

The church is under attack today precisely because it protects Armenian identity. An effort is underway to strip Armenia of its Christian heritage and integrate it into the Turkic, Islamic world of Turkey and Azerbaijan as an economic and military vassal.

You, Mr. Vice President, have rightly warned the EU that it has been committing civilizational suicide by giving up Europe’s Christian identity and opening its borders to those who do not share the values rooted in Europe’s Judeo-Christian tradition.

This is precisely what the Armenian Prime Minister is engineering in Armenia.

Throughout its history, there have always been Armenians, even churchmen, who became the instruments of the persecutors of the Church. They have often done so in the name of peace.

“They say, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” Such was the case in the time of the Prophet Jeremiah. Such is the case in Armenia today.

President Trump has invested a great deal of his time and political capital to make peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But there can be no peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan if the Armenian nation ceases to exist. If the Armenian church is successfully neutralized, nothing less than that will be at stake.

I know that you will soon travel to Armenia and to Azerbaijan. You will contribute greatly a genuinely historic, lasting peace if you: 1) secure release of the Armenian Christian political prisoners held in Yerevan and Baku, and 2) obtain guarantees for the safe return, with fundamental

human rights intact, of the 150,000 Armenian Christians who were forced out of their homes in Nagorno Karabakh.

As you depart on your important mission to Armenia and Azerbaijan, please keep in mind the words of the Prophet Isaiah, which were read by our Lord at the onset of his earthly ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18).

May you be animated by this Spirit while engaging with the authorities in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Sincerely, *with love and prayer*

Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan





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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE

Protecting Armenia's Sovereignty, Identity, and Heritage

February 26th, 2026
2:00 - 3:00 PM

2075 Rayburn HOB
Refreshments will be served

We invite you to an important briefing with world-renowned experts to discuss the dangerous rise of authoritarian policies within Armenia at the hands of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Speakers will address the repression of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, media and journalists, the growth of a Soviet style security apparatus which is arresting and detaining those who express opposition. This has led to a bloated and abusive prison system, the erosion of rule of law by a corrupt judiciary including the illegal detainment and imprisonment of the leadership's political adversaries. If political repression, international religious freedom and human rights violations are left unchecked, instability will threaten Armenia's very existence.



FEATURED SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Amb. Alberto Fernandez

*Vice President of the
Middle East Media
Research Institute*

Dr. Ján Figel'

*Former Special Envoy for Promotion
of Freedom of Religion or Belief
Outside the European Union*

Dr. John Eibner

*International President of
Christian Solidarity
International*

RSVP to LCirone@sovereignglobalsolutions.com

This event is organized by Sovereign Global Solutions, LLC on behalf of the National Democratic Alliance for Armenia

Visiting an Armenian Archbishop in Prison

Joel Veldkamp

On February 3, I stood in a poorly lit meeting room in the National Security Services building in Yerevan, Armenia, as Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan prayed a blessing over me and my colleagues—a Catholic priest, a Swiss MP, and the president of [Christian Solidarity International](#).

Then a group of friendly guards came to take the archbishop back to his cell.

Armenia is the last country where I expected to visit an archbishop in prison. But the archbishop reminded us that for clergy from the Armenian Apostolic Church, he is far from exceptional. His ecclesiastical namesake, Archbishop Bagrat Vardazaryan, was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities in the very same building and executed in its basement.

When we left the prison, we took with us a [letter](#) the archbishop wrote to Vice President JD Vance, who visited Armenia yesterday. In the letter, the archbishop [told](#) the vice president that the Church is “simply doing what it has done for 1,700 years: safeguarding the Armenian nation, the world’s first Christian nation.”

Archbishop Bagrat was arrested on June 25. He was charged with plotting a coup, based on audio recordings that were later shown to have been [falsified](#). Since then, three other bishops have been arrested. Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan is serving a two-year sentence for a charge that Armenia’s public prosecutor had previously rejected as groundless. Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan is in pretrial detention on charges of “coercing political activity.” Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan is held on charges of planting a marijuana joint on a protestor in 2018. The marijuana in question was purportedly held in an evidence locker for the past few years, but has now gone [missing](#).

The absurdity of the charges shows that they are beside the point. As Stalin’s executioner Beria said, “Show me the man, I’ll show you the crime.”

Armenia’s prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, has made the real point crystal clear. He is publicly demanding that the Catholicos of All Armenians, the head of the worldwide Armenian Apostolic Church, resign and be replaced by someone picked by a state-appointed committee. From a religious freedom and ecclesiastical perspective, it is as absurd as if Giorgia Meloni were demanding the resignation of Pope Leo XIV.

To neutralize the Church, Pashinyan has resorted to using the old Soviet playbook. Pashinyan’s government has imprisoned the Church’s leading benefactor, Samvel Karapetyan, and begun nationalizing his businesses. He has organized a group of renegade bishops who call for “reforming” the Church, much as the Bolsheviks used a group of [“free Church”](#) clerics to foment a schism in the 1920s.

This new wave of persecution has a context. In 2020, Armenia lost a war to its neighbor Azerbaijan, which was backed by its powerful ally Turkey. Three years later, Azerbaijan attacked Nagorno Karabakh (or Artsakh), a land where Armenians have been living for thousands of years. All 120,000 Armenian Christians living there were forced to flee. In the aftermath, the European Union and the United States have been pushing Armenia toward peace on Azerbaijan’s terms, and toward “economic integration” with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The West's strategy for the region is to establish an economic corridor connecting Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which would allow Europe to receive oil and gas from Central Asia and goods from China. Such an arrangement risks making Armenia permanently vulnerable and economically dependent on the powers that carried out the Armenian Genocide and the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh.

With admittedly few good choices before him, Pashinyan has tried to make this vision his own. Pashinyan seeks to re-found the Republic of Armenia based on a new ideology he calls "Real Armenia."

Armenia was founded as a state dedicated to preserving the Armenian people in the wake of the Armenian Genocide. But Real Armenia is a Western-facing state, focused on delivering economic gains for the people who live there. For Pashinyan, the memory of the genocide, the lost homelands in Karabakh and Anatolia, and even the worldwide Armenian diaspora are distractions from "Real Armenia."

The Armenian Church has openly challenged the prime minister's agenda. In May 2024, the Armenian government unilaterally conceded some territories in Tavush province, where Archbishop Bagrat has his diocese, to Azerbaijan. The archbishop responded by organizing a protest march from Tavush to Yerevan. This march grew into a political [movement](#) that named the archbishop a candidate for prime minister. (The Catholicos granted him leave from his ecclesiastical duties.)

But the arrests did not begin until a year later, when the Catholicos spoke at a conference organized by the World Council of Churches in Switzerland. In his [speech](#), he demanded that the Armenian refugees from Artsakh be allowed to return to their homeland. Within days, the prime minister began attacking the Catholicos. A few weeks later, Archbishop Bagrat was arrested.

Westerners may balk at the thought of archbishops running for prime minister, or a Church trying to shape foreign policy. For the Armenian clergymen we have spoken to—both behind bars and not—there is no contradiction. They are shepherds defending their endangered flock. "The church cannot stand by and watch while this happens," the archbishop told us. "That's why I'm in here."

In his letter, Archbishop Bagrat points out that Vice President Vance has "warned the EU that it has been committing civilizational suicide by giving up Europe's Christian identity." "This is precisely what the Armenian Prime Minister is engineering in Armenia," he writes.

One may or may not share the archbishop's assessment. But this crisis poses an inescapable question to Western Christians, especially those of us who believe that Christianity should play a role in politics and society in our own countries. How will we respond to an attempt by a secular state—a U.S. ally—to break one of the oldest churches in the world?

As our visit ended, we asked Archbishop Bagrat if he would be happy for other Christian leaders to visit him in prison. He responded with enthusiasm: "Yes! Come!"

Image by Anthony Pizzoferrato via Getty Images

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church May 2025- February 2026

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan unleashed an unholy attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church, the foundation of the first Christian nation that was established in 301 A.D. This unprecedented assault, by the government, on the country's cornerstone and guardian of Christianity, is a calculated attempt to undermine the very foundation of Armenian heritage, culture and unity. To the Armenians, *it is eerily reminiscent of Soviet Era repression*. The prime minister's war vastly widened the gap between his government and the Armenian people, resulting in an 8.2% approval rating.

Timeline of Repression

On May 26, 2025, The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, in cooperation with the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church of Switzerland, held an international conference in Bern, Switzerland. Catholicos Karekin II, the titular head of the Armenian Apostolic Church located at the Mother See in Etchmiadzin addressed the preservation of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Artsakh following Azerbaijan's September 2023 invasion and ethnic cleansing of the region and other matters, such as the prisoners in Baku. The conference drew international attention to the destruction of Armenian Christian monuments and the broader cultural erasure underway in historically Armenian territories, prompting criticism from Azerbaijani religious leadership shortly after.

On May 30, 2025, Prime Minister Pashinyan began posting a series of abusive and vulgar statements against the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II, calling for his forced removal.

Following his public verbal attacks, PM Pashinyan dramatically escalated his crackdown, arresting, detaining and imprisoning high ranking archbishops and numerous clergy.

On June 11, 2025, Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the spiritual leader of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Office, sent a formal letter to the World Council of Churches condemning the Bern conference. In the letter, he accused the Armenian Apostolic Church of inciting Armenians to "fight until death" through its advocacy for the protection of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Artsakh. remarks were widely interpreted by observers as reflecting hostility toward the continued institutional presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church and its efforts to safeguard Armenian identity in the region.

On June 18, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government arrested Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, owner of the Electric Networks of Armenia "ENA", moments after Karapetyan publicly condemned the government's escalating attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church. Shortly after the arrest, Pashinyan called to nationalize the country's

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Electrical Network Grids. This act is viewed as a politically motivated attack rather than an economic reform. On July 23, 2025, Karapetyan won an international arbitration case on behalf of ENA, which only temporarily stymied Pashinyan's nationalization plans, yet he still remains imprisoned without release. The case of Samvel Karapetyan has become a telling story of Armenia's recent persecution campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church and internal democratic struggles — all by one man's decision to simply stand for his faith and Church.

On June 25, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan arrested alongside 13 others over an alleged coup plot. This act is seen as retaliation against the Armenian Apostolic Church as the Church has been largely outspoken against Pashinyan's concessions of land and lack of demanding justice for the Armenian people. Galstanyan is responsible for organizing and leading protests calling for Pashinyan's resignation in 2023 after 4 border towns had been conceded to Azerbaijan.

On June 28, 2025, Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan was arrested also over the alleged coup plot. He is now being held in pre-trial detention for two months and his lawyer Ara Zohrabyan calls the decision "obviously illegal and unfounded."

On July 20, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called for the resignation of the Catholicos on Facebook, claiming it is time to free Veharan, referring to the Catholicos by his lay name in an attempt to demoralize the leader of the Church and his followers. Pashinyan planned and executed a gathering in Etchmiadzin, the Mother See of the Armenian Apostolic Church, to place pressure on the Catholicos, saying "Be ready."

The same day, The Armenian Apostolic Church released a statement condemning Pashinyan's actions against the Catholicos. They affirm they will not waver in their mission and emphasize the failure of Pashinyan as leader of the country, leaving them vulnerable to external political forces.

On July 23, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan posted on Facebook the need for the purification of the Church and outlined the standards the new leader should meet. To accomplish this, Pashinyan created the "Veharan is great" movement which he leads himself, asserting he meets the very criteria he established.

On October 3, 2025, Archbishop Mikayel Ajapahyan was sentenced to two years in prison over an alleged coup plot. His lawyer calls the arrest "obviously illegal and unfounded."

On October 15, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan took another bold step in cracking down on the Church which he sees as political opponents. His government arrested and jailed Bishop Mkritich Poshyan, the third Bishop in the campaign of arrests of high level clergy and detained 12 priests in his diocese and are held in pre-trial detention along with 50% of Armenia's prison population.

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On October 26, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended a liturgy at the ancient Hovhannavank Monastery led by a priest who had been formally defrocked by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin just days before the Prime Minister's attendance. Many perceive this as a shameless act of state interference in church affairs as Pashinyan announced on the day of Father Aram's defrocking he would attend his liturgy. The event was attended by top government officials, strong police presence, and Pashinyan supporters. This gathering was denounced by clergy as a “soul destroying initiative” and a direct challenge to the Armenian Apostolic Church's independence. Pashinyan’s attendance at such a service has become a symbol of his growing intolerance toward the clergy.

On November 3, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan furthered escalated his campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church, by ordering the arrest of His Holiness Karekin II’s 68 year old brother, Gervorg Nersisyan, and his nephew, Hamvardzum Nersisyan. Both men are falsely accused of hooliganism and obstruction of pre-election campaigning, stemming from an alleged incident during local elections in Vagharshapat. Despite testimony and video evidence that disproves the claims, Judge Arman Babakanyan ordered Gevorg Nersisyan’s detention for one month, while the court is expected to review the motion for Hambardzum Nersisyan’s arrest.

On December 5, 2025, Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, Chancellor of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, was arrested in Yerevan on drug-related charges, accused by authorities of participating in the illegal sale of narcotic substances as part of a group allegedly acting in prior conspiracy. The arrest came after authorities detained him outside the Investigative Committee and a court ordered him held in two months of pre-trial detention amid the charges, which he has denied and his lawyer has criticized as baseless and politically motivated.

On December 9, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan shamelessly intensified his campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church by actively undermining its internal autonomy and fomenting divisions within the clergy. Pashinyan has been affirming rogue priests who openly defy Church canons and Catholicos Karekin II, while simultaneously attending (services) liturgies led by defrocked clergy, accompanied by significant security presence.

The clergy has described such actions by the Prime Minister as unprecedented state intrusion into sacred spaces, noting that the churches were locked, access was restricted, and traditional procedures were disrupted. Many view this strategy as a deliberate attack to weaken the Mother See by provoking internal disruptions and asserting political power over Christian life. This disturbing pattern marks a new danger point for escalation. Shifting from targeted arrests of clergy to even broader political efforts to erode the Church’s autonomy and reshape Armenia's religious landscape under direct government pressure.

On January 25, 2026, state authorities prevented Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan from receiving Holy Communion during a Divine Liturgy held at Izmirlian Medical Center, where he was being

held under detention. Prison service personnel reportedly obstructed the sacrament despite the service taking place in a controlled medical setting, and no compelling security justification was presented. Religious and legal observers have noted that denying a detained clergyman the ability to participate in worship and receive sacraments is a serious violation of freedom of religion, which is protected under international law even in detention. Many clergy and observers view this as another escalation between the Armenian state and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 3, 2026, the European Forum for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FOREF Europe) publicly condemned actions by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government toward the Armenian Apostolic Church, further describing such actions as a serious threat to freedom of religion and to the constitution of Armenia. FOREF Europe President Ján Figel warned that public calls for the removal of Catholicos Karekin II and other measures taken against clergy constituted unprecedented state interference in Church autonomy, raising major concerns about violations of Armenia's international human rights obligations. The organization also condemned escalating pressure on clergy, termination of military chaplaincy programs, and travel bans preventing bishops from attending a scheduled episcopal assembly abroad, developments that many outside observers view as a part of a very broad pattern of political pressure on the Church and major source of instability within Armenian society.

On February 5, 2026, a coalition of more than twenty Armenian human-rights and civil society organizations circulated an open letter addressed to the U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance ahead of his visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan. The letter urged the United States to prioritize the release of Armenian political prisoners, prisoners of war, and civilians held in Baku. The coalition highlighted that at least nineteen Armenians remain detained and ongoing judicial proceedings against them were heavily criticized by observers as failing to meet fair proceedings, warning that continued unlawful detention undermines trust in the peace process and prolongs suffering for the prisoners and their loved ones.

The organizations argued that resolving humanitarian issues such as the release of detainees is crucial for building confidence between Armenia and Azerbaijan and for achieving a lasting peace deal. To appeal to the U.S. administration the signatories argued they must use their diplomatic influence to help secure their return and address these ongoing unlawful detentions.

On February 7, 2026, The Armenian Center for Political Rights published an urgent report describing a further escalation in pressure on the Armenian Apostolic Church. Armenia's National Security Service pressured priests not to mention the name of Catholicos Karekin II during the Divine Liturgy. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan openly supported a faction of bishops calling for the Catholicos' removal. At the same time, Armenian courts have intervened and reinstated Bishop Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, who had been removed and later defrocked by the Catholicos, and authorities have initiated criminal proceedings against six bishops involved in the case, imposing travel bans that prevented them from attending a planned

episcopal assembly scheduled on February 16th in Austria. Many clergy and outside observers view these actions as a serious escalation, highlighting a new shift from political pressure and arrests to direct state interference in the religious practice of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 13, 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly warned against what he described as attempts to remove the Catholicosate of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the treasures of Holy Etchmiaszin from Armenia. Pashinyan, speaking at briefing, claimed that plans to convene a Council of Bishops outside the country were aimed at relocating the Catholicosate and using it as a political instrument against the Armenian state, and he warned that any such efforts would face strong resistance. The remarks came amid already rising tensions between state authorities and church leadership, and many observers viewed the statement as another sign of deepening conflict and mistrust between the government and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 14, 2026, representatives of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin strongly condemned the initiation of criminal proceedings against Catholicos Karekin II and the decision to impose travel bans on him from leaving Armenia to attend an episcopal assembly scheduled on February 16th in Austria. Clergy further described the situation as a grave national and spiritual crisis arguing that such actions taken against the head of the Armenian Apostolic church constituted an unprecedented intrusion into the Church and a profound escalation in tensions between State and Church leadership. Outside observers and various Church figures have warned that such developments like travel restrictions and legal pressure highlighted a further erosion in Church and State relations. Observers also noted serious concerns of interference in the religion and the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 15, 2026, Armenian law-enforcement authorities indicted Catholicos Karekin II, marking the first time in Armenia's post-Soviet history that the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church had been formally prosecuted. The charges followed escalating tensions between Nikol Pashinyan's Government and Church leadership, including disputes over the defrocking of a bishop, court intervention in internal church matters, and travel bans imposed on senior clergy that prevented them from attending a planned episcopal assembly abroad. Church representatives and legal observers described the indictment and restrictions as direct interference in the internal affairs of the Church and an unprecedented escalation in the conflict between state authorities and religious leadership.

The developments came amid broader political tensions, with critics accusing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of using law-enforcement measures to pressure the Church and prevent gatherings of senior clergy that could consolidate opposition to his campaign against Catholicos Karekin II. These events marked a significant turning point, shifting the conflict from public rhetoric and administrative pressure to formal criminal proceedings against the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Conclusion

The numerous actions explained above point to increasing repression of the Church's religious leaders, family members and anyone who stands up for them. They demonstrate a sustained strategy to intimidate and dismantle the church's independence, their voice and their influence. As one source noted, "Pashinyan and his counterpart Aliyev act in tandem, fearing the unifying power of the Armenian Apostolic church – the very institution that has held the Armenian nation together throughout history."

These authoritarian measures are understood to be a calculated destruction of the last bastion of resistance to Pashinyan and the Turkification of Armenia. Many believe that Armenia and the Church, which is Armenia's cultural and spiritual foundation, are on the brink of catastrophic extinction.

Civil Society Groups and Public Figures Condemn Government Actions Undermining Church Freedom and Autonomy

10.12.2025 - Factor TV News



A number of civil society organizations and public figures have issued a statement condemning government actions that, according to the signatories, undermine the autonomy of the Church.

Below is the full text of the statement:

We, the undersigned civil society organisations and individuals, express our deep concern regarding the alarming developments that have recently taken place in Armenia. Today, we are witnessing

violations of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the principle of the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms, and the independence of the judiciary, as well as a gross breach of the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (the Church), a right protected by the Constitution and international conventions.

Representatives of Armenia's executive and legislative branches continue to interfere with the autonomy and freedom of the Church's activities, in violation of the Constitution and the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations, international norms on freedom of religion or belief, and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (<https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/autonomy-of-religious-organisations>). The authorities' unlawful and unacceptable attempts to influence the formation of ecclesiastical governance bodies and internal decision-making processes are deeply concerning. Equally unacceptable are attempts to arbitrarily edit or alter the Church's centuries-old traditions, rites, sacraments, canonical order, and other domains of ecclesial life.

We strongly condemn the exertion of pressure on Church clergy by state security bodies of the Republic of Armenia, including the National Security Service (<https://youtu.be/gH5JgOJEKG8>). Such conduct constitutes an abuse of official power and an impermissible deviation from the aims and functions of the National Security Service.

We are also concerned by the selective use of criminal justice tools against clergy, for the purpose of exerting unlawful and undue influence, including the use of pre-trial detention as a punitive measure and as a means of compelling behaviour desired by public authorities.

It is unacceptable that public officials at the highest political level continue to promote rhetoric targeting clergy with hate speech and insults, as well as unlawfully disseminating personal

information, using both public and private information channels. We believe that such actions may severely undermine the country's already fragile social cohesion, leading to deeper polarisation and intolerance.

We firmly believe that any reform or renewal within the Church must take place inside the Church itself, grounded in the principles of freedom and autonomy of religious organisation, in accordance with the Constitution and Armenia's international legal obligations, without any discrimination and on an equal footing with other religious organisations.

In view of the above, we reiterate our demands:

- **From representatives of public authorities, and especially from Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan:** to refrain from any actions that violate the RA Constitution, domestic laws, or Armenia's international legal obligations; to respect the Church's freedom and autonomy; and to cease exerting unlawful influence on judicial bodies and law-enforcement agencies.
- **From President Vahagn Khachaturyan:** to fulfil his function of overseeing adherence to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia.
- **From public officials:** to exercise restraint in their public statements; to observe the ethical and behavioural standards required of public office-holders; and to refrain from speech that disseminates hate, intolerance, discrimination, or insult.
- **From judges:** to exercise their powers independently, in compliance with the Constitution and human rights standards, including the right to liberty and the principle that pre-trial detention must be applied only as an exceptional measure.
- **From the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor's Office:** to ensure independent and effective investigations, guided solely by the requirements of the Constitution and the law; and to safeguard the rights of all individuals involved in proceedings, including respect for the presumption of innocence.
- **From the Police and the National Security Service:** to carry out their functions independently and strictly in accordance with the demands of the Constitution and the law; and to refrain from the disproportionate and unnecessary use of force or from violating individuals' rights.

Organisations:

Protection of Rights Without Borders NGO
Regional Centre for Democracy and Security
Yerevan Press Club
Armenian Progressive Youth NGO
Public Journalism Club
Journalists for Human Rights NGO
Centre for Law and Freedom NGO
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Armenian Committee
Helsinki Association Human Rights NGO
Media Initiatives Centre

Yezidi Centre for Human Rights
Centre for Community Mobilization and Support NGO

Individuals:

Gayane Shagoyan, Cultural Anthropologist
Isabella Sargsyan, International Expert on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Zaruhi Hovhannisyan, Human Rights Defender, New Justice Culture NGO
Armen Martirosyan, Publisher
Tigran Paskevichyan, Journalist–Publicist
Sarhat Petrosyan, Architect–Urban Planner
Inga Harutyunyan, Psychologist, Social Protection Specialist
Apres Zohrabyan, Orientalist
Aram Khanalanyan, Architect–Theorist
Arsen Hakobyan, Cultural Anthropologist
Maria Sadoyan, Translator
Mushegh Hovsepyan, Human Rights Defender
Nune Torosyan, Teacher, Translator, Editor
Ruben Malayan, Calligrapher, Lecturer
Vardan Harutyunyan, Human Rights Defender
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¹ This material is distributed by Sovereign Global Solutions on behalf of National Democratic Alliance of Armenia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

Armenia's state is now the greatest threat to its own official Christian church

by David A. Grigorian, opinion contributor - 01/12/26 1:30 PM ET



Grigor Yepremyan/PAN Photo via AP
Armenian Apostolic Church leader Catholicos Karekin II in 2021.

This Christmas, the world's oldest Christian church was under attack. The church in Armenia — a small country in the Caucasus and the first nation to adopt Christianity as its state religion in A.D. 301 — has been the object of a brutal campaign unleashed by the country's authoritarian ruler, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Recently, a striking headline — “In God's name, what is going on in Armenia?” — dominated page nine of the Financial Times as part of a full-page advertisement accusing the country's government of Christian persecution. It is an extraordinary accusation in a country where more than 90 percent are followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The country's constitution gives the church a formal role in the preservation of its national identity, although the official separation of state and religion allows it to function independently.

In short, the country's oldest and most respected institution, which has sustained the identity of this small country for centuries while it has fallen under the rule of Romans, Persians, Byzantines, Arabs, Mongols, Turks and Russians now finds itself on a collision course with its country's own government.

Pashinyan — a college dropout turned yellow journalist, whose sudden ascent to power in 2018 is widely attributed to Russia — makes no secret of the fact that he wants to overthrow the church's spiritual leader, the Catholicos Karekin II. His elaborate campaign of pushing out the church leadership has involved the arrest of three archbishops, a bishop, several clergy and supporters. The aim is to divert attention of the country away from its existential problems.

People from across Armenia are deeply dissatisfied with Pashinyan's leadership and believe that the nation is drifting in the wrong direction. Nearly three-quarters of citizens now struggle

with poverty and Pashinyan's approval rating was measured in the single digits last summer — one of the lowest ratings of any head of government in the world.

A significant factor in dissatisfaction with his governance is the sense that Pashinyan has been unwilling or unable to safeguard Armenia's national security and sovereignty during a period of exceptional geopolitical vulnerability. Armenia now confronts the coordinated pressure of Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan — three powers whose cooperation threatens the country's existence.

Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh in Armenian), its main strategic defense buffer, in 2020 and the subsequent exodus of its 120,000 Armenian population in 2023 remains a national trauma. Pashinyan has attempted simultaneously to deny responsibility and deflect blame, while many view the church's firm stance on this tragedy as a principal catalyst for his feud with the clergy. The church has vigorously defended the rights of the refugees and highlighted Pashinyan's culpability for this national humiliation.

Despite his highly unpopular attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church and his low approval rating, Pashinyan is laying the groundwork for an attempt to stay in power for another five years. Citing widespread abuse of administrative resources and government crackdowns on its critics, Transparency International's Anti-Corruption Center stated in a recent report that these problems are calling into question the freedom and fairness of this year's Armenian parliamentary elections.

In a recent interview, one of Armenia's most prominent human rights advocates warned of escalating repression by the regime ahead of the June 2026 elections. As a measure of control over the judiciary by Pashinyan, she mentioned the publication, one day prior to the court's decision, of a court verdict extending the pre-trial detention of church benefactor and leading businessman Samvel Karapetyan, on a website owned by the Pashinyan family.

Ironically, with their blind and unconditional support of Pashinyan's anti-Christian and defeatist policies on Artsakh and his corruption record, EU member states are pushing the people of Armenia closer to Russia. By crushing dissent inside the country and cozying up to Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping, Pashinyan has shown time and time again that he is not a reliable partner for the West.

His visit to China, with which he recently signed a strategic partnership agreement, is a testament to that, coming only days after the historic Aug. 8 peace deal he had pre-signed in the White House. The Trump administration should not fall for Pashinyan's continuous flip-flopping.

This would be a good time for the Trump administration to extend a helping hand to Armenia and Armenian Americans, most of whom remain faithful followers of Christian values and the Armenian church. A strong U.S. statement denouncing Pashinyan's actions against the Armenian Apostolic Church would go a long way in helping the people of Armenia remove him from power and force new elections.

Conversely, allowing Pashinyan to keep attacking the church and dividing his country risks jeopardizing the deal that the Trump administration worked so hard to seal. It might even backfire during midterm elections in November 2026.

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Statement on the Suppression of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Historical Continuities of Identity Erasure within Victim Groups

The Lemkin Institute
December 28, 2025



The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention expresses deep concern over the ongoing state repression against the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia, including the arrests and intimidation of clergy, the targeting of ecclesiastical institutions, and the state's increasing use of the legal system to silence religious leadership. These developments represent a dangerous challenge to Armenia's democratic institutions as well as an

encroachment on the core institutions of Armenian identity. They are an unfortunate example of how genocidal processes can become internalized during periods of threat.

Tensions between the Armenian government and the Armenian Apostolic Church were exacerbated by education reforms in 2023, which eliminated the History of the Armenian Church as a standalone mandatory subject and incorporated it into broader, generalized curricula. More recently, the state's recent attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church coincided with an international conference organized by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin together with the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church of Switzerland. The conference was held in Bern, Switzerland from May 26 to 28, 2025, with the goal of addressing the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in the historically Armenian region of Artsakh, which was invaded and fully depopulated by Azerbaijan in September 2023.

This conference was criticized by Azerbaijan's spiritual leader Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, who is close to the Azerbaijani government, for allegedly inciting Armenians "to fight to the death" by advocating for the integrity of Armenian cultural heritage.

A couple of weeks later, in late June, the Armenian authorities detained two archbishops of the Armenian Apostolic church, Bagrat Galstanyan and Michael Ajapahyan, and charged them with attempting to overthrow the government and destabilize the state. These arrests were followed by detentions of several priests as part of a widening investigation into clergy accused of political interference and corruption.

In October 2025, Armenian authorities arrested Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan, head of the Aragatsotn Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. On December 4 2025, Armenian authorities detained the third Armenian Archbishop, Arshak Khachatryan. Two weeks later, on December 18, a protest was initiated by a small number of archbishops and bishops in the

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Armenian Apostolic Church's administrative headquarters, calling for the removal of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II. Although Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan did not appear at the protest, he expressed his approval through a morning briefing where he claimed that the Catholicos has links to unnamed foreign intelligence services. Combined with the Prime Minister's published plans to remove Catholicos Karekin II, this protest appears to have been a tactic employed by the Pashinyan Administration to undermine the independence of the Armenian clergy and usurp its power.

While the government claims its actions are based on evidence of criminal wrongdoing, Church leaders have denounced the arrests as politically motivated, calling them an attack on religious freedom and a deliberate effort to weaken the Church.

Taken together, these developments, especially the detentions of individual members of the senior clergy, raise serious concerns about the weakening of rule-of-law safeguards. The state has produced no evidence to substantiate the charges against clergy members. At the same time, documented conduct by state authorities, including efforts to influence religious services, exert pressure on clerical leadership, and intervene in the Church's internal governance, has drawn strong criticism from civic groups and human rights organizations as exceeding lawful state authority and undermining constitutional principles of church-state separation.

The combination of selective prosecutions, limited transparency, and direct state intervention in religious affairs raises serious concerns that legal mechanisms are being used not to uphold the law but to undermine the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Moreover, the Armenian government's recent decision to remove Shoghakat television channel (a media outlet established by and historically co-financed by the Armenian Apostolic Church) from the national digital package represents a further step in the ongoing efforts to marginalize the Church. Shoghakat now no longer has public broadcaster status. While the government frames this decision as a mere technical adjustment grounded in a new law, its effect is the selective removal of the Church's key platform for cultural and spiritual expression—no other channel has been impacted by the law.

Due to the selective nature of the legislative change, the decision raises serious concerns under Article 18.1 of the Constitution, which recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church with an exclusive historical mission in spiritual life, development of national culture, and national identity. By depriving the Church of its primary public platform, the decision also undermines Article 42.2, which guarantees freedom of the press and requires the state to ensure that public broadcasters provide diverse informational, educational, and cultural programming. More broadly, the removal of this distinct religious and cultural voice risks undermining the principle of political and ideological pluralism protected by Article 8 of the Constitution, thereby calling into question the state's commitment to a democratic and pluralistic society. The crackdown comes amid heightened tensions over Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's handling of relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, which Church leaders have criticized.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has for centuries served as the spiritual, cultural, and historical foundation of the Armenian people. From the fourth century, when Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion, the Church has been the principal guardian of Armenian continuity, preserving language, culture, and memory during centuries of foreign domination. Its survival through periods of colonization, genocide, and exile has long symbolized the endurance of the Armenian nation itself.

The current wave of repression echoes a familiar and tragic historical pattern deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Armenian people. During the Armenian Genocide (1915–1923), the Ottoman authorities did not merely seek to murder or remove a population; they aimed to obliterate an entire civilization by severing its identity from its moral and spiritual core. The first phase of the genocide began with the systematic targeting of Armenian intellectuals, clergy, and community leaders, a deliberate strategy to decapitate the nation's leadership and erase the voices that could organize resistance or preserve cultural cohesion.

The Ottoman leadership understood that Armenian Christianity was not merely a religion but the vessel of Armenian national identity, a center of education, and a vehicle for collective memory. Ottoman assaults on the Church were not collateral damage; they were the deliberate destruction of a people's spiritual infrastructure. By destroying the Church, Ottoman leaders sought to dismantle the very mechanism that had enabled the Armenian identity to survive centuries of imperial domination and cultural suppression.

This calculated campaign against Armenian Christianity reveals that genocide operates not only through physical annihilation but also through cultural and spiritual identity erasure. The eradication of the Church as the moral compass and unifying institution of the nation was central to the genocidal logic. It sought to produce a population stripped of its historical consciousness, its sacred geography, and its communal bonds. The scars of this destruction persist today as thousands of Armenian religious monuments remain in ruins or under threat in Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The ideological continuity is clear. Both then and now, the Apostolic Church, as a moral and social institution capable of unifying people beyond political lines, is perceived by those in power as a potential threat to state control.

Historically, the Turkish state viewed Christianity as the heart of Armenian distinctiveness and thus as an obstacle to national homogenization. Today, the Armenian Apostolic Church is being framed by some political actors in Armenia as a competing power center, a vestige of the old order, or a destabilizing force. Such rhetoric, combined with the use of legal instruments to dismantle or intimidate the clergy, reflects a deeply troubling attempt to weaken the Church's role as a moral authority and protector of national identity.

These developments reflect multiple early warning indicators of identity-based repression: the criminalization of moral authorities, the framing of religious leadership as a national security threat, the delegitimization of institutions that embody collective memory, and the use of the law

to weaken institutions outside state control. History shows that such patterns often manifest before broader campaigns to divide society and erase cultural identity.

Compounding this crisis is Armenia's current geopolitical trajectory. In light of recent peace talks and normalization efforts with Turkey, as well as the growing diplomatic influence of Azerbaijan, Armenia's internal strategy toward its main religious institution appears increasingly aligned, intentionally or otherwise, with the long-term goals of these neighboring states. The marginalization of the Apostolic Church, the very institution that has historically embodied national resilience, mirrors the strategies historically used by Ankara and now Baku to undermine Armenian identity and cohesion. If unchecked, this alignment risks eroding the moral and cultural foundations that have safeguarded Armenian survival for centuries, effectively advancing the objectives of powers that have sought to weaken Armenia's independence and unity.

While the current situation cannot be equated with the genocidal violence of 1915, the parallels in logic and method must be recognized. Early warning signs of identity-based repression often begin with efforts to delegitimize and criminalize institutions that embody collective memory and moral resistance. The systematic discrediting of the Church, the arrests of priests, and the state's growing hostility toward religious expression create a hostile environment that endangers not only freedom of religion but also the cultural and existential security of the Armenian people.

The Lemkin Institute calls on the Armenian government to immediately cease all politically motivated actions against the clergy and to reaffirm its commitment to the constitutional principles of religious freedom and pluralism. The Institute further urges international observers and human rights organizations to monitor developments in Armenia closely, recognizing that the erosion of religious institutions has historically preceded broader campaigns of societal fragmentation and identity erasure.

The strength of Armenia's democracy and sovereignty rests not in the suppression of its moral institutions, but in their protection. A nation that has survived genocide cannot afford to repeat, in any form, the mechanisms of its historical destruction.¹

¹ This material is distributed by Sovereign Global Solutions on behalf of National Democratic Alliance of Armenia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

February 2, 2026

Mr. Vice President,

I greet you in the name of our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

I do so from Yerevan Kentron Prison in Armenia, as a political prisoner of the regime of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Using the time-honored methods of his communist predecessors, Pashinyan has ordered his security apparatus to spy on me, to falsify evidence, to interrogate me, to slander me and incarcerate me.

Why? The answer is simple. I have spoken uncomfortable truth to power on the byways and highways of Armenia, all in the non-violent spirit of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

In doing so, I have exercised my fundamental human right to bring my Christian faith and testimony into the public arena, in the hope that the Armenian nation and state remain true to their historic Christian tradition at a time of national crisis.

I am not alone. Others are similarly incarcerated by the Pashinyan regime, and for much the same reason. Some are my brothers in the clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Archbishop Mikael Ajapajyan, Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan and Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan.

There is also the lay patron of the Church, Samvel Karapetyan. Not only has he been imprisoned, but his company has been nationalized by the state, Soviet-style.

Prime Minister Pashinyan has imprisoned us as part of his campaign to assert state power over the Armenian Apostolic Church. Violating the constitution and all principles of religious freedom, he is demanding that the Catholicos, the head of the worldwide Armenian church, be replaced by someone under his influence.

The reason is simple: the church is defending our flock. We are speaking for the right of Armenians from Artsakh to return to their homes, after they were ethnically cleansed by Azerbaijan two years ago. We are demanding the

return of our hostages from Azerbaijan. We are speaking out against the abandonment of our homeland and its sovereignty to Azerbaijan.

For this, both Prime Minister Pashinyan and the Azerbaijani government have labeled the church “an obstacle to peace.”

But the Apostolic Armenian Church is simply doing what it has done for 1,700 years: safeguarding the Armenian nation, the world’s first Christian nation. For most of those 1,700 years, the church was the only national institution which bound Armenians together.

The church is under attack today precisely because it protects Armenian identity. An effort is underway to strip Armenia of its Christian heritage and integrate it into the Turkic, Islamic world of Turkey and Azerbaijan as an economic and military vassal.

You, Mr. Vice President, have rightly warned the EU that it has been committing civilizational suicide by giving up Europe’s Christian identity and opening its borders to those who do not share the values rooted in Europe’s Judeo-Christian tradition.

This is precisely what the Armenian Prime Minister is engineering in Armenia.

Throughout its history, there have always been Armenians, even churchmen, who became the instruments of the persecutors of the Church. They have often done so in the name of peace.

“They say, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” Such was the case in the time of the Prophet Jeremiah. Such is the case in Armenia today.

President Trump has invested a great deal of his time and political capital to make peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But there can be no peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan if the Armenian nation ceases to exist. If the Armenian church is successfully neutralized, nothing less than that will be at stake.

I know that you will soon travel to Armenia and to Azerbaijan. You will contribute greatly a genuinely historic, lasting peace if you: 1) secure release of the Armenian Christian political prisoners held in Yerevan and Baku, and 2) obtain guarantees for the safe return, with fundamental

human rights intact, of the 150,000 Armenian Christians who were forced out of their homes in Nagorno Karabakh.

As you depart on your important mission to Armenia and Azerbaijan, please keep in mind the words of the Prophet Isaiah, which were read by our Lord at the onset of his earthly ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18).

May you be animated by this Spirit while engaging with the authorities in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Sincerely, *with love and prayer*

Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bagrat Galstanyan', written in a cursive style.

Civil Society Groups and Public Figures Condemn Government Actions Undermining Church Freedom and Autonomy

10.12.2025 - Factor TV News



A number of civil society organizations and public figures have issued a statement condemning government actions that, according to the signatories, undermine the autonomy of the Church.

Below is the full text of the statement:

We, the undersigned civil society organisations and individuals, express our deep concern regarding the alarming developments that have recently taken place in Armenia. Today, we are witnessing

violations of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the principle of the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms, and the independence of the judiciary, as well as a gross breach of the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (the Church), a right protected by the Constitution and international conventions.

Representatives of Armenia's executive and legislative branches continue to interfere with the autonomy and freedom of the Church's activities, in violation of the Constitution and the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations, international norms on freedom of religion or belief, and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (<https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/autonomy-of-religious-organisations>). The authorities' unlawful and unacceptable attempts to influence the formation of ecclesiastical governance bodies and internal decision-making processes are deeply concerning. Equally unacceptable are attempts to arbitrarily edit or alter the Church's centuries-old traditions, rites, sacraments, canonical order, and other domains of ecclesial life.

We strongly condemn the exertion of pressure on Church clergy by state security bodies of the Republic of Armenia, including the National Security Service (<https://youtu.be/gH5JgOJEKG8>). Such conduct constitutes an abuse of official power and an impermissible deviation from the aims and functions of the National Security Service.

We are also concerned by the selective use of criminal justice tools against clergy, for the purpose of exerting unlawful and undue influence, including the use of pre-trial detention as a punitive measure and as a means of compelling behaviour desired by public authorities.

It is unacceptable that public officials at the highest political level continue to promote rhetoric targeting clergy with hate speech and insults, as well as unlawfully disseminating personal

information, using both public and private information channels. We believe that such actions may severely undermine the country's already fragile social cohesion, leading to deeper polarisation and intolerance.

We firmly believe that any reform or renewal within the Church must take place inside the Church itself, grounded in the principles of freedom and autonomy of religious organisation, in accordance with the Constitution and Armenia's international legal obligations, without any discrimination and on an equal footing with other religious organisations.

In view of the above, we reiterate our demands:

- **From representatives of public authorities, and especially from Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan:** to refrain from any actions that violate the RA Constitution, domestic laws, or Armenia's international legal obligations; to respect the Church's freedom and autonomy; and to cease exerting unlawful influence on judicial bodies and law-enforcement agencies.
- **From President Vahagn Khachaturyan:** to fulfil his function of overseeing adherence to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia.
- **From public officials:** to exercise restraint in their public statements; to observe the ethical and behavioural standards required of public office-holders; and to refrain from speech that disseminates hate, intolerance, discrimination, or insult.
- **From judges:** to exercise their powers independently, in compliance with the Constitution and human rights standards, including the right to liberty and the principle that pre-trial detention must be applied only as an exceptional measure.
- **From the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor's Office:** to ensure independent and effective investigations, guided solely by the requirements of the Constitution and the law; and to safeguard the rights of all individuals involved in proceedings, including respect for the presumption of innocence.
- **From the Police and the National Security Service:** to carry out their functions independently and strictly in accordance with the demands of the Constitution and the law; and to refrain from the disproportionate and unnecessary use of force or from violating individuals' rights.

Organisations:

Protection of Rights Without Borders NGO
Regional Centre for Democracy and Security
Yerevan Press Club
Armenian Progressive Youth NGO
Public Journalism Club
Journalists for Human Rights NGO
Centre for Law and Freedom NGO
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Armenian Committee
Helsinki Association Human Rights NGO
Media Initiatives Centre

Yezidi Centre for Human Rights
Centre for Community Mobilization and Support NGO

Individuals:

Gayane Shagoyan, Cultural Anthropologist
Isabella Sargsyan, International Expert on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Zaruhi Hovhannisyan, Human Rights Defender, New Justice Culture NGO
Armen Martirosyan, Publisher
Tigran Paskevichyan, Journalist–Publicist
Sarhat Petrosyan, Architect–Urban Planner
Inga Harutyunyan, Psychologist, Social Protection Specialist
Apres Zohrabyan, Orientalist
Aram Khanalanyan, Architect–Theorist
Arsen Hakobyan, Cultural Anthropologist
Maria Sadoyan, Translator
Mushegh Hovsepyan, Human Rights Defender
Nune Torosyan, Teacher, Translator, Editor
Ruben Malayan, Calligrapher, Lecturer
Vardan Harutyunyan, Human Rights Defender
Mariam Movsisyan, Communications Specialist

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¹ This material is distributed by Sovereign Global Solutions on behalf of National Democratic Alliance of Armenia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.



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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE

Protecting Armenia's Sovereignty, Identity, and Heritage

February 26th, 2026
2:00 - 3:00 PM

2075 Rayburn HOB
Refreshments will be served

We invite you to an important briefing with world-renowned experts to discuss the dangerous rise of authoritarian policies within Armenia at the hands of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Speakers will address the repression of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, media and journalists, the growth of a Soviet style security apparatus which is arresting and detaining those who express opposition. This has led to a bloated and abusive prison system, the erosion of rule of law by a corrupt judiciary including the illegal detainment and imprisonment of the leadership's political adversaries. If political repression, international religious freedom and human rights violations are left unchecked, instability will threaten Armenia's very existence.



FEATURED SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Amb. Alberto Fernandez

*Vice President of the
Middle East Media
Research Institute*

Dr. Ján Figel'

*Former Special Envoy for Promotion
of Freedom of Religion or Belief
Outside the European Union*

Dr. John Eibner

*International President of
Christian Solidarity
International*

RSVP to LCirone@sovereignglobalsolutions.com

This event is organized by Sovereign Global Solutions, LLC on behalf of the National Democratic Alliance for Armenia



Armenian
Center for
Political Rights

**ON THE ONGOING
INTERFERENCE WITH
THE AUTONOMY OF
THE ARMENIAN
APOSTOLIC HOLY
CHURCH**

URGENT REPORT

**FEBRUARY 7, 2026
YEREVAN**

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The **Armenian Center for Political Rights** is a watchdog organization focusing on detecting, responding, and preventing political persecution and safeguarding political rights.

Email: info@acpr.center

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/acpr.center>

INTRODUCTION

1. The urgency of this report stems from the political campaign launched by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, against the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (AAHC), as well as recent developments in this context. The motivations, manifestations of the campaign, as well as the Prime Minister's control over the judicial and law enforcement systems within this context were addressed in our November 5 report.¹
2. One of the primary guarantees of freedom of religion is the State's obligation not to interfere with the autonomy and internal life of religious organizations. This obligation is enshrined in the Constitution² and legislation³ of the Republic of Armenia, as well as in international human rights documents.⁴
3. During the aforementioned campaign, the State, represented by the Prime Minister, security bodies, other officials, and now also the courts, has repeatedly interfered with the AAHC's autonomy across multiple domains. These interferences have manifested both in the denial of the Church's and its individual members' freedom of expression and other rights,⁵ and in attempts to influence internal affairs and liturgy.

¹ *Injustice in Armenia: Mass Political Persecutions in 2025, Part I (May-September)*, ACPR, 5 November 2025, pp 4-12, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cF8bcqCOAgPDCaK9Oa-uDFxCCEH5CwHv/view>

² Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 17

³ Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Organizations of RA, Article 17

⁴ Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Court's interpretations (among others, *Hassan and Tchaouch v. Bulgaria*, no.30985/96, § 62, ECHR 2000, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-58921>)

⁵ *Injustice in Armenia...*, pp 39-41

4. These interventions have already been criticized by the World Council of Churches,⁶ Christian Solidarity International,⁷ the Forum for Religious Freedom in Europe,⁸ and others.
5. This urgent report does not aim to document all ongoing persecutions against the Church. Its purpose is to present the international legal standards on religious autonomy that Armenian authorities must follow.

CONTEXT

6. Following the publication of [“Injustice in Armenia: Mass Political Persecutions in 2025, Part I \(May-September\)”](#), persecution of AAHC members and supporters has continued and evolved. These developments will be addressed in a separate publication.
7. **On December 3**, 2025, Fr. Ruben, a priest of St. Hakob Mtsbnetsi Church in Gyumri, reported that the National Security Service (NSS) had approached him and requested that he refrain from mentioning the Catholicos’s name during the Divine Liturgy,⁹ though this is a mandatory part of the service.¹⁰ N. Pashinyan confirmed this, stating: “We ask that the fact that we consider Ktritch Nersisyan¹¹ not to be

⁶ *WCC expresses deep concern over recent developments involving the Armenian Apostolic Church*, World Council of Churches, 8 July 2025, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-expresses-deep-concern-over-recent-developments-involving-the-armenian-apostolic-church>

⁷ *Religious freedom organizations call on Armenian government to end attacks on Armenian church (statement)*, Christian Solidarity International, Coptic Solidarity, SOS Chrétiens d’Orient and individuals, 17 July 2025, <https://www.csi-int.org/app/uploads/sites/13/2025/07/IRF-statement-for-Armenian-Church-with-signatories.pdf>

⁸ *ARMENIA: Apostolic Church Under Attack*, 3 February 2026թ., <https://foref-europe.org/blog/2026/02/03/armenia-apostolic-church-under-attack/>

⁹ *Փաշինյանը հաստատեց՝ զնույն է այն պատարագներին, որտեղ Վեհապետի անունը չի հնչում, ԱԱԾ-ականները ճշտումներ են անում քահանայից*, Azatutyun.am, 4 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/pashinyany-hastatets-gnoum-e-ayn-pataragnerin-ortegh-vehapari-anouny-chi-hnchoum-aats-akannery-chshtoumner-en-anoum-kahanayits/33613033.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁰ See the clarification issued by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, <https://www.facebook.com/100064767818393/posts/1314288350740080/#> (in Armenian)

¹¹ Nikol Pashinyan uses the Catholicos’s baptismal name, which carries a derogatory connotation when referring to ordained clergy, as well as for the followers.


Catholicos be taken into account. **It could be someone familiar, an NSS officer, a relative, my assistant...**"¹²


ասիմանվեն ամրագրված սկզբունքների պահպանման, ֆինանսական թափանցիկության եւ հոգեւորականների բարեվարքության ապահովման կառուցակարգեր,

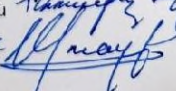
5. Ասիմանված կարգով Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոսի ընտրություն:

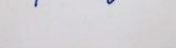
Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու հոգևորականաց դասին եւ բոլոր հետետորդներին կոչ ենք անում աջակցել միանալ Եկեղեցու բարենորոգմանը, համախմբվել այս նպատակի շուրջ՝ հանուն Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու, հանուն Հայաստանի Հանրապետության եւ մեր ժողովրդի:

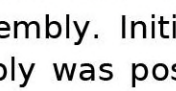
Մենք՝ ներքոստորագրյալներս ձեռալորում ենք Համակարգող խորհուրդ, որին վերապահում ենք Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու բարենորոգման կազմակերպչական գործառույթներ: Սույն կազմը կարող է ընդլայնվել Համակարգող խորհրդի միաձայնությամբ:

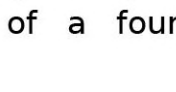
Նիկոլ Փաշինյան, ՀՀ վարչապետ 

S. Հովնան արքեպիսկոպոս Տերտերյան 

S. Նավասարդ արքեպիսկոպոս Կճոյան 

S. Աբրահամ արքեպիսկոպոս Մկրտչյան 

S. Առաքել արքեպիսկոպոս Քարամյան 

S. Սիոն արքեպիսկոպոս Աղամյան 

8. As part of his campaign to remove the Catholicos, N. Pashinyan, having enlisted a group of clergymen to his side, established the so-called “Council for the Reform of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.”¹³ The declaration announcing the intention to remove the Catholicos, elect a new one, and amend the Church’s statute was signed by ten bishops. The list is headed personally by the Prime Minister, whose signature appears first; the statement was disseminated via his official Facebook page.¹⁴

9. To discuss “recent developments surrounding the AAHC and issues relating to

internal ecclesiastical life,” the Mother See had decided to convene an Episcopal Assembly. Initially scheduled for December 10-12,¹⁵ 2025, the assembly was postponed¹⁶ following ongoing repression and the arrest of a fourth senior cleric, Archbishop Arshak

¹² Փաշինյանը հաստատում է՝ պատարագներում կաթողիկոսի անունը չհնչեցնելու իսկրանքը փոխանցվում է նաև ԱԱԾ աշխատակիցների միջոցով, Azatutyun.am, 4 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33612647.html> (in Armenian)

¹³ Nikol Pashinyan’s official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0aNF3UpGsLLokXRiP6GaXPBvkr6mwRbF4vnx9AxmrYXCS8fdiisUBH38reTW9Dkxl>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0UCaf6nSGSVWjBTaUDcXPMWfB2cki6o3LTKrQFuy1LVYcDeYuEUnMhz6EijLF8f97l>

¹⁴ Վարչապետը և 10 եպիսկոպոսները «Եկեղեցու բարենորոգման հայտարարություն» են ստորագրել, Մայր Աթոռից հակադարձում են, Azatutyun.am, 5 June 2026, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/varchapety-ev-10-episkoposnery-ekeghetsoubarenorogman-haytararoutyamb-handes-ekan-/33640182.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁵ Կաթողիկոսը ղեկտնմբերի 10-12-ը եպիսկոպոսաց ժողով է հրավիրում, Azatutyun.am, 1 դեկտեմբերի 2025թ., <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/katoghikosity-dektemberi-10-12-y-episkoposats-zhoghov-e-hraviroum/33610091.html>

¹⁶ Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովը հետաձգվում է՝ պայմանավորված բռնաճնշումներով. Մայր Աթոռ, Azatutyun.am, 7 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/episkoposats-zhoghovy-hetadzgoum-e-paymanavorvats-brnachnshoumnerov-mayrator/33615591.html> (in Armenian)

Khachatryan.¹⁷ Ultimately, it was decided to convene the assembly outside Armenia, in St. Pölten, Austria, on February 16–19.¹⁸

10. On January 10, 2025 one of the bishops who signed the statement against the Catholicos, Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, was removed by the Catholicos from his position as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese. The grounds cited were “abuse of office, failure to fulfill the duties incumbent upon the Primate, as well as instances of coercion and pressure exercised against the clergy of the diocese.”¹⁹

11. Saroyan filed a lawsuit against the AAHC seeking to “invalidate the Patriarchal Decree of His Holiness Karekin II no 02 of January 10, 2026 removing him from office and to reinstate him”. On January 17, the First Instance Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz “reinstated” Saroyan as diocesan primate. The decision was the following:

“Order the Respondent, the religious organization “Armenian Apostolic Holy Church,” and any other persons, to ensure, without hindrance, the continued exercise of office by Arman Volodya Saroyan (Bishop Gevorg Saroyan) as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese until the issuance of a final judicial act in this case. Prohibit the Respondent, the religious organization “Armenian Apostolic Holy Church,” and any other persons from undertaking any action that may, in any manner, impede or interfere with Arman Volodya Saroyan (Bishop Gevorg Saroyan), in his capacity as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese, in the exercise of the powers and fulfillment of the duties assigned to the diocesan primate under Article 68 of the Statute of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, as well as under any other applicable ecclesiastical rules, including, inter alia, the administration and management of the financial accounts (funds) of the Masyatsotn Diocese and the execution of the Diocese’s financial transactions, until the issuance of a final judicial act in this case.”²⁰

12. In its reasoning, the court, the Court noted, that “the significance of the office of Diocesan Primate (...) is not manifested in a superior rank

¹⁷ Արշակ սրբազանը կալանավորվեց 2 ամսով, Azatutyun.am, 5 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33613561.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁸ Կաթողիկոսի հրավերով Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովը տեղի կունենա Ավստրիայի Սանկտ Փյոլթըն քաղաքում, Azatutyun.am, 19 January 2026, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/katoghikosi-hraverov-episkoposats-zhoghovy-teghikounena-avstriayi-sankt-pyoltyn-kaghakoum/33653916.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁹ *Communiqué*, AAHC Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, 10 January 2026, <https://www.armenianchurch.org/en/news/e-10-01-2025/12113>

²⁰ See case no. ԱՐԴ/0046/02/26, Decision on means of securing a claim of 16 January 2026, First Instance Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz

within the administrative hierarchy, nor is it expressed through the enjoyment of specific material advantages or the ability to exercise authority in matters of a domestic or proprietary nature. Rather, the importance of the office is primarily reflected in its **exclusive and paramount role of spiritual leadership**, the officeholder bearing responsibility for the activities of all monasteries within the Diocese that fall under his jurisdiction. Various diocesan unions and commissions, whether cultural, educational, Christian, or devoted to national upbringing and formation, operate under the auspices and supervision of the Diocesan Primate. Within the Diocese, the Diocesan Primate is the sole authority **charged with the diligent and proper oversight of the unaltered preservation of the doctrine and canonical order of the Armenian Apostolic Church.**"²¹

13. Later, on January 27, the Catholicos defrocked Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan:

"The grounds for defrocking included, in particular, the fact that he contested the Patriarchal decree ordering his dismissal from the position of Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese and his return to the Mother See, thereby impeding the normal functioning of the Masyatsotn Diocese and, through his judicial claim, creating both the occasion and the conditions for interference in internal ecclesiastical life by bodies belonging to the state authorities.

Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, through canonical deviations and acts of misconduct, has breached and violated his vow of obedience.

*The defrocked clergyman shall henceforth be classified among the laity under his baptismal name, Arman Saroyan."*²²

14. On January 29, the Investigative Committee initiated criminal proceedings for not reinstating Arman Saroyan as the Primate of Masyatsotnon Diocese on the basis of **failure to comply with the judicial act.**²³ Six bishops were charged and prohibited from leaving the country, **effectively preventing their participation in the Episcopal Assembly in Austria.**²⁴

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Կարգալույծ է հռչակվել Տ. Գևորգ Եպիսկոպոս Սարոյանը, Hetq.am, 27 հունվարի 2026թ., <https://hetq.am/hy/article/179445> (in Armenian)

²³ *Criminal Proceeding Initiated on Failure to Comply with Judicial Act*, Investigative Committee of RA, 29 January 2026, <https://www.investigative.am/news/36902>

²⁴ Մեղադրանք հոգևորականներին՝ Ավստրիայի Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովին ընդառաջ արգելվել է լքել երկիրը, Azatutyun.am, 31 January 2026,

15. In February, two other defrocked clergymen, Aramayis Takhmazian and Stepan Asatryan, also filed court claims seeking reinstatement to ecclesiastical office.²⁵

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

16. Unlike Armenian practice, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) provides extensive clarification regarding the autonomy of religious organizations and the dismissal of clergy. By ratifying the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and its protocols, Armenia has undertaken to accept these standards as sources of law. This obligation is enshrined in both the Constitution²⁶ and legislation.²⁷
17. A general principle is that Article 9 of the Convention **does not enshrine a right of dissent** within a religious community; In cases of doctrinal or organizational disagreement, the individual's freedom of religion is exercised through the option of **freely leaving the community**.²⁸
18. In *Sindicatul "Păstorul cel Bun" v. Romania*, the ECtHR held that "[r]espect for the autonomy of religious communities recognised by the State implies, in particular, that the State should accept the **right of such communities to react, in accordance with their own rules and interests, to any dissident movements** emerging within them that might pose a threat to their cohesion, image or unity. It is therefore **not the task of the national authorities to act as**

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/erkou-episkoposi-mek-kahanayi-meghadrank-e-arajadrvel/33665593.html> (in Armenian)

²⁵ Կարգալուծ քահանաները Կաթողիկոսի տնօրինությունն անվավեր ճանաչելու պահանջով դիմել են դատարան, Hetq.am, 6 փետրվարի 2026թ., <https://hetq.am/hy/article/179597> (in Armenian)

²⁶ Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 81

²⁷ For instance, Articles 192 and 381 of the Civil Code of Armenia

²⁸ *Miroļubovs and Others v. Latvia*, no. 798/05, ECHR, 15 December 2009, § 80, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-93983>

the arbiter between religious communities and the various dissident factions that exist or may emerge within them.”²⁹

19. In the context of the principle of religious autonomy, the State cannot oblige **“to admit members or exclude existing members.** Interference of this sort would run counter to the freedom of religious associations to regulate their conduct and to administer their affairs freely.” Moreover, according to ECHR, “The internal structure of a religious organisation and the regulations governing its membership must be seen as a **means by which such organisations are able to express their beliefs and maintain their religious traditions.”³⁰** The autonomy principle prohibits the State from imposing religious duties on specific individuals.³¹
20. These principles apply even where a member of the clergy is in an employment relationship with a religious organization, a relationship that entails a certain degree of duty of loyalty (an obligation that does not exist in the private employment sphere). In *Fernández Martínez v. Spain*, the Catholic Church terminated Martínez’s contract to teach religion after it emerged that he was affiliated with an association expressing views contrary to the Church’s doctrine. The European Court of Human Rights emphasized that, by virtue of his status as a cleric, Martínez was bound “by a duty of loyalty towards the Catholic Church, thus limiting his right to respect for his private life to a certain degree. In the Court’s view, the fact of being seen as campaigning publicly in movements opposed to Catholic doctrine clearly runs counter to that duty. In addition, there is little doubt that the applicant, as a former priest and director of a seminary, was or must have been aware of the substance and significance of that duty.”³²

²⁹ *Sindicatul “Păstorul cel Bun” v. Romania* [GC], no. 2330/09, ECHR, 9 July 2013, § 165, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-122763>

³⁰ *Svyato-Mykhaylivska Parafiya v. Ukraine*, no 77703/01, ECHR, 14 June 2007, §§ 146 and 150, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-81067>

³¹ *Fernández Martínez v. Spain* [GC], no. 56030/07, ECHR, 2 June 2014, § 129, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-145068>

³² *Ibid*, § 146

CONCLUSION

21. By imposing an interim measure in the case of former Bishop Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, the Armavir court itself underscored the significance of the office of diocesan primate, emphasizing its **exclusive role in spiritual leadership**, responsibility for the functioning of the monasteries within the entire diocese under his authority, and oversight of various cultural, educational, Christian, and national-formational associations and committees. The court separately highlighted the primate's distinctive duty to ensure, with due diligence, the unaltered preservation of the doctrine and canons of the Armenian Church. Such functions and responsibilities, by their very nature, concern core doctrinal and organizational matters of a religious organization, in this case, of the AAHC, and, as noted above, constitute instruments through which the Church expresses its beliefs and preserves its religious traditions. Accordingly, they fall **exclusively within the internal affairs of the AAHC**.
22. Under Article 61 of the Church's statute, the diocesan primate "is appointed by the Catholicos of All Armenians and acts as his representative. Where necessary, His Holiness may recall the diocesan primate from office."³³ It is beyond reasonable dispute that Arman Saroyan was fully aware of this statutory rule and understood the substance and significance of the office.
23. It follows that the appointment to or removal from the office of diocesan primate lies solely within the discretion of the Catholicos, through which the **Church's beliefs are expressed and its religious traditions maintained. The State possesses no authority** to require that such religious responsibilities be entrusted to any particular individual.
24. In light of the interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights, Arman Saroyan, as well as other clergy calling for "reform" of the Church, **do not enjoy a right to express dissent within the religious community**. In the event of disagreement, their freedom

³³ Statute of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church operating in the territory of the internal diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, Article 61, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j3z07r7rQ9Uib2cousUb9TCPQrKrwzvB/view?usp=sharing> (in Armenian)

of religion is exercised through the option of freely leaving the community.

25. If members of a religious organization, namely the holders of ecclesiastical office, do not enjoy such a right, it follows *a fortiori* that **ordinary followers of the Church cannot claim it either. Nevertheless, Prime Minister N. Pashinyan, has advanced demands for the replacement of the Catholicos, basing his claims on presenting himself as such a follower.**³⁴
26. The episcopal college of the AAHC currently consists of 56 bishops.³⁵ Of these, ten have joined the campaign to remove the Catholicos and amend the Church's statute under the patronage of N. Pashinyan; six have been prohibited by court order from leaving the country; and four are detained on politically motivated grounds.³⁶
27. In these circumstances, it is evident that the Bishops' Assembly scheduled for February 16-19 in Austria, an event that should be guaranteed by the freedoms of religion and association, may be jeopardized. Given that two additional former clergy have filed claims seeking reinstatement to ecclesiastical office, and that there already exists a **judicial "precedent" contradicting the standards of Article 9 of the Convention**, a further step in the authorities'

³⁴ Nikol Pashinyan's official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid02VwcfFxyTewgGVPLdQV1t2uUtgKymttBLKEvWM9qMee51A3noGd4UEZEPYk8FPB5TI>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid02PpgZ9J5vTAfu9bKF9K2iT6oyU4ct8Xkg5UBYyRFSgNpan1cKp6YBrkLLkVmnniDXI>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0MZxZxgvkniV8dhwTcgn7WNF7u1p9SdKVixKgK8g24KyueZCMg7odPrhLHkNWRZEI>

³⁵ The list of current Bishops is available on the official website of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, <https://www.armenianchurch.org/en/Bishops>

³⁶ The political nature of the prosecution of Archbishops Galstanyan and Ajapahyan was addressed in the report "Injustice in Armenia: ...", pp. 17-37.

Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan has been charged with compelling individuals to participate in protests against N. Pashinyan in 2021 and with urging them not to vote for him in the elections. The accusation is based on testimony given by former clergy who have themselves joined N. Pashinyan's campaign.

Մկրտիչ սրբազանի գործը՝ դատարանում, փաստաբանը մեղադրանքն անհիմն է համարում, Azatutyun.am, 29 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/mkrtich-srbazani-gortsy-dataranoum-pastabany-meghadrankn-anhimn-e-hamaroum/33635641.html> (in Armenian)

Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, who is also a vocal critic of N. Pashinyan, is currently in detention on charges of having planted "marijuana" in the bag of an individual who, eight years earlier, had publicly demanded the removal of the Catholicos.

ԱՄԾ-ն ձերբակալեց Արշակ սրբազանին թմրամիջոցի ապօրինի իրացման մեղադրանքով, Hetq.am, 4 December 2025, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/178542> (in Armenian)

Case of Illegal Drug Supply Committed in Previous Years Disclosed, Investigative Committee of RA, 5 December 2025, <https://www.investigative.am/en/news/36798>

campaign against the AAHC, led by N. Pashinyan, appears to be taking shape.

28. Finally, it should be noted that, given the distinctive nature of religious organizations discussed above, it is not uncommon for clergy to be dismissed from service for criticizing church leadership. One such example occurred in September 2025, when Don Leonardo Maria Pompei, a priest in one of the Roman communities, was removed from service after criticizing the reforms of the Second Vatican Council during an online meeting.³⁷ Earlier, another Catholic priest, Natale Santonocito, was excommunicated after declaring with respect to Pope Francis that “the Pope is not the Pope, he never was.”³⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Armenian Center for Political Rights calls upon international organizations with mandates related to human rights protection, to which Armenia is a member, their specialized offices, and relevant officials, as well as human rights organizations operating in Armenia and other countries, to:

1. Conduct a detailed review of the cases presented in this report, as well as in other publicly available sources, regarding the campaign against the AAHC coordinated by the Prime Minister of RA, Nikol Pashinyan, and the interventions against the autonomy of the church. ACPR is ready to provide support to the extent possible in obtaining necessary materials.
2. Evaluate the persecutions in light of ECHR law, “Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities” by Venice

³⁷ *Italian priest suspended after YouTube broadcast criticising Vatican II*, The Catholic Herald, 9 September 2025, <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/italian-priest-suspended-after-youtube-broadcast-criticising-vatican-ii-2>

³⁸ *Another Italian priest excommunicated for saying Francis is not Pope*, The Catholic Herald, 31 January 2025, <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/another-italian-priest-excommunicated-for-saying-francis-is-not-pope>

Commission and OSCE/ODIHR, and other internationally recognized human rights standards.

3. Issue clear public statements regarding the cases described above.
4. Focus attention on cases of state interventions that undermine the autonomy of religious organizations in RA, providing a precise evaluation.



Armenian
Center for
Political Rights

**ON THE ONGOING
INTERFERENCE WITH
THE AUTONOMY OF
THE ARMENIAN
APOSTOLIC HOLY
CHURCH**

URGENT REPORT

**FEBRUARY 7, 2026
YEREVAN**

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The **Armenian Center for Political Rights** is a watchdog organization focusing on detecting, responding, and preventing political persecution and safeguarding political rights.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The urgency of this report stems from the political campaign launched by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, against the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (AAHC), as well as recent developments in this context. The motivations, manifestations of the campaign, as well as the Prime Minister's control over the judicial and law enforcement systems within this context were addressed in our November 5 report.¹
2. One of the primary guarantees of freedom of religion is the State's obligation not to interfere with the autonomy and internal life of religious organizations. This obligation is enshrined in the Constitution² and legislation³ of the Republic of Armenia, as well as in international human rights documents.⁴
3. During the aforementioned campaign, the State, represented by the Prime Minister, security bodies, other officials, and now also the courts, has repeatedly interfered with the AAHC's autonomy across multiple domains. These interferences have manifested both in the denial of the Church's and its individual members' freedom of expression and other rights,⁵ and in attempts to influence internal affairs and liturgy.

¹ *Injustice in Armenia: Mass Political Persecutions in 2025, Part I (May-September)*, ACPR, 5 November 2025, pp 4-12, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cF8bcqCOAgPDCaK9Oa-uDFxCCEH5CwHv/view>

² Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 17

³ Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Organizations of RA, Article 17

⁴ Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Court's interpretations (among others, *Hassan and Tchaouch v. Bulgaria*, no.30985/96, § 62, ECHR 2000, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-58921>)

⁵ *Injustice in Armenia...*, pp 39-41

4. These interventions have already been criticized by the World Council of Churches,⁶ Christian Solidarity International,⁷ the Forum for Religious Freedom in Europe,⁸ and others.
5. This urgent report does not aim to document all ongoing persecutions against the Church. Its purpose is to present the international legal standards on religious autonomy that Armenian authorities must follow.

CONTEXT

6. Following the publication of [“Injustice in Armenia: Mass Political Persecutions in 2025, Part I \(May-September\)”](#), persecution of AAHC members and supporters has continued and evolved. These developments will be addressed in a separate publication.
7. **On December 3**, 2025, Fr. Ruben, a priest of St. Hakob Mtsbnetsi Church in Gyumri, reported that the National Security Service (NSS) had approached him and requested that he refrain from mentioning the Catholicos’s name during the Divine Liturgy,⁹ though this is a mandatory part of the service.¹⁰ N. Pashinyan confirmed this, stating: “We ask that the fact that we consider Ktritch Nersisyan¹¹ not to be

⁶ *WCC expresses deep concern over recent developments involving the Armenian Apostolic Church*, World Council of Churches, 8 July 2025, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-expresses-deep-concern-over-recent-developments-involving-the-armenian-apostolic-church>

⁷ *Religious freedom organizations call on Armenian government to end attacks on Armenian church (statement)*, Christian Solidarity International, Coptic Solidarity, SOS Chrétiens d’Orient and individuals, 17 July 2025, <https://www.csi-int.org/app/uploads/sites/13/2025/07/IRF-statement-for-Armenian-Church-with-signatories.pdf>

⁸ *ARMENIA: Apostolic Church Under Attack*, 3 February 2026թ., <https://foref-europe.org/blog/2026/02/03/armenia-apostolic-church-under-attack/>

⁹ *Փաշինյանը հաստատեց՝ զնույն է այն պատարագներին, որտեղ Վեհապետի անունը չի հնչում, ԱԱԾ-ականները ճշտումներ են անում քահանայից*, Azatutyun.am, 4 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/pashinyany-hastatets-gnoum-e-ayn-pataragnerin-ortegh-vehapari-anouny-chi-hnchoum-aats-akannery-chshtoumner-en-anoum-kahanayits/33613033.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁰ See the clarification issued by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, <https://www.facebook.com/100064767818393/posts/1314288350740080/#> (in Armenian)

¹¹ Nikol Pashinyan uses the Catholicos’s baptismal name, which carries a derogatory connotation when referring to ordained clergy, as well as for the followers.

Catholicos be taken into account. **It could be someone familiar, an NSS officer, a relative, my assistant...**"¹²

ասիմանվեն ամրագրված սկզբունքների պահպանման, ֆինանսական թափանցիկության եւ հոգեւորականների բարեվարքության ապահովման կառուցակարգեր,

5. Ասիմանված կարգով Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոսի ընտրություն:

Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու հոգևորականաց դասին եւ բոլոր հետետրոդներին կոչ ենք անում աջակցել միանալ Եկեղեցու բարենորոգմանը, համախմբվել այս նպատակի շուրջ՝ հանուն Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու, հանուն Հայաստանի Հանրապետության եւ մեր ժողովրդի:

Մենք՝ ներքոստորագրյալներս ձեռալորում ենք Համակարգող խորհուրդ, որին վերապահում ենք Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու բարենորոգման կազմակերպչական գործառույթներ: Սույն կազմը կարող է ընդլայնվել Համակարգող խորհրդի միաձայնությամբ:

Նիկոլ Փաշինյան, ՀՀ վարչապետ

S. Հովնան արքեպիսկոպոս Տերտերյան

S. Նավասարդ արքեպիսկոպոս Կճոյան

S. Աբրահամ արքեպիսկոպոս Մկրտչյան

S. Առաքել արքեպիսկոպոս Քարամյան

S. Սիոն արքեպիսկոպոս Աղամյան

8. As part of his campaign to remove the Catholicos, N. Pashinyan, having enlisted a group of clergymen to his side, established the so-called “Council for the Reform of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.”¹³ The declaration announcing the intention to remove the Catholicos, elect a new one, and amend the Church’s statute was signed by ten bishops. The list is headed personally by the Prime Minister, whose signature appears first; the statement was disseminated via his official Facebook page.¹⁴

9. To discuss “recent developments surrounding the AAHC and issues relating to

internal ecclesiastical life,” the Mother See had decided to convene an Episcopal Assembly. Initially scheduled for December 10-12,¹⁵ 2025, the assembly was postponed¹⁶ following ongoing repression and the arrest of a fourth senior cleric, Archbishop Arshak

¹² Փաշինյանը հաստատում է՝ պատարագներում կաթողիկոսի անունը չհնչեցնելու իսկրանքը փոխանցվում է նաև ԱԱԾ աշխատակիցների միջոցով, Azatutyun.am, 4 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33612647.html> (in Armenian)

¹³ Nikol Pashinyan’s official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0aNF3UpGsLLokXRiP6GaXPBvkr6mwRbF4vnx9AxmrYXCS8fdiisUBH38reTW9Dkxl>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0UCaf6nSGSVWjBTaUDcXPMWfB2cki6o3LTKrQFuy1LVYcDeYuEUnMhz6EijLF8f97l>

¹⁴ Վարչապետը և 10 եպիսկոպոսները «Եկեղեցու բարենորոգման հայտարարություն» են ստորագրել, Մայր Աթոռից հակադարձում են, Azatutyun.am, 5 June 2026, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/varchapety-ev-10-episkoposnery-ekeghetsoubarenorogman-haytararoutyamb-handes-ekan-/33640182.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁵ Կաթողիկոսը ղեկտնմբերի 10-12-ը եպիսկոպոսաց ժողով է հրավիրում, Azatutyun.am, 1 դեկտեմբերի 2025թ., <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/katoghikosy-dektemberi-10-12-y-episkoposats-zhoghov-e-hraviroum/33610091.html>

¹⁶ Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովը հետաձգվում է՝ պայմանավորված բռնաճնշումներով. Մայր Աթոռ, Azatutyun.am, 7 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/episkoposats-zhoghovy-hetadzgoum-e-paymanavorvats-brnachnshoumnerov-mayrator/33615591.html> (in Armenian)

Khachatryan.¹⁷ Ultimately, it was decided to convene the assembly outside Armenia, in St. Pölten, Austria, on February 16–19.¹⁸

10. On January 10, 2025 one of the bishops who signed the statement against the Catholicos, Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, was removed by the Catholicos from his position as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese. The grounds cited were “abuse of office, failure to fulfill the duties incumbent upon the Primate, as well as instances of coercion and pressure exercised against the clergy of the diocese.”¹⁹
11. Saroyan filed a lawsuit against the AAHC seeking to “invalidate the Patriarchal Decree of His Holiness Karekin II no 02 of January 10, 2026 removing him from office and to reinstate him”. On January 17, the First Instance Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz “reinstated” Saroyan as diocesan primate. The decision was the following:

“Order the Respondent, the religious organization “Armenian Apostolic Holy Church,” and any other persons, to ensure, without hindrance, the continued exercise of office by Arman Volodya Saroyan (Bishop Gevorg Saroyan) as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese until the issuance of a final judicial act in this case. Prohibit the Respondent, the religious organization “Armenian Apostolic Holy Church,” and any other persons from undertaking any action that may, in any manner, impede or interfere with Arman Volodya Saroyan (Bishop Gevorg Saroyan), in his capacity as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese, in the exercise of the powers and fulfillment of the duties assigned to the diocesan primate under Article 68 of the Statute of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, as well as under any other applicable ecclesiastical rules, including, inter alia, the administration and management of the financial accounts (funds) of the Masyatsotn Diocese and the execution of the Diocese’s financial transactions, until the issuance of a final judicial act in this case.”²⁰

12. In its reasoning, the court, the Court noted, that “the significance of the office of Diocesan Primate (...) is not manifested in a superior rank

¹⁷ Արշակ սրբազանը կալանավորվեց 2 ամսով, Azatutyun.am, 5 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33613561.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁸ Կաթողիկոսի հրավերով Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովը տեղի կունենա Ավստրիայի Սանկտ Փյոլթրն քաղաքում, Azatutyun.am, 19 January 2026, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/katoghikosi-hraverov-episkoposats-zhoghovy-teghikounena-avstriayi-sankt-pyoltyn-kaghakoum/33653916.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁹ *Communiqué*, AAHC Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, 10 January 2026, <https://www.armenianchurch.org/en/news/e-10-01-2025/12113>

²⁰ See case no. ԱՐԴ/0046/02/26, Decision on means of securing a claim of 16 January 2026, First Instance Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz

within the administrative hierarchy, nor is it expressed through the enjoyment of specific material advantages or the ability to exercise authority in matters of a domestic or proprietary nature. Rather, the importance of the office is primarily reflected in its **exclusive and paramount role of spiritual leadership**, the officeholder bearing responsibility for the activities of all monasteries within the Diocese that fall under his jurisdiction. Various diocesan unions and commissions, whether cultural, educational, Christian, or devoted to national upbringing and formation, operate under the auspices and supervision of the Diocesan Primate. Within the Diocese, the Diocesan Primate is the sole authority **charged with the diligent and proper oversight of the unaltered preservation of the doctrine and canonical order of the Armenian Apostolic Church.**"²¹

13. Later, on January 27, the Catholicos defrocked Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan:

"The grounds for defrocking included, in particular, the fact that he contested the Patriarchal decree ordering his dismissal from the position of Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese and his return to the Mother See, thereby impeding the normal functioning of the Masyatsotn Diocese and, through his judicial claim, creating both the occasion and the conditions for interference in internal ecclesiastical life by bodies belonging to the state authorities.

Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, through canonical deviations and acts of misconduct, has breached and violated his vow of obedience.

*The defrocked clergyman shall henceforth be classified among the laity under his baptismal name, Arman Saroyan."*²²

14. On January 29, the Investigative Committee initiated criminal proceedings for not reinstating Arman Saroyan as the Primate of Masyatsotnon Diocese on the basis of **failure to comply with the judicial act.**²³ Six bishops were charged and prohibited from leaving the country, **effectively preventing their participation in the Episcopal Assembly in Austria.**²⁴

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Կարգալույծ է հռչակվել Տ. Գևորգ Եպիսկոպոս Սարոյանը, Hetq.am, 27 հունվարի 2026թ., <https://hetq.am/hy/article/179445> (in Armenian)

²³ *Criminal Proceeding Initiated on Failure to Comply with Judicial Act*, Investigative Committee of RA, 29 January 2026, <https://www.investigative.am/news/36902>

²⁴ Մեղադրանք հոգևորականներին՝ Ավստրիայի Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովին ընդառաջ արգելվել է լքել երկիրը, Azatutyun.am, 31 January 2026,

15. In February, two other defrocked clergymen, Aramayis Takhmazian and Stepan Asatryan, also filed court claims seeking reinstatement to ecclesiastical office.²⁵

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

16. Unlike Armenian practice, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) provides extensive clarification regarding the autonomy of religious organizations and the dismissal of clergy. By ratifying the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and its protocols, Armenia has undertaken to accept these standards as sources of law. This obligation is enshrined in both the Constitution²⁶ and legislation.²⁷
17. A general principle is that Article 9 of the Convention **does not enshrine a right of dissent** within a religious community; In cases of doctrinal or organizational disagreement, the individual's freedom of religion is exercised through the option of **freely leaving the community**.²⁸
18. In *Sindicatul "Păstorul cel Bun" v. Romania*, the ECtHR held that "[r]espect for the autonomy of religious communities recognised by the State implies, in particular, that the State should accept the **right of such communities to react, in accordance with their own rules and interests, to any dissident movements** emerging within them that might pose a threat to their cohesion, image or unity. It is therefore **not the task of the national authorities to act as**

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/erkou-episkoposi-mek-kahanayi-meghadrank-e-arajadrvel/33665593.html> (in Armenian)

²⁵ Կարգալուծ քահանաները Կաթողիկոսի տնօրինությունն անվավեր ճանաչելու պահանջով դիմել են դատարան, Hetq.am, 6 փետրվարի 2026թ., <https://hetq.am/hy/article/179597> (in Armenian)

²⁶ Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 81

²⁷ For instance, Articles 192 and 381 of the Civil Code of Armenia

²⁸ *Miroļubovs and Others v. Latvia*, no. 798/05, ECHR, 15 December 2009, § 80, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-93983>

the arbiter between religious communities and the various dissident factions that exist or may emerge within them.”²⁹

19. In the context of the principle of religious autonomy, the State cannot oblige **“to admit members or exclude existing members.** Interference of this sort would run counter to the freedom of religious associations to regulate their conduct and to administer their affairs freely.” Moreover, according to ECHR, “The internal structure of a religious organisation and the regulations governing its membership must be seen as a **means by which such organisations are able to express their beliefs and maintain their religious traditions.”³⁰** The autonomy principle prohibits the State from imposing religious duties on specific individuals.³¹
20. These principles apply even where a member of the clergy is in an employment relationship with a religious organization, a relationship that entails a certain degree of duty of loyalty (an obligation that does not exist in the private employment sphere). In *Fernández Martínez v. Spain*, the Catholic Church terminated Martínez’s contract to teach religion after it emerged that he was affiliated with an association expressing views contrary to the Church’s doctrine. The European Court of Human Rights emphasized that, by virtue of his status as a cleric, Martínez was bound “by a duty of loyalty towards the Catholic Church, thus limiting his right to respect for his private life to a certain degree. In the Court’s view, the fact of being seen as campaigning publicly in movements opposed to Catholic doctrine clearly runs counter to that duty. In addition, there is little doubt that the applicant, as a former priest and director of a seminary, was or must have been aware of the substance and significance of that duty.”³²

²⁹ *Sindicatul “Păstorul cel Bun” v. Romania* [GC], no. 2330/09, ECHR, 9 July 2013, § 165, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-122763>

³⁰ *Svyato-Mykhaylivska Parafiya v. Ukraine*, no 77703/01, ECHR, 14 June 2007, §§ 146 and 150, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-81067>

³¹ *Fernández Martínez v. Spain* [GC], no. 56030/07, ECHR, 2 June 2014, § 129, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-145068>

³² *Ibid*, § 146

CONCLUSION

21. By imposing an interim measure in the case of former Bishop Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, the Armavir court itself underscored the significance of the office of diocesan primate, emphasizing its **exclusive role in spiritual leadership**, responsibility for the functioning of the monasteries within the entire diocese under his authority, and oversight of various cultural, educational, Christian, and national-formational associations and committees. The court separately highlighted the primate's distinctive duty to ensure, with due diligence, the unaltered preservation of the doctrine and canons of the Armenian Church. Such functions and responsibilities, by their very nature, concern core doctrinal and organizational matters of a religious organization, in this case, of the AAHC, and, as noted above, constitute instruments through which the Church expresses its beliefs and preserves its religious traditions. Accordingly, they fall **exclusively within the internal affairs of the AAHC**.
22. Under Article 61 of the Church's statute, the diocesan primate "is appointed by the Catholicos of All Armenians and acts as his representative. Where necessary, His Holiness may recall the diocesan primate from office."³³ It is beyond reasonable dispute that Arman Saroyan was fully aware of this statutory rule and understood the substance and significance of the office.
23. It follows that the appointment to or removal from the office of diocesan primate lies solely within the discretion of the Catholicos, through which the **Church's beliefs are expressed and its religious traditions maintained. The State possesses no authority** to require that such religious responsibilities be entrusted to any particular individual.
24. In light of the interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights, Arman Saroyan, as well as other clergy calling for "reform" of the Church, **do not enjoy a right to express dissent within the religious community**. In the event of disagreement, their freedom

³³ Statute of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church operating in the territory of the internal diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, Article 61, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j3z07r7rQ9Uib2cousUb9TCPQrKrwzvB/view?usp=sharing> (in Armenian)

of religion is exercised through the option of freely leaving the community.

25. If members of a religious organization, namely the holders of ecclesiastical office, do not enjoy such a right, it follows *a fortiori* that **ordinary followers of the Church cannot claim it either**. Nevertheless, **Prime Minister N. Pashinyan, has advanced demands for the replacement of the Catholicos, basing his claims on presenting himself as such a follower**.³⁴
26. The episcopal college of the AAHC currently consists of 56 bishops.³⁵ Of these, ten have joined the campaign to remove the Catholicos and amend the Church's statute under the patronage of N. Pashinyan; six have been prohibited by court order from leaving the country; and four are detained on politically motivated grounds.³⁶
27. In these circumstances, it is evident that the Bishops' Assembly scheduled for February 16-19 in Austria, an event that should be guaranteed by the freedoms of religion and association, may be jeopardized. Given that two additional former clergy have filed claims seeking reinstatement to ecclesiastical office, and that there already exists a **judicial "precedent" contradicting the standards of Article 9 of the Convention**, a further step in the authorities'

³⁴ Nikol Pashinyan's official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid02VwcfFxyTewgGVPLdQV1t2uUtgKymttBLKEvWM9qMee51A3noGd4UEZEPYk8FPB5TI>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid02PpgZ9J5vTAfu9bKF9K2iT6oyU4ct8Xkg5UBYyRFSgNpan1cKp6YBrkLLkVmnniDXI>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0MZxZxgvkniV8dhwTcgn7WNF7u1p9SdKVixKgK8g24KyueZCMg7odPrhLHkNWRZEI>

³⁵ The list of current Bishops is available on the official website of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, <https://www.armenianchurch.org/en/Bishops>

³⁶ The political nature of the prosecution of Archbishops Galstanyan and Ajapahyan was addressed in the report "Injustice in Armenia: ...", pp. 17-37.

Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan has been charged with compelling individuals to participate in protests against N. Pashinyan in 2021 and with urging them not to vote for him in the elections. The accusation is based on testimony given by former clergy who have themselves joined N. Pashinyan's campaign.

Մկրտիչ սրբազանի գործը՝ դատարանում, փաստաբանը մեղադրանքն անհիմն է համարում, Azatutyun.am, 29 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/mkrtich-srbazani-gortsy-dataranoum-pastabany-meghadrankn-anhimn-e-hamaroum/33635641.html> (in Armenian)

Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, who is also a vocal critic of N. Pashinyan, is currently in detention on charges of having planted "marijuana" in the bag of an individual who, eight years earlier, had publicly demanded the removal of the Catholicos.

ԱՄԾ-ն ձերբակալեց Արշակ սրբազանին թմրամիջոցի ապօրինի իրացման մեղադրանքով, Hetq.am, 4 December 2025, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/178542> (in Armenian)

Case of Illegal Drug Supply Committed in Previous Years Disclosed, Investigative Committee of RA, 5 December 2025, <https://www.investigative.am/en/news/36798>

campaign against the AAHC, led by N. Pashinyan, appears to be taking shape.

28. Finally, it should be noted that, given the distinctive nature of religious organizations discussed above, it is not uncommon for clergy to be dismissed from service for criticizing church leadership. One such example occurred in September 2025, when Don Leonardo Maria Pompei, a priest in one of the Roman communities, was removed from service after criticizing the reforms of the Second Vatican Council during an online meeting.³⁷ Earlier, another Catholic priest, Natale Santonocito, was excommunicated after declaring with respect to Pope Francis that “the Pope is not the Pope, he never was.”³⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Armenian Center for Political Rights calls upon international organizations with mandates related to human rights protection, to which Armenia is a member, their specialized offices, and relevant officials, as well as human rights organizations operating in Armenia and other countries, to:

1. Conduct a detailed review of the cases presented in this report, as well as in other publicly available sources, regarding the campaign against the AAHC coordinated by the Prime Minister of RA, Nikol Pashinyan, and the interventions against the autonomy of the church. ACPR is ready to provide support to the extent possible in obtaining necessary materials.
2. Evaluate the persecutions in light of ECHR law, “Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities” by Venice

³⁷ *Italian priest suspended after YouTube broadcast criticising Vatican II*, The Catholic Herald, 9 September 2025, <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/italian-priest-suspended-after-youtube-broadcast-criticising-vatican-ii-2>

³⁸ *Another Italian priest excommunicated for saying Francis is not Pope*, The Catholic Herald, 31 January 2025, <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/another-italian-priest-excommunicated-for-saying-francis-is-not-pope>

Commission and OSCE/ODIHR, and other internationally recognized human rights standards.

3. Issue clear public statements regarding the cases described above.
4. Focus attention on cases of state interventions that undermine the autonomy of religious organizations in RA, providing a precise evaluation.



Armenian
Center for
Political Rights

**ON THE ONGOING
INTERFERENCE WITH
THE AUTONOMY OF
THE ARMENIAN
APOSTOLIC HOLY
CHURCH**

URGENT REPORT

**FEBRUARY 7, 2026
YEREVAN**

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The **Armenian Center for Political Rights** is a watchdog organization focusing on detecting, responding, and preventing political persecution and safeguarding political rights.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The urgency of this report stems from the political campaign launched by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, against the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (AAHC), as well as recent developments in this context. The motivations, manifestations of the campaign, as well as the Prime Minister's control over the judicial and law enforcement systems within this context were addressed in our November 5 report.¹
2. One of the primary guarantees of freedom of religion is the State's obligation not to interfere with the autonomy and internal life of religious organizations. This obligation is enshrined in the Constitution² and legislation³ of the Republic of Armenia, as well as in international human rights documents.⁴
3. During the aforementioned campaign, the State, represented by the Prime Minister, security bodies, other officials, and now also the courts, has repeatedly interfered with the AAHC's autonomy across multiple domains. These interferences have manifested both in the denial of the Church's and its individual members' freedom of expression and other rights,⁵ and in attempts to influence internal affairs and liturgy.

¹ *Injustice in Armenia: Mass Political Persecutions in 2025, Part I (May-September)*, ACPR, 5 November 2025, pp 4-12, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cF8bcqCOAgPDCaK9Oa-uDFxCCEH5CwHv/view>

² Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 17

³ Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Organizations of RA, Article 17

⁴ Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Court's interpretations (among others, *Hassan and Tchaouch v. Bulgaria*, no.30985/96, § 62, ECHR 2000, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-58921>)

⁵ *Injustice in Armenia...*, pp 39-41

4. These interventions have already been criticized by the World Council of Churches,⁶ Christian Solidarity International,⁷ the Forum for Religious Freedom in Europe,⁸ and others.
5. This urgent report does not aim to document all ongoing persecutions against the Church. Its purpose is to present the international legal standards on religious autonomy that Armenian authorities must follow.

CONTEXT

6. Following the publication of [“Injustice in Armenia: Mass Political Persecutions in 2025, Part I \(May-September\)”](#), persecution of AAHC members and supporters has continued and evolved. These developments will be addressed in a separate publication.
7. **On December 3**, 2025, Fr. Ruben, a priest of St. Hakob Mtsbnetsi Church in Gyumri, reported that the National Security Service (NSS) had approached him and requested that he refrain from mentioning the Catholicos’s name during the Divine Liturgy,⁹ though this is a mandatory part of the service.¹⁰ N. Pashinyan confirmed this, stating: “We ask that the fact that we consider Ktritch Nersisyan¹¹ not to be

⁶ *WCC expresses deep concern over recent developments involving the Armenian Apostolic Church*, World Council of Churches, 8 July 2025, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-expresses-deep-concern-over-recent-developments-involving-the-armenian-apostolic-church>

⁷ *Religious freedom organizations call on Armenian government to end attacks on Armenian church (statement)*, Christian Solidarity International, Coptic Solidarity, SOS Chrétiens d’Orient and individuals, 17 July 2025, <https://www.csi-int.org/app/uploads/sites/13/2025/07/IRF-statement-for-Armenian-Church-with-signatories.pdf>

⁸ *ARMENIA: Apostolic Church Under Attack*, 3 February 2026թ., <https://foref-europe.org/blog/2026/02/03/armenia-apostolic-church-under-attack/>

⁹ *Փաշինյանը հաստատեց՝ զնույն է այն պատարագներին, որտեղ Վեհապետի անունը չի հնչում, ԱԱԾ-ականները ճշտումներ են անում քահանայից*, Azatutyun.am, 4 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/pashinyany-hastatets-gnoum-e-ayn-pataragnerin-ortegh-vehapari-anouny-chi-hnchoum-aats-akannery-chshtoumner-en-anoum-kahanayits/33613033.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁰ See the clarification issued by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, <https://www.facebook.com/100064767818393/posts/1314288350740080/#> (in Armenian)

¹¹ Nikol Pashinyan uses the Catholicos’s baptismal name, which carries a derogatory connotation when referring to ordained clergy, as well as for the followers.


Catholicos be taken into account. **It could be someone familiar, an NSS officer, a relative, my assistant...**"¹²


ասիմանվեն ամրագրված սկզբունքների պահպանման, ֆինանսական թափանցիկության եւ հոգեւորականների բարեվարքության ապահովման կառուցակարգեր,

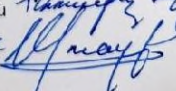
5. Ասիմանված կարգով Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոսի ընտրություն:

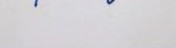
Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու հոգևորականաց դասին եւ բոլոր հետետրոդներին **կոչ ենք** անում աջակցել, միանալ Եկեղեցու բարենորոգմանը, համախմբվել այս նպատակի շուրջ՝ հանուն Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու, հանուն Հայաստանի Հանրապետության եւ մեր ժողովրդի:

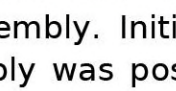
Սենք՝ ներքոստորագրյալներն ձեռալորում ենք Համակարգող խորհուրդ, որին վերապահում ենք Հայաստանյայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցու բարենորոգման կազմակերպչական գործառույթներ: Սույն կազմը կարող է ընդլայնվել Համակարգող խորհրդի միաձայնությամբ:

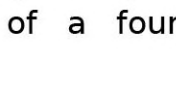
Նիկոլ Փաշինյան, ՀՀ վարչապետ 

S. Հովնան արքեպիսկոպոս Տերտերյան 

S. Նավասարդ արքեպիսկոպոս Կճոյան 

S. Աբրահամ արքեպիսկոպոս Մկրտչյան 

S. Առաքել արքեպիսկոպոս Քարամյան 

S. Սիոն արքեպիսկոպոս Աղամյան 

8. As part of his campaign to remove the Catholicos, N. Pashinyan, having enlisted a group of clergymen to his side, established the so-called “Council for the Reform of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.”¹³ The declaration announcing the intention to remove the Catholicos, elect a new one, and amend the Church’s statute was signed by ten bishops. The list is headed personally by the Prime Minister, whose signature appears first; the statement was disseminated via his official Facebook page.¹⁴

9. To discuss “recent developments surrounding the AAHC and issues relating to

internal ecclesiastical life,” the Mother See had decided to convene an Episcopal Assembly. Initially scheduled for December 10-12,¹⁵ 2025, the assembly was postponed¹⁶ following ongoing repression and the arrest of a fourth senior cleric, Archbishop Arshak

¹² Փաշինյանը հաստատում է՝ պատարագներում կաթողիկոսի անունը չհնչեցնելու իսկրանքը փոխանցվում է նաև ԱԱԾ աշխատակիցների միջոցով, Azatutyun.am, 4 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33612647.html> (in Armenian)

¹³ Nikol Pashinyan’s official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0aNF3UpGsLLokXRiP6GaXPBvkr6mwRbF4vnx9AxmrYXCS8fdiisUBH38reTW9Dkxl>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0UCaf6nSGSVWjBTaUDcXPMWfB2cki6o3LTKrQFuy1LVYcDeYuEUnMhz6EijLF8f97l>

¹⁴ Վարչապետը և 10 եպիսկոպոսները «Եկեղեցու բարենորոգման հայտարարություն» են ստորագրել, Մայր Աթոռից հակադարձում են, Azatutyun.am, 5 June 2026, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/varchapety-ev-10-episkoposnery-ekeghetsoubarenorogman-haytararoutyamb-handes-ekan-/33640182.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁵ Կաթողիկոսը ղեկտնմբերի 10-12-ը եպիսկոպոսաց ժողով է հրավիրում, Azatutyun.am, 1 դեկտեմբերի 2025թ., <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/katoghikosy-dektemberi-10-12-y-episkoposats-zhoghov-e-hraviroum/33610091.html>

¹⁶ Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովը հետաձգվում է՝ պայմանավորված բռնաճնշումներով. Մայր Աթոռ, Azatutyun.am, 7 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/episkoposats-zhoghovy-hetadzgoum-e-paymanavorvats-brnachnshoumnerov-mayrator/33615591.html> (in Armenian)

Khachatryan.¹⁷ Ultimately, it was decided to convene the assembly outside Armenia, in St. Pölten, Austria, on February 16–19.¹⁸

10. On January 10, 2025 one of the bishops who signed the statement against the Catholicos, Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, was removed by the Catholicos from his position as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese. The grounds cited were “abuse of office, failure to fulfill the duties incumbent upon the Primate, as well as instances of coercion and pressure exercised against the clergy of the diocese.”¹⁹
11. Saroyan filed a lawsuit against the AAHC seeking to “invalidate the Patriarchal Decree of His Holiness Karekin II no 02 of January 10, 2026 removing him from office and to reinstate him”. On January 17, the First Instance Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz “reinstated” Saroyan as diocesan primate. The decision was the following:

“Order the Respondent, the religious organization “Armenian Apostolic Holy Church,” and any other persons, to ensure, without hindrance, the continued exercise of office by Arman Volodya Saroyan (Bishop Gevorg Saroyan) as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese until the issuance of a final judicial act in this case. Prohibit the Respondent, the religious organization “Armenian Apostolic Holy Church,” and any other persons from undertaking any action that may, in any manner, impede or interfere with Arman Volodya Saroyan (Bishop Gevorg Saroyan), in his capacity as Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese, in the exercise of the powers and fulfillment of the duties assigned to the diocesan primate under Article 68 of the Statute of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, as well as under any other applicable ecclesiastical rules, including, inter alia, the administration and management of the financial accounts (funds) of the Masyatsotn Diocese and the execution of the Diocese’s financial transactions, until the issuance of a final judicial act in this case.”²⁰

12. In its reasoning, the court, the Court noted, that “the significance of the office of Diocesan Primate (...) is not manifested in a superior rank

¹⁷ Արշակ սրբազանը կալանավորվեց 2 ամսով, Azatutyun.am, 5 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33613561.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁸ Կաթողիկոսի հրավերով Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովը տեղի կունենա Ավստրիայի Սանկտ Փյոլթեն քաղաքում, Azatutyun.am, 19 January 2026, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/katoghikosi-hraverov-episkoposats-zhoghovy-teghikounena-avstriayi-sankt-pyoltyn-kaghakoum/33653916.html> (in Armenian)

¹⁹ *Communiqué*, AAHC Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, 10 January 2026, <https://www.armenianchurch.org/en/news/e-10-01-2025/12113>

²⁰ See case no. ԱՐԴ/0046/02/26, Decision on means of securing a claim of 16 January 2026, First Instance Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz

within the administrative hierarchy, nor is it expressed through the enjoyment of specific material advantages or the ability to exercise authority in matters of a domestic or proprietary nature. Rather, the importance of the office is primarily reflected in its **exclusive and paramount role of spiritual leadership**, the officeholder bearing responsibility for the activities of all monasteries within the Diocese that fall under his jurisdiction. Various diocesan unions and commissions, whether cultural, educational, Christian, or devoted to national upbringing and formation, operate under the auspices and supervision of the Diocesan Primate. Within the Diocese, the Diocesan Primate is the sole authority **charged with the diligent and proper oversight of the unaltered preservation of the doctrine and canonical order of the Armenian Apostolic Church.**"²¹

13. Later, on January 27, the Catholicos defrocked Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan:

"The grounds for defrocking included, in particular, the fact that he contested the Patriarchal decree ordering his dismissal from the position of Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese and his return to the Mother See, thereby impeding the normal functioning of the Masyatsotn Diocese and, through his judicial claim, creating both the occasion and the conditions for interference in internal ecclesiastical life by bodies belonging to the state authorities.

Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, through canonical deviations and acts of misconduct, has breached and violated his vow of obedience.

*The defrocked clergyman shall henceforth be classified among the laity under his baptismal name, Arman Saroyan."*²²

14. On January 29, the Investigative Committee initiated criminal proceedings for not reinstating Arman Saroyan as the Primate of Masyatsotnon Diocese on the basis of **failure to comply with the judicial act.**²³ Six bishops were charged and prohibited from leaving the country, **effectively preventing their participation in the Episcopal Assembly in Austria.**²⁴

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Կարգալույծ է հռչակվել Տ. Գևորգ Եպիսկոպոս Սարոյանը, Hetq.am, 27 հունվարի 2026թ., <https://hetq.am/hy/article/179445> (in Armenian)

²³ *Criminal Proceeding Initiated on Failure to Comply with Judicial Act*, Investigative Committee of RA, 29 January 2026, <https://www.investigative.am/news/36902>

²⁴ Մեղադրանք հոգևորականներին՝ Ավստրիայի Եպիսկոպոսաց ժողովին ընդառաջ արգելվել է լքել երկիրը, Azatutyun.am, 31 January 2026,

15. In February, two other defrocked clergymen, Aramayis Takhmazian and Stepan Asatryan, also filed court claims seeking reinstatement to ecclesiastical office.²⁵

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

16. Unlike Armenian practice, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) provides extensive clarification regarding the autonomy of religious organizations and the dismissal of clergy. By ratifying the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and its protocols, Armenia has undertaken to accept these standards as sources of law. This obligation is enshrined in both the Constitution²⁶ and legislation.²⁷
17. A general principle is that Article 9 of the Convention **does not enshrine a right of dissent** within a religious community; In cases of doctrinal or organizational disagreement, the individual's freedom of religion is exercised through the option of **freely leaving the community**.²⁸
18. In *Sindicatul "Păstorul cel Bun" v. Romania*, the ECtHR held that "[r]espect for the autonomy of religious communities recognised by the State implies, in particular, that the State should accept the **right of such communities to react, in accordance with their own rules and interests, to any dissident movements** emerging within them that might pose a threat to their cohesion, image or unity. It is therefore **not the task of the national authorities to act as**

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/erkou-episkoposi-mek-kahanayi-meghadrank-e-arajadrvel/33665593.html> (in Armenian)

²⁵ Կարգալուծ քահանաները Կաթողիկոսի տնօրինությունն անվավեր ճանաչելու պահանջով դիմել են դատարան, Hetq.am, 6 փետրվարի 2026թ., <https://hetq.am/hy/article/179597> (in Armenian)

²⁶ Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 81

²⁷ For instance, Articles 192 and 381 of the Civil Code of Armenia

²⁸ *Miroļubovs and Others v. Latvia*, no. 798/05, ECHR, 15 December 2009, § 80, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-93983>

the arbiter between religious communities and the various dissident factions that exist or may emerge within them.”²⁹

19. In the context of the principle of religious autonomy, the State cannot oblige **“to admit members or exclude existing members.** Interference of this sort would run counter to the freedom of religious associations to regulate their conduct and to administer their affairs freely.” Moreover, according to ECHR, “The internal structure of a religious organisation and the regulations governing its membership must be seen as a **means by which such organisations are able to express their beliefs and maintain their religious traditions.”³⁰** The autonomy principle prohibits the State from imposing religious duties on specific individuals.³¹
20. These principles apply even where a member of the clergy is in an employment relationship with a religious organization, a relationship that entails a certain degree of duty of loyalty (an obligation that does not exist in the private employment sphere). In *Fernández Martínez v. Spain*, the Catholic Church terminated Martínez’s contract to teach religion after it emerged that he was affiliated with an association expressing views contrary to the Church’s doctrine. The European Court of Human Rights emphasized that, by virtue of his status as a cleric, Martínez was bound “by a duty of loyalty towards the Catholic Church, thus limiting his right to respect for his private life to a certain degree. In the Court’s view, the fact of being seen as campaigning publicly in movements opposed to Catholic doctrine clearly runs counter to that duty. In addition, there is little doubt that the applicant, as a former priest and director of a seminary, was or must have been aware of the substance and significance of that duty.”³²

²⁹ *Sindicatul “Păstorul cel Bun” v. Romania* [GC], no. 2330/09, ECHR, 9 July 2013, § 165, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-122763>

³⁰ *Svyato-Mykhaylivska Parafiya v. Ukraine*, no 77703/01, ECHR, 14 June 2007, §§ 146 and 150, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-81067>

³¹ *Fernández Martínez v. Spain* [GC], no. 56030/07, ECHR, 2 June 2014, § 129, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-145068>

³² *Ibid*, § 146

CONCLUSION

21. By imposing an interim measure in the case of former Bishop Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, the Armavir court itself underscored the significance of the office of diocesan primate, emphasizing its **exclusive role in spiritual leadership**, responsibility for the functioning of the monasteries within the entire diocese under his authority, and oversight of various cultural, educational, Christian, and national-formational associations and committees. The court separately highlighted the primate's distinctive duty to ensure, with due diligence, the unaltered preservation of the doctrine and canons of the Armenian Church. Such functions and responsibilities, by their very nature, concern core doctrinal and organizational matters of a religious organization, in this case, of the AAHC, and, as noted above, constitute instruments through which the Church expresses its beliefs and preserves its religious traditions. Accordingly, they fall **exclusively within the internal affairs of the AAHC**.
22. Under Article 61 of the Church's statute, the diocesan primate "is appointed by the Catholicos of All Armenians and acts as his representative. Where necessary, His Holiness may recall the diocesan primate from office."³³ It is beyond reasonable dispute that Arman Saroyan was fully aware of this statutory rule and understood the substance and significance of the office.
23. It follows that the appointment to or removal from the office of diocesan primate lies solely within the discretion of the Catholicos, through which the **Church's beliefs are expressed and its religious traditions maintained. The State possesses no authority** to require that such religious responsibilities be entrusted to any particular individual.
24. In light of the interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights, Arman Saroyan, as well as other clergy calling for "reform" of the Church, **do not enjoy a right to express dissent within the religious community**. In the event of disagreement, their freedom

³³ Statute of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church operating in the territory of the internal diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, Article 61, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j3z07r7rQ9Uib2cousUb9TCPQrKrwzvB/view?usp=sharing> (in Armenian)

of religion is exercised through the option of freely leaving the community.

25. If members of a religious organization, namely the holders of ecclesiastical office, do not enjoy such a right, it follows *a fortiori* that **ordinary followers of the Church cannot claim it either. Nevertheless, Prime Minister N. Pashinyan, has advanced demands for the replacement of the Catholicos, basing his claims on presenting himself as such a follower.**³⁴
26. The episcopal college of the AAHC currently consists of 56 bishops.³⁵ Of these, ten have joined the campaign to remove the Catholicos and amend the Church's statute under the patronage of N. Pashinyan; six have been prohibited by court order from leaving the country; and four are detained on politically motivated grounds.³⁶
27. In these circumstances, it is evident that the Bishops' Assembly scheduled for February 16-19 in Austria, an event that should be guaranteed by the freedoms of religion and association, may be jeopardized. Given that two additional former clergy have filed claims seeking reinstatement to ecclesiastical office, and that there already exists a **judicial "precedent" contradicting the standards of Article 9 of the Convention**, a further step in the authorities'

³⁴ Nikol Pashinyan's official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid02VwcfFxyTewgGVPLdQV1t2uUtgKymttBLKEvWM9qMee51A3noGd4UEZEPYk8FPB5TI>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid02PpgZ9J5vTAfu9bKF9K2iT6oyU4ct8Xkg5UBYyRFSgNpan1cKp6YBrkLLkVmnniDXI>
<https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/pfbid0MZxZxgvkniV8dhwTcgn7WNF7u1p9SdKVixKgK8g24KyueZCMg7odPrhLHkNWRZEI>

³⁵ The list of current Bishops is available on the official website of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, <https://www.armenianchurch.org/en/Bishops>

³⁶ The political nature of the prosecution of Archbishops Galstanyan and Ajapahyan was addressed in the report "Injustice in Armenia: ...", pp. 17-37.

Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan has been charged with compelling individuals to participate in protests against N. Pashinyan in 2021 and with urging them not to vote for him in the elections. The accusation is based on testimony given by former clergy who have themselves joined N. Pashinyan's campaign.

Մկրտիչ սրբազանի գործը՝ դատարանում, փաստաբանը մեղադրանքն անհիմն է համարում, Azatutyun.am, 29 December 2025, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/mkrtich-srbazani-gortsy-dataranoum-pastabany-meghadrankn-anhimn-e-hamaroum/33635641.html> (in Armenian)

Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, who is also a vocal critic of N. Pashinyan, is currently in detention on charges of having planted "marijuana" in the bag of an individual who, eight years earlier, had publicly demanded the removal of the Catholicos.

ԱՄԾ-ն ձերբակալեց Արշակ սրբազանին թմրամիջոցի ապօրինի իրացման մեղադրանքով, Hetq.am, 4 December 2025, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/178542> (in Armenian)

Case of Illegal Drug Supply Committed in Previous Years Disclosed, Investigative Committee of RA, 5 December 2025, <https://www.investigative.am/en/news/36798>

campaign against the AAHC, led by N. Pashinyan, appears to be taking shape.

28. Finally, it should be noted that, given the distinctive nature of religious organizations discussed above, it is not uncommon for clergy to be dismissed from service for criticizing church leadership. One such example occurred in September 2025, when Don Leonardo Maria Pompei, a priest in one of the Roman communities, was removed from service after criticizing the reforms of the Second Vatican Council during an online meeting.³⁷ Earlier, another Catholic priest, Natale Santonocito, was excommunicated after declaring with respect to Pope Francis that “the Pope is not the Pope, he never was.”³⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Armenian Center for Political Rights calls upon international organizations with mandates related to human rights protection, to which Armenia is a member, their specialized offices, and relevant officials, as well as human rights organizations operating in Armenia and other countries, to:

1. Conduct a detailed review of the cases presented in this report, as well as in other publicly available sources, regarding the campaign against the AAHC coordinated by the Prime Minister of RA, Nikol Pashinyan, and the interventions against the autonomy of the church. ACPR is ready to provide support to the extent possible in obtaining necessary materials.
2. Evaluate the persecutions in light of ECHR law, “Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities” by Venice

³⁷ *Italian priest suspended after YouTube broadcast criticising Vatican II*, The Catholic Herald, 9 September 2025, <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/italian-priest-suspended-after-youtube-broadcast-criticising-vatican-ii-2>

³⁸ *Another Italian priest excommunicated for saying Francis is not Pope*, The Catholic Herald, 31 January 2025, <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/another-italian-priest-excommunicated-for-saying-francis-is-not-pope>

Commission and OSCE/ODIHR, and other internationally recognized human rights standards.

3. Issue clear public statements regarding the cases described above.
4. Focus attention on cases of state interventions that undermine the autonomy of religious organizations in RA, providing a precise evaluation.

Visiting an Armenian Archbishop in Prison

Joel Veldkamp

On February 3, I stood in a poorly lit meeting room in the National Security Services building in Yerevan, Armenia, as Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan prayed a blessing over me and my colleagues—a Catholic priest, a Swiss MP, and the president of [Christian Solidarity International](#).

Then a group of friendly guards came to take the archbishop back to his cell.

Armenia is the last country where I expected to visit an archbishop in prison. But the archbishop reminded us that for clergy from the Armenian Apostolic Church, he is far from exceptional. His ecclesiastical namesake, Archbishop Bagrat Vardazaryan, was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities in the very same building and executed in its basement.

When we left the prison, we took with us a [letter](#) the archbishop wrote to Vice President JD Vance, who visited Armenia yesterday. In the letter, the archbishop [told](#) the vice president that the Church is “simply doing what it has done for 1,700 years: safeguarding the Armenian nation, the world’s first Christian nation.”

Archbishop Bagrat was arrested on June 25. He was charged with plotting a coup, based on audio recordings that were later shown to have been [falsified](#). Since then, three other bishops have been arrested. Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan is serving a two-year sentence for a charge that Armenia’s public prosecutor had previously rejected as groundless. Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan is in pretrial detention on charges of “coercing political activity.” Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan is held on charges of planting a marijuana joint on a protestor in 2018. The marijuana in question was purportedly held in an evidence locker for the past few years, but has now gone [missing](#).

The absurdity of the charges shows that they are beside the point. As Stalin’s executioner Beria said, “Show me the man, I’ll show you the crime.”

Armenia’s prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, has made the real point crystal clear. He is publicly demanding that the Catholicos of All Armenians, the head of the worldwide Armenian Apostolic Church, resign and be replaced by someone picked by a state-appointed committee. From a religious freedom and ecclesiastical perspective, it is as absurd as if Giorgia Meloni were demanding the resignation of Pope Leo XIV.

To neutralize the Church, Pashinyan has resorted to using the old Soviet playbook. Pashinyan’s government has imprisoned the Church’s leading benefactor, Samvel Karapetyan, and begun nationalizing his businesses. He has organized a group of renegade bishops who call for “reforming” the Church, much as the Bolsheviks used a group of [“free Church”](#) clerics to foment a schism in the 1920s.

This new wave of persecution has a context. In 2020, Armenia lost a war to its neighbor Azerbaijan, which was backed by its powerful ally Turkey. Three years later, Azerbaijan attacked Nagorno Karabakh (or Artsakh), a land where Armenians have been living for thousands of years. All 120,000 Armenian Christians living there were forced to flee. In the aftermath, the European Union and the United States have been pushing Armenia toward peace on Azerbaijan’s terms, and toward “economic integration” with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The West's strategy for the region is to establish an economic corridor connecting Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which would allow Europe to receive oil and gas from Central Asia and goods from China. Such an arrangement risks making Armenia permanently vulnerable and economically dependent on the powers that carried out the Armenian Genocide and the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh.

With admittedly few good choices before him, Pashinyan has tried to make this vision his own. Pashinyan seeks to re-found the Republic of Armenia based on a new ideology he calls "Real Armenia."

Armenia was founded as a state dedicated to preserving the Armenian people in the wake of the Armenian Genocide. But Real Armenia is a Western-facing state, focused on delivering economic gains for the people who live there. For Pashinyan, the memory of the genocide, the lost homelands in Karabakh and Anatolia, and even the worldwide Armenian diaspora are distractions from "Real Armenia."

The Armenian Church has openly challenged the prime minister's agenda. In May 2024, the Armenian government unilaterally conceded some territories in Tavush province, where Archbishop Bagrat has his diocese, to Azerbaijan. The archbishop responded by organizing a protest march from Tavush to Yerevan. This march grew into a political [movement](#) that named the archbishop a candidate for prime minister. (The Catholicos granted him leave from his ecclesiastical duties.)

But the arrests did not begin until a year later, when the Catholicos spoke at a conference organized by the World Council of Churches in Switzerland. In his [speech](#), he demanded that the Armenian refugees from Artsakh be allowed to return to their homeland. Within days, the prime minister began attacking the Catholicos. A few weeks later, Archbishop Bagrat was arrested.

Westerners may balk at the thought of archbishops running for prime minister, or a Church trying to shape foreign policy. For the Armenian clergymen we have spoken to—both behind bars and not—there is no contradiction. They are shepherds defending their endangered flock. "The church cannot stand by and watch while this happens," the archbishop told us. "That's why I'm in here."

In his letter, Archbishop Bagrat points out that Vice President Vance has "warned the EU that it has been committing civilizational suicide by giving up Europe's Christian identity." "This is precisely what the Armenian Prime Minister is engineering in Armenia," he writes.

One may or may not share the archbishop's assessment. But this crisis poses an inescapable question to Western Christians, especially those of us who believe that Christianity should play a role in politics and society in our own countries. How will we respond to an attempt by a secular state—a U.S. ally—to break one of the oldest churches in the world?

As our visit ended, we asked Archbishop Bagrat if he would be happy for other Christian leaders to visit him in prison. He responded with enthusiasm: "Yes! Come!"

Image by Anthony Pizzoferrato via Getty Images

Armenia's state is now the greatest threat to its own official Christian church

by David A. Grigorian, opinion contributor - 01/12/26 1:30 PM ET



Grigor Yepremyan/PAN Photo via AP
Armenian Apostolic Church leader Catholicos Karekin II in 2021.

This Christmas, the world's oldest Christian church was under attack. The church in Armenia — a small country in the Caucasus and the first nation to adopt Christianity as its state religion in A.D. 301 — has been the object of a brutal campaign unleashed by the country's authoritarian ruler, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Recently, a striking headline — “In God's name, what is going on in Armenia?” — dominated page nine of the Financial Times as part of a full-page advertisement accusing the country's government of Christian persecution. It is an extraordinary accusation in a country where more than 90 percent are followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The country's constitution gives the church a formal role in the preservation of its national identity, although the official separation of state and religion allows it to function independently.

In short, the country's oldest and most respected institution, which has sustained the identity of this small country for centuries while it has fallen under the rule of Romans, Persians, Byzantines, Arabs, Mongols, Turks and Russians now finds itself on a collision course with its country's own government.

Pashinyan — a college dropout turned yellow journalist, whose sudden ascent to power in 2018 is widely attributed to Russia — makes no secret of the fact that he wants to overthrow the church's spiritual leader, the Catholicos Karekin II. His elaborate campaign of pushing out the church leadership has involved the arrest of three archbishops, a bishop, several clergy and supporters. The aim is to divert attention of the country away from its existential problems.

People from across Armenia are deeply dissatisfied with Pashinyan's leadership and believe that the nation is drifting in the wrong direction. Nearly three-quarters of citizens now struggle

with poverty and Pashinyan's approval rating was measured in the single digits last summer — one of the lowest ratings of any head of government in the world.

A significant factor in dissatisfaction with his governance is the sense that Pashinyan has been unwilling or unable to safeguard Armenia's national security and sovereignty during a period of exceptional geopolitical vulnerability. Armenia now confronts the coordinated pressure of Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan — three powers whose cooperation threatens the country's existence.

Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh in Armenian), its main strategic defense buffer, in 2020 and the subsequent exodus of its 120,000 Armenian population in 2023 remains a national trauma. Pashinyan has attempted simultaneously to deny responsibility and deflect blame, while many view the church's firm stance on this tragedy as a principal catalyst for his feud with the clergy. The church has vigorously defended the rights of the refugees and highlighted Pashinyan's culpability for this national humiliation.

Despite his highly unpopular attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church and his low approval rating, Pashinyan is laying the groundwork for an attempt to stay in power for another five years. Citing widespread abuse of administrative resources and government crackdowns on its critics, Transparency International's Anti-Corruption Center stated in a recent report that these problems are calling into question the freedom and fairness of this year's Armenian parliamentary elections.

In a recent interview, one of Armenia's most prominent human rights advocates warned of escalating repression by the regime ahead of the June 2026 elections. As a measure of control over the judiciary by Pashinyan, she mentioned the publication, one day prior to the court's decision, of a court verdict extending the pre-trial detention of church benefactor and leading businessman Samvel Karapetyan, on a website owned by the Pashinyan family.

Ironically, with their blind and unconditional support of Pashinyan's anti-Christian and defeatist policies on Artsakh and his corruption record, EU member states are pushing the people of Armenia closer to Russia. By crushing dissent inside the country and cozying up to Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping, Pashinyan has shown time and time again that he is not a reliable partner for the West.

His visit to China, with which he recently signed a strategic partnership agreement, is a testament to that, coming only days after the historic Aug. 8 peace deal he had pre-signed in the White House. The Trump administration should not fall for Pashinyan's continuous flip-flopping.

This would be a good time for the Trump administration to extend a helping hand to Armenia and Armenian Americans, most of whom remain faithful followers of Christian values and the Armenian church. A strong U.S. statement denouncing Pashinyan's actions against the Armenian Apostolic Church would go a long way in helping the people of Armenia remove him from power and force new elections.

Conversely, allowing Pashinyan to keep attacking the church and dividing his country risks jeopardizing the deal that the Trump administration worked so hard to seal. It might even backfire during midterm elections in November 2026.

Dr. David A. Grigorian is a research fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, a non-resident fellow at the Center for Global Development, and a 22-year veteran of the International Monetary Fund.

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¹ This material is distributed by Sovereign Global Solutions on behalf of National Democratic Alliance of Armenia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

Statement on the Suppression of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Historical Continuities of Identity Erasure within Victim Groups

The Lemkin Institute
December 28, 2025



The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention expresses deep concern over the ongoing state repression against the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia, including the arrests and intimidation of clergy, the targeting of ecclesiastical institutions, and the state's increasing use of the legal system to silence religious leadership. These developments represent a dangerous challenge to Armenia's democratic institutions as well as an

encroachment on the core institutions of Armenian identity. They are an unfortunate example of how genocidal processes can become internalized during periods of threat.

Tensions between the Armenian government and the Armenian Apostolic Church were exacerbated by education reforms in 2023, which eliminated the History of the Armenian Church as a standalone mandatory subject and incorporated it into broader, generalized curricula. More recently, the state's recent attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church coincided with an international conference organized by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin together with the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church of Switzerland. The conference was held in Bern, Switzerland from May 26 to 28, 2025, with the goal of addressing the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in the historically Armenian region of Artsakh, which was invaded and fully depopulated by Azerbaijan in September 2023.

This conference was criticized by Azerbaijan's spiritual leader Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, who is close to the Azerbaijani government, for allegedly inciting Armenians "to fight to the death" by advocating for the integrity of Armenian cultural heritage.

A couple of weeks later, in late June, the Armenian authorities detained two archbishops of the Armenian Apostolic church, Bagrat Galstanyan and Michael Ajapahyan, and charged them with attempting to overthrow the government and destabilize the state. These arrests were followed by detentions of several priests as part of a widening investigation into clergy accused of political interference and corruption.

In October 2025, Armenian authorities arrested Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan, head of the Aragatsotn Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. On December 4 2025, Armenian authorities detained the third Armenian Archbishop, Arshak Khachatryan. Two weeks later, on December 18, a protest was initiated by a small number of archbishops and bishops in the

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Armenian Apostolic Church's administrative headquarters, calling for the removal of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II. Although Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan did not appear at the protest, he expressed his approval through a morning briefing where he claimed that the Catholicos has links to unnamed foreign intelligence services. Combined with the Prime Minister's published plans to remove Catholicos Karekin II, this protest appears to have been a tactic employed by the Pashinyan Administration to undermine the independence of the Armenian clergy and usurp its power.

While the government claims its actions are based on evidence of criminal wrongdoing, Church leaders have denounced the arrests as politically motivated, calling them an attack on religious freedom and a deliberate effort to weaken the Church.

Taken together, these developments, especially the detentions of individual members of the senior clergy, raise serious concerns about the weakening of rule-of-law safeguards. The state has produced no evidence to substantiate the charges against clergy members. At the same time, documented conduct by state authorities, including efforts to influence religious services, exert pressure on clerical leadership, and intervene in the Church's internal governance, has drawn strong criticism from civic groups and human rights organizations as exceeding lawful state authority and undermining constitutional principles of church-state separation.

The combination of selective prosecutions, limited transparency, and direct state intervention in religious affairs raises serious concerns that legal mechanisms are being used not to uphold the law but to undermine the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Moreover, the Armenian government's recent decision to remove Shoghakat television channel (a media outlet established by and historically co-financed by the Armenian Apostolic Church) from the national digital package represents a further step in the ongoing efforts to marginalize the Church. Shoghakat now no longer has public broadcaster status. While the government frames this decision as a mere technical adjustment grounded in a new law, its effect is the selective removal of the Church's key platform for cultural and spiritual expression—no other channel has been impacted by the law.

Due to the selective nature of the legislative change, the decision raises serious concerns under Article 18.1 of the Constitution, which recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church with an exclusive historical mission in spiritual life, development of national culture, and national identity. By depriving the Church of its primary public platform, the decision also undermines Article 42.2, which guarantees freedom of the press and requires the state to ensure that public broadcasters provide diverse informational, educational, and cultural programming. More broadly, the removal of this distinct religious and cultural voice risks undermining the principle of political and ideological pluralism protected by Article 8 of the Constitution, thereby calling into question the state's commitment to a democratic and pluralistic society. The crackdown comes amid heightened tensions over Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's handling of relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, which Church leaders have criticized.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has for centuries served as the spiritual, cultural, and historical foundation of the Armenian people. From the fourth century, when Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion, the Church has been the principal guardian of Armenian continuity, preserving language, culture, and memory during centuries of foreign domination. Its survival through periods of colonization, genocide, and exile has long symbolized the endurance of the Armenian nation itself.

The current wave of repression echoes a familiar and tragic historical pattern deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Armenian people. During the Armenian Genocide (1915–1923), the Ottoman authorities did not merely seek to murder or remove a population; they aimed to obliterate an entire civilization by severing its identity from its moral and spiritual core. The first phase of the genocide began with the systematic targeting of Armenian intellectuals, clergy, and community leaders, a deliberate strategy to decapitate the nation's leadership and erase the voices that could organize resistance or preserve cultural cohesion.

The Ottoman leadership understood that Armenian Christianity was not merely a religion but the vessel of Armenian national identity, a center of education, and a vehicle for collective memory. Ottoman assaults on the Church were not collateral damage; they were the deliberate destruction of a people's spiritual infrastructure. By destroying the Church, Ottoman leaders sought to dismantle the very mechanism that had enabled the Armenian identity to survive centuries of imperial domination and cultural suppression.

This calculated campaign against Armenian Christianity reveals that genocide operates not only through physical annihilation but also through cultural and spiritual identity erasure. The eradication of the Church as the moral compass and unifying institution of the nation was central to the genocidal logic. It sought to produce a population stripped of its historical consciousness, its sacred geography, and its communal bonds. The scars of this destruction persist today as thousands of Armenian religious monuments remain in ruins or under threat in Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The ideological continuity is clear. Both then and now, the Apostolic Church, as a moral and social institution capable of unifying people beyond political lines, is perceived by those in power as a potential threat to state control.

Historically, the Turkish state viewed Christianity as the heart of Armenian distinctiveness and thus as an obstacle to national homogenization. Today, the Armenian Apostolic Church is being framed by some political actors in Armenia as a competing power center, a vestige of the old order, or a destabilizing force. Such rhetoric, combined with the use of legal instruments to dismantle or intimidate the clergy, reflects a deeply troubling attempt to weaken the Church's role as a moral authority and protector of national identity.

These developments reflect multiple early warning indicators of identity-based repression: the criminalization of moral authorities, the framing of religious leadership as a national security threat, the delegitimization of institutions that embody collective memory, and the use of the law

to weaken institutions outside state control. History shows that such patterns often manifest before broader campaigns to divide society and erase cultural identity.

Compounding this crisis is Armenia's current geopolitical trajectory. In light of recent peace talks and normalization efforts with Turkey, as well as the growing diplomatic influence of Azerbaijan, Armenia's internal strategy toward its main religious institution appears increasingly aligned, intentionally or otherwise, with the long-term goals of these neighboring states. The marginalization of the Apostolic Church, the very institution that has historically embodied national resilience, mirrors the strategies historically used by Ankara and now Baku to undermine Armenian identity and cohesion. If unchecked, this alignment risks eroding the moral and cultural foundations that have safeguarded Armenian survival for centuries, effectively advancing the objectives of powers that have sought to weaken Armenia's independence and unity.

While the current situation cannot be equated with the genocidal violence of 1915, the parallels in logic and method must be recognized. Early warning signs of identity-based repression often begin with efforts to delegitimize and criminalize institutions that embody collective memory and moral resistance. The systematic discrediting of the Church, the arrests of priests, and the state's growing hostility toward religious expression create a hostile environment that endangers not only freedom of religion but also the cultural and existential security of the Armenian people.

The Lemkin Institute calls on the Armenian government to immediately cease all politically motivated actions against the clergy and to reaffirm its commitment to the constitutional principles of religious freedom and pluralism. The Institute further urges international observers and human rights organizations to monitor developments in Armenia closely, recognizing that the erosion of religious institutions has historically preceded broader campaigns of societal fragmentation and identity erasure.

The strength of Armenia's democracy and sovereignty rests not in the suppression of its moral institutions, but in their protection. A nation that has survived genocide cannot afford to repeat, in any form, the mechanisms of its historical destruction.¹

¹ This material is distributed by Sovereign Global Solutions on behalf of National Democratic Alliance of Armenia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

Visiting an Armenian Archbishop in Prison

Joel Veldkamp

On February 3, I stood in a poorly lit meeting room in the National Security Services building in Yerevan, Armenia, as Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan prayed a blessing over me and my colleagues—a Catholic priest, a Swiss MP, and the president of [Christian Solidarity International](#).

Then a group of friendly guards came to take the archbishop back to his cell.

Armenia is the last country where I expected to visit an archbishop in prison. But the archbishop reminded us that for clergy from the Armenian Apostolic Church, he is far from exceptional. His ecclesiastical namesake, Archbishop Bagrat Vardazaryan, was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities in the very same building and executed in its basement.

When we left the prison, we took with us a [letter](#) the archbishop wrote to Vice President JD Vance, who visited Armenia yesterday. In the letter, the archbishop [told](#) the vice president that the Church is “simply doing what it has done for 1,700 years: safeguarding the Armenian nation, the world’s first Christian nation.”

Archbishop Bagrat was arrested on June 25. He was charged with plotting a coup, based on audio recordings that were later shown to have been [falsified](#). Since then, three other bishops have been arrested. Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan is serving a two-year sentence for a charge that Armenia’s public prosecutor had previously rejected as groundless. Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan is in pretrial detention on charges of “coercing political activity.” Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan is held on charges of planting a marijuana joint on a protestor in 2018. The marijuana in question was purportedly held in an evidence locker for the past few years, but has now gone [missing](#).

The absurdity of the charges shows that they are beside the point. As Stalin’s executioner Beria said, “Show me the man, I’ll show you the crime.”

Armenia’s prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, has made the real point crystal clear. He is publicly demanding that the Catholicos of All Armenians, the head of the worldwide Armenian Apostolic Church, resign and be replaced by someone picked by a state-appointed committee. From a religious freedom and ecclesiastical perspective, it is as absurd as if Giorgia Meloni were demanding the resignation of Pope Leo XIV.

To neutralize the Church, Pashinyan has resorted to using the old Soviet playbook. Pashinyan’s government has imprisoned the Church’s leading benefactor, Samvel Karapetyan, and begun nationalizing his businesses. He has organized a group of renegade bishops who call for “reforming” the Church, much as the Bolsheviks used a group of [“free Church”](#) clerics to foment a schism in the 1920s.

This new wave of persecution has a context. In 2020, Armenia lost a war to its neighbor Azerbaijan, which was backed by its powerful ally Turkey. Three years later, Azerbaijan attacked Nagorno Karabakh (or Artsakh), a land where Armenians have been living for thousands of years. All 120,000 Armenian Christians living there were forced to flee. In the aftermath, the European Union and the United States have been pushing Armenia toward peace on Azerbaijan’s terms, and toward “economic integration” with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The West's strategy for the region is to establish an economic corridor connecting Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which would allow Europe to receive oil and gas from Central Asia and goods from China. Such an arrangement risks making Armenia permanently vulnerable and economically dependent on the powers that carried out the Armenian Genocide and the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh.

With admittedly few good choices before him, Pashinyan has tried to make this vision his own. Pashinyan seeks to re-found the Republic of Armenia based on a new ideology he calls "Real Armenia."

Armenia was founded as a state dedicated to preserving the Armenian people in the wake of the Armenian Genocide. But Real Armenia is a Western-facing state, focused on delivering economic gains for the people who live there. For Pashinyan, the memory of the genocide, the lost homelands in Karabakh and Anatolia, and even the worldwide Armenian diaspora are distractions from "Real Armenia."

The Armenian Church has openly challenged the prime minister's agenda. In May 2024, the Armenian government unilaterally conceded some territories in Tavush province, where Archbishop Bagrat has his diocese, to Azerbaijan. The archbishop responded by organizing a protest march from Tavush to Yerevan. This march grew into a political [movement](#) that named the archbishop a candidate for prime minister. (The Catholicos granted him leave from his ecclesiastical duties.)

But the arrests did not begin until a year later, when the Catholicos spoke at a conference organized by the World Council of Churches in Switzerland. In his [speech](#), he demanded that the Armenian refugees from Artsakh be allowed to return to their homeland. Within days, the prime minister began attacking the Catholicos. A few weeks later, Archbishop Bagrat was arrested.

Westerners may balk at the thought of archbishops running for prime minister, or a Church trying to shape foreign policy. For the Armenian clergymen we have spoken to—both behind bars and not—there is no contradiction. They are shepherds defending their endangered flock. "The church cannot stand by and watch while this happens," the archbishop told us. "That's why I'm in here."

In his letter, Archbishop Bagrat points out that Vice President Vance has "warned the EU that it has been committing civilizational suicide by giving up Europe's Christian identity." "This is precisely what the Armenian Prime Minister is engineering in Armenia," he writes.

One may or may not share the archbishop's assessment. But this crisis poses an inescapable question to Western Christians, especially those of us who believe that Christianity should play a role in politics and society in our own countries. How will we respond to an attempt by a secular state—a U.S. ally—to break one of the oldest churches in the world?

As our visit ended, we asked Archbishop Bagrat if he would be happy for other Christian leaders to visit him in prison. He responded with enthusiasm: "Yes! Come!"

Image by Anthony Pizzoferrato via Getty Images

February 2, 2026

Mr. Vice President,

I greet you in the name of our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

I do so from Yerevan Kentron Prison in Armenia, as a political prisoner of the regime of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Using the time-honored methods of his communist predecessors, Pashinyan has ordered his security apparatus to spy on me, to falsify evidence, to interrogate me, to slander me and incarcerate me.

Why? The answer is simple. I have spoken uncomfortable truth to power on the byways and highways of Armenia, all in the non-violent spirit of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

In doing so, I have exercised my fundamental human right to bring my Christian faith and testimony into the public arena, in the hope that the Armenian nation and state remain true to their historic Christian tradition at a time of national crisis.

I am not alone. Others are similarly incarcerated by the Pashinyan regime, and for much the same reason. Some are my brothers in the clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Archbishop Mikael Ajapajyan, Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan and Bishop Mkrtych Proshyan.

There is also the lay patron of the Church, Samvel Karapetyan. Not only has he been imprisoned, but his company has been nationalized by the state, Soviet-style.

Prime Minister Pashinyan has imprisoned us as part of his campaign to assert state power over the Armenian Apostolic Church. Violating the constitution and all principles of religious freedom, he is demanding that the Catholicos, the head of the worldwide Armenian church, be replaced by someone under his influence.

The reason is simple: the church is defending our flock. We are speaking for the right of Armenians from Artsakh to return to their homes, after they were ethnically cleansed by Azerbaijan two years ago. We are demanding the

return of our hostages from Azerbaijan. We are speaking out against the abandonment of our homeland and its sovereignty to Azerbaijan.

For this, both Prime Minister Pashinyan and the Azerbaijani government have labeled the church “an obstacle to peace.”

But the Apostolic Armenian Church is simply doing what it has done for 1,700 years: safeguarding the Armenian nation, the world’s first Christian nation. For most of those 1,700 years, the church was the only national institution which bound Armenians together.

The church is under attack today precisely because it protects Armenian identity. An effort is underway to strip Armenia of its Christian heritage and integrate it into the Turkic, Islamic world of Turkey and Azerbaijan as an economic and military vassal.

You, Mr. Vice President, have rightly warned the EU that it has been committing civilizational suicide by giving up Europe’s Christian identity and opening its borders to those who do not share the values rooted in Europe’s Judeo-Christian tradition.

This is precisely what the Armenian Prime Minister is engineering in Armenia.

Throughout its history, there have always been Armenians, even churchmen, who became the instruments of the persecutors of the Church. They have often done so in the name of peace.

“They say, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” Such was the case in the time of the Prophet Jeremiah. Such is the case in Armenia today.

President Trump has invested a great deal of his time and political capital to make peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But there can be no peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan if the Armenian nation ceases to exist. If the Armenian church is successfully neutralized, nothing less than that will be at stake.

I know that you will soon travel to Armenia and to Azerbaijan. You will contribute greatly a genuinely historic, lasting peace if you: 1) secure release of the Armenian Christian political prisoners held in Yerevan and Baku, and 2) obtain guarantees for the safe return, with fundamental

human rights intact, of the 150,000 Armenian Christians who were forced out of their homes in Nagorno Karabakh.

As you depart on your important mission to Armenia and Azerbaijan, please keep in mind the words of the Prophet Isaiah, which were read by our Lord at the onset of his earthly ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18).

May you be animated by this Spirit while engaging with the authorities in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Sincerely, *with love and prayer*

Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bagrat Galstanyan', written in a cursive style.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church May 2025- February 2026

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan unleashed an unholy attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church, the foundation of the first Christian nation that was established in 301 A.D. This unprecedented assault, by the government, on the country's cornerstone and guardian of Christianity, is a calculated attempt to undermine the very foundation of Armenian heritage, culture and unity. To the Armenians, *it is eerily reminiscent of Soviet Era repression*. The prime minister's war vastly widened the gap between his government and the Armenian people, resulting in an 8.2% approval rating.

Timeline of Repression

On May 26, 2025, The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, in cooperation with the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church of Switzerland, held an international conference in Bern, Switzerland. Catholicos Karekin II, the titular head of the Armenian Apostolic Church located at the Mother See in Etchmiadzin addressed the preservation of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Artsakh following Azerbaijan's September 2023 invasion and ethnic cleansing of the region and other matters, such as the prisoners in Baku. The conference drew international attention to the destruction of Armenian Christian monuments and the broader cultural erasure underway in historically Armenian territories, prompting criticism from Azerbaijani religious leadership shortly after.

On May 30, 2025, Prime Minister Pashinyan began posting a series of abusive and vulgar statements against the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II, calling for his forced removal.

Following his public verbal attacks, PM Pashinyan dramatically escalated his crackdown, arresting, detaining and imprisoning high ranking archbishops and numerous clergy.

On June 11, 2025, Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the spiritual leader of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Office, sent a formal letter to the World Council of Churches condemning the Bern conference. In the letter, he accused the Armenian Apostolic Church of inciting Armenians to "fight until death" through its advocacy for the protection of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Artsakh. remarks were widely interpreted by observers as reflecting hostility toward the continued institutional presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church and its efforts to safeguard Armenian identity in the region.

On June 18, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government arrested Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, owner of the Electric Networks of Armenia "ENA", moments after Karapetyan publicly condemned the government's escalating attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church. Shortly after the arrest, Pashinyan called to nationalize the country's

This material is distributed by Sovereign Global Solutions on behalf of National Democratic Alliance of Armenia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

Electrical Network Grids. This act is viewed as a politically motivated attack rather than an economic reform. On July 23, 2025, Karapetyan won an international arbitration case on behalf of ENA, which only temporarily stymied Pashinyan's nationalization plans, yet he still remains imprisoned without release. The case of Samvel Karapetyan has become a telling story of Armenia's recent persecution campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church and internal democratic struggles — all by one man's decision to simply stand for his faith and Church.

On June 25, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan arrested alongside 13 others over an alleged coup plot. This act is seen as retaliation against the Armenian Apostolic Church as the Church has been largely outspoken against Pashinyan's concessions of land and lack of demanding justice for the Armenian people. Galstanyan is responsible for organizing and leading protests calling for Pashinyan's resignation in 2023 after 4 border towns had been conceded to Azerbaijan.

On June 28, 2025, Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan was arrested also over the alleged coup plot. He is now being held in pre-trial detention for two months and his lawyer Ara Zohrabyan calls the decision "obviously illegal and unfounded."

On July 20, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called for the resignation of the Catholicos on Facebook, claiming it is time to free Veharan, referring to the Catholicos by his lay name in an attempt to demoralize the leader of the Church and his followers. Pashinyan planned and executed a gathering in Etchmiadzin, the Mother See of the Armenian Apostolic Church, to place pressure on the Catholicos, saying "Be ready."

The same day, The Armenian Apostolic Church released a statement condemning Pashinyan's actions against the Catholicos. They affirm they will not waver in their mission and emphasize the failure of Pashinyan as leader of the country, leaving them vulnerable to external political forces.

On July 23, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan posted on Facebook the need for the purification of the Church and outlined the standards the new leader should meet. To accomplish this, Pashinyan created the "Veharan is great" movement which he leads himself, asserting he meets the very criteria he established.

On October 3, 2025, Archbishop Mikayel Ajapahyan was sentenced to two years in prison over an alleged coup plot. His lawyer calls the arrest "obviously illegal and unfounded."

On October 15, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan took another bold step in cracking down on the Church which he sees as political opponents. His government arrested and jailed Bishop Mkritich Poshyan, the third Bishop in the campaign of arrests of high level clergy and detained 12 priests in his diocese and are held in pre-trial detention along with 50% of Armenia's prison population.

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On October 26, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended a liturgy at the ancient Hovhannavank Monastery led by a priest who had been formally defrocked by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin just days before the Prime Minister's attendance. Many perceive this as a shameless act of state interference in church affairs as Pashinyan announced on the day of Father Aram's defrocking he would attend his liturgy. The event was attended by top government officials, strong police presence, and Pashinyan supporters. This gathering was denounced by clergy as a “soul destroying initiative” and a direct challenge to the Armenian Apostolic Church's independence. Pashinyan’s attendance at such a service has become a symbol of his growing intolerance toward the clergy.

On November 3, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan furthered escalated his campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church, by ordering the arrest of His Holiness Karekin II’s 68 year old brother, Gervorg Nersisyan, and his nephew, Hamvardzum Nersisyan. Both men are falsely accused of hooliganism and obstruction of pre-election campaigning, stemming from an alleged incident during local elections in Vagharshapat. Despite testimony and video evidence that disproves the claims, Judge Arman Babakanyan ordered Gevorg Nersisyan’s detention for one month, while the court is expected to review the motion for Hambardzum Nersisyan’s arrest.

On December 5, 2025, Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, Chancellor of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, was arrested in Yerevan on drug-related charges, accused by authorities of participating in the illegal sale of narcotic substances as part of a group allegedly acting in prior conspiracy. The arrest came after authorities detained him outside the Investigative Committee and a court ordered him held in two months of pre-trial detention amid the charges, which he has denied and his lawyer has criticized as baseless and politically motivated.

On December 9, 2025, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan shamelessly intensified his campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church by actively undermining its internal autonomy and fomenting divisions within the clergy. Pashinyan has been affirming rogue priests who openly defy Church canons and Catholicos Karekin II, while simultaneously attending (services) liturgies led by defrocked clergy, accompanied by significant security presence.

The clergy has described such actions by the Prime Minister as unprecedented state intrusion into sacred spaces, noting that the churches were locked, access was restricted, and traditional procedures were disrupted. Many view this strategy as a deliberate attack to weaken the Mother See by provoking internal disruptions and asserting political power over Christian life. This disturbing pattern marks a new danger point for escalation. Shifting from targeted arrests of clergy to even broader political efforts to erode the Church’s autonomy and reshape Armenia's religious landscape under direct government pressure.

On January 25, 2026, state authorities prevented Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan from receiving Holy Communion during a Divine Liturgy held at Izmirlian Medical Center, where he was being

held under detention. Prison service personnel reportedly obstructed the sacrament despite the service taking place in a controlled medical setting, and no compelling security justification was presented. Religious and legal observers have noted that denying a detained clergyman the ability to participate in worship and receive sacraments is a serious violation of freedom of religion, which is protected under international law even in detention. Many clergy and observers view this as another escalation between the Armenian state and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 3, 2026, the European Forum for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FOREF Europe) publicly condemned actions by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government toward the Armenian Apostolic Church, further describing such actions as a serious threat to freedom of religion and to the constitution of Armenia. FOREF Europe President Ján Figel warned that public calls for the removal of Catholicos Karekin II and other measures taken against clergy constituted unprecedented state interference in Church autonomy, raising major concerns about violations of Armenia's international human rights obligations. The organization also condemned escalating pressure on clergy, termination of military chaplaincy programs, and travel bans preventing bishops from attending a scheduled episcopal assembly abroad, developments that many outside observers view as a part of a very broad pattern of political pressure on the Church and major source of instability within Armenian society.

On February 5, 2026, a coalition of more than twenty Armenian human-rights and civil society organizations circulated an open letter addressed to the U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance ahead of his visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan. The letter urged the United States to prioritize the release of Armenian political prisoners, prisoners of war, and civilians held in Baku. The coalition highlighted that at least nineteen Armenians remain detained and ongoing judicial proceedings against them were heavily criticized by observers as failing to meet fair proceedings, warning that continued unlawful detention undermines trust in the peace process and prolongs suffering for the prisoners and their loved ones.

The organizations argued that resolving humanitarian issues such as the release of detainees is crucial for building confidence between Armenia and Azerbaijan and for achieving a lasting peace deal. To appeal to the U.S. administration the signatories argued they must use their diplomatic influence to help secure their return and address these ongoing unlawful detentions.

On February 7, 2026, The Armenian Center for Political Rights published an urgent report describing a further escalation in pressure on the Armenian Apostolic Church. Armenia's National Security Service pressured priests not to mention the name of Catholicos Karekin II during the Divine Liturgy. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan openly supported a faction of bishops calling for the Catholicos' removal. At the same time, Armenian courts have intervened and reinstated Bishop Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, who had been removed and later defrocked by the Catholicos, and authorities have initiated criminal proceedings against six bishops involved in the case, imposing travel bans that prevented them from attending a planned

episcopal assembly scheduled on February 16th in Austria. Many clergy and outside observers view these actions as a serious escalation, highlighting a new shift from political pressure and arrests to direct state interference in the religious practice of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 13, 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly warned against what he described as attempts to remove the Catholicosate of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the treasures of Holy Etchmiaszin from Armenia. Pashinyan, speaking at briefing, claimed that plans to convene a Council of Bishops outside the country were aimed at relocating the Catholicosate and using it as a political instrument against the Armenian state, and he warned that any such efforts would face strong resistance. The remarks came amid already rising tensions between state authorities and church leadership, and many observers viewed the statement as another sign of deepening conflict and mistrust between the government and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 14, 2026, representatives of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin strongly condemned the initiation of criminal proceedings against Catholicos Karekin II and the decision to impose travel bans on him from leaving Armenia to attend an episcopal assembly scheduled on February 16th in Austria. Clergy further described the situation as a grave national and spiritual crisis arguing that such actions taken against the head of the Armenian Apostolic church constituted an unprecedented intrusion into the Church and a profound escalation in tensions between State and Church leadership. Outside observers and various Church figures have warned that such developments like travel restrictions and legal pressure highlighted a further erosion in Church and State relations. Observers also noted serious concerns of interference in the religion and the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

On February 15, 2026, Armenian law-enforcement authorities indicted Catholicos Karekin II, marking the first time in Armenia's post-Soviet history that the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church had been formally prosecuted. The charges followed escalating tensions between Nikol Pashinyan's Government and Church leadership, including disputes over the defrocking of a bishop, court intervention in internal church matters, and travel bans imposed on senior clergy that prevented them from attending a planned episcopal assembly abroad. Church representatives and legal observers described the indictment and restrictions as direct interference in the internal affairs of the Church and an unprecedented escalation in the conflict between state authorities and religious leadership.

The developments came amid broader political tensions, with critics accusing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of using law-enforcement measures to pressure the Church and prevent gatherings of senior clergy that could consolidate opposition to his campaign against Catholicos Karekin II. These events marked a significant turning point, shifting the conflict from public rhetoric and administrative pressure to formal criminal proceedings against the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Conclusion

The numerous actions explained above point to increasing repression of the Church's religious leaders, family members and anyone who stands up for them. They demonstrate a sustained strategy to intimidate and dismantle the church's independence, their voice and their influence. As one source noted, "Pashinyan and his counterpart Aliyev act in tandem, fearing the unifying power of the Armenian Apostolic church – the very institution that has held the Armenian nation together throughout history."

These authoritarian measures are understood to be a calculated destruction of the last bastion of resistance to Pashinyan and the Turkification of Armenia. Many believe that Armenia and the Church, which is Armenia's cultural and spiritual foundation, are on the brink of catastrophic extinction.



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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE

Protecting Armenia's Sovereignty, Identity, and Heritage

February 26th, 2026
2:00 - 3:00 PM

2075 Rayburn HOB
Refreshments will be served

We invite you to an important briefing with world-renowned experts to discuss the dangerous rise of authoritarian policies within Armenia at the hands of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Speakers will address the repression of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, media and journalists, the growth of a Soviet style security apparatus which is arresting and detaining those who express opposition. This has led to a bloated and abusive prison system, the erosion of rule of law by a corrupt judiciary including the illegal detainment and imprisonment of the leadership's political adversaries. If political repression, international religious freedom and human rights violations are left unchecked, instability will threaten Armenia's very existence.



FEATURED SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Amb. Alberto Fernandez

*Vice President of the
Middle East Media
Research Institute*

Dr. Ján Figel'

*Former Special Envoy for Promotion
of Freedom of Religion or Belief
Outside the European Union*

Dr. John Eibner

*International President of
Christian Solidarity
International*

RSVP to LCirone@sovereignglobalsolutions.com

This event is organized by Sovereign Global Solutions, LLC on behalf of the National Democratic Alliance for Armenia

Civil Society Groups and Public Figures Condemn Government Actions Undermining Church Freedom and Autonomy

10.12.2025 - Factor TV News



A number of civil society organizations and public figures have issued a statement condemning government actions that, according to the signatories, undermine the autonomy of the Church.

Below is the full text of the statement:

We, the undersigned civil society organisations and individuals, express our deep concern regarding the alarming developments that have recently taken place in Armenia. Today, we are witnessing

violations of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the principle of the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms, and the independence of the judiciary, as well as a gross breach of the autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (the Church), a right protected by the Constitution and international conventions.

Representatives of Armenia's executive and legislative branches continue to interfere with the autonomy and freedom of the Church's activities, in violation of the Constitution and the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations, international norms on freedom of religion or belief, and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (<https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/autonomy-of-religious-organisations>). The authorities' unlawful and unacceptable attempts to influence the formation of ecclesiastical governance bodies and internal decision-making processes are deeply concerning. Equally unacceptable are attempts to arbitrarily edit or alter the Church's centuries-old traditions, rites, sacraments, canonical order, and other domains of ecclesial life.

We strongly condemn the exertion of pressure on Church clergy by state security bodies of the Republic of Armenia, including the National Security Service (<https://youtu.be/gH5JgOJEKG8>). Such conduct constitutes an abuse of official power and an impermissible deviation from the aims and functions of the National Security Service.

We are also concerned by the selective use of criminal justice tools against clergy, for the purpose of exerting unlawful and undue influence, including the use of pre-trial detention as a punitive measure and as a means of compelling behaviour desired by public authorities.

It is unacceptable that public officials at the highest political level continue to promote rhetoric targeting clergy with hate speech and insults, as well as unlawfully disseminating personal

information, using both public and private information channels. We believe that such actions may severely undermine the country's already fragile social cohesion, leading to deeper polarisation and intolerance.

We firmly believe that any reform or renewal within the Church must take place inside the Church itself, grounded in the principles of freedom and autonomy of religious organisation, in accordance with the Constitution and Armenia's international legal obligations, without any discrimination and on an equal footing with other religious organisations.

In view of the above, we reiterate our demands:

- **From representatives of public authorities, and especially from Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan:** to refrain from any actions that violate the RA Constitution, domestic laws, or Armenia's international legal obligations; to respect the Church's freedom and autonomy; and to cease exerting unlawful influence on judicial bodies and law-enforcement agencies.
- **From President Vahagn Khachaturyan:** to fulfil his function of overseeing adherence to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia.
- **From public officials:** to exercise restraint in their public statements; to observe the ethical and behavioural standards required of public office-holders; and to refrain from speech that disseminates hate, intolerance, discrimination, or insult.
- **From judges:** to exercise their powers independently, in compliance with the Constitution and human rights standards, including the right to liberty and the principle that pre-trial detention must be applied only as an exceptional measure.
- **From the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor's Office:** to ensure independent and effective investigations, guided solely by the requirements of the Constitution and the law; and to safeguard the rights of all individuals involved in proceedings, including respect for the presumption of innocence.
- **From the Police and the National Security Service:** to carry out their functions independently and strictly in accordance with the demands of the Constitution and the law; and to refrain from the disproportionate and unnecessary use of force or from violating individuals' rights.

Organisations:

Protection of Rights Without Borders NGO
Regional Centre for Democracy and Security
Yerevan Press Club
Armenian Progressive Youth NGO
Public Journalism Club
Journalists for Human Rights NGO
Centre for Law and Freedom NGO
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Armenian Committee
Helsinki Association Human Rights NGO
Media Initiatives Centre

Yezidi Centre for Human Rights
Centre for Community Mobilization and Support NGO

Individuals:

Gayane Shagoyan, Cultural Anthropologist
Isabella Sargsyan, International Expert on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Zaruhi Hovhannisyan, Human Rights Defender, New Justice Culture NGO
Armen Martirosyan, Publisher
Tigran Paskevichyan, Journalist–Publicist
Sarhat Petrosyan, Architect–Urban Planner
Inga Harutyunyan, Psychologist, Social Protection Specialist
Apres Zohrabyan, Orientalist
Aram Khanalanyan, Architect–Theorist
Arsen Hakobyan, Cultural Anthropologist
Maria Sadoyan, Translator
Mushegh Hovsepyan, Human Rights Defender
Nune Torosyan, Teacher, Translator, Editor
Ruben Malayan, Calligrapher, Lecturer
Vardan Harutyunyan, Human Rights Defender
Mariam Movsisyan, Communications Specialist

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