



# EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

## News Release

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### **Destruction of headstones in the Armenian cemetery of Old Jugha (Nakhichevan)**

A major act of vandalism took place last week in Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan: a group of Azerbaijani soldiers, supported by arms and equipment, destroyed the historically and religiously significant headstones of the medieval Armenian cemetery in Old Jugha, at the bank of river Araks, in Nakhichevan. The headstones were the remnants of those which survived similar Azerbaijani vandalism in 2002.

The planned act of vandalism threatened the complete destruction of historic monuments belonging to Armenian, as well as world cultural heritage. After being smashed to pieces, the Armenian monuments were loaded on trucks and dumped in the river Araks.

This area, which is situated between Armenia and Iran, has been home to a majority Armenian population for generations before they were ousted by successive Azeri governments. The cemetery held more than 10,000 individually carved, artistically unique headstones called Stone Crosses – *khachkars*. The Azerbaijani government began their destruction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, continued with great force in 2002, and during the last three days of the last week resumed with a vengeance attempting to wipe out traces of Armenian presence in the area.

The fact of soldiers taking part in the act of vandalism testifies to the Azerbaijani authorities' involvement in yet another attempt of disguising history with the aim of completely eliminating any trace of Armenians and historic Armenian presence in Nakhichevan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia has expressed frustration and deep concern over the issue and has called upon Baku and Nakhichevan to stop these acts immediately. In the meantime, the Ministry has urged UNESCO and other international bodies to send experts to Nakhichevan immediately, so that the fact of vandalism can be recorded and urgent measures be taken.

These acts of vandalism and violence, this callous demonstration of malice and intolerance come at a time when the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the international community at large are extolling the virtues of preserving our common patrimony. We are hopeful that the ire and disapproval of the international community will be brought to bear on Azerbaijan in order that they cease from carrying out these acts which are tantamount to ethnic cleansing – only this time, when there are no people left, they have resorted to cleansing the memory of those people.