



## ARMENIAN LEGAL CENTER

FOR JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### AN OPEN LETTER

April 15, 2025

**To: His Eminence Rev. Card. José Tolentino de Mendonça,  
Chancellor, Pontifical Gregorian University**

**Fr. Mark A. Lewis, SJ, Rector, Pontifical Gregorian University  
Rome, Italy**

**Subject: Legal and Human Rights Implications of the Azerbaijani-Sponsored Conference "Christianity in Azerbaijan: History and Modernity"**

Your Eminences,

We, the **Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights (ALC)**, write to express **grave concern** and **legal objection** to the international conference entitled "**Christianity in Azerbaijan: History and Modernity**," held on April 10, 2025, at the **Pontifical Gregorian University**. The event, organized with the participation of the **Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry**, raises urgent **legal, ethical, and human rights concerns** with direct implications under **international law**.

As a respected academic institution associated with the Catholic Church, the **Pontifical Gregorian University** is bound by an ethical obligation to ensure that its scholarly platforms are not utilized to **whitewash human rights violations** or to legitimize **historical revisionism** and **cultural erasure**. By permitting a state-led conference advancing the discredited theory of "**Caucasian Albanian**" **continuity**—used to appropriate Armenian Christian religious and **cultural heritage** in **Nagorno-Karabakh**—the University risks complicity in a broader campaign of **denial** and cultural **genocide**.

The situation is not abstract: from 2020 to 2023, more than 150,000 indigenous Christian Armenians were forcibly displaced from their ancestral homeland in **Nagorno-Karabakh**. This mass displacement, compounded by the destruction and appropriation of centuries-old Armenian churches, monasteries, and khachkars (cross-stones), constitutes a violation of multiple binding international legal instrument.

We call attention to the following international legal frameworks:

- The **UNESCO Convention** Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) obligates parties to identify, protect, and preserve cultural heritage, especially that of vulnerable and historically oppressed groups.
- The **Hague Convention** for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), and its Second Protocol (1999), prohibit the targeting, alteration, or misappropriation of cultural property during and after conflict.
- The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (Article 15) guarantees the right of every individual and community to participate in and enjoy their cultural heritage.
- The **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, though not binding, reflects customary international law affirming the rights of indigenous populations to maintain and protect their cultural, spiritual, and religious traditions.

By offering a platform to a state actor engaged in systematic cultural appropriation and ethnic cleansing, the University may be viewed as abetting the dissemination of narratives used to justify these violations. Moreover, the exclusion of Armenian scholars and representatives from this conference contradicts fundamental principles of academic freedom, fairness, and pluralism.

We respectfully urge the Pontifical Gregorian University to:

1. Publicly clarify its position on the conference and issue a formal statement distancing itself from the historical revisionism presented;
2. **Condemn** the use of academic platforms to promote cultural appropriation and the denial of human rights violations;
3. Commit to **academic integrity** by ensuring inclusive representation of affected communities in future scholarly events;
4. Initiate a consultative forum or independent review panel, composed of **legal**, historical, and **cultural heritage experts**, including Armenian representatives, to assess the misuse of cultural narratives in state propaganda and recommend safeguards for institutional neutrality and scholarly integrity.

This issue transcends academic discourse—it strikes at the heart of ethnic and cultural survival, historical truth, and the protection of fundamental rights. The Armenian Legal Center urges the Pontifical Gregorian University to uphold the values of justice, accountability, and scholarly responsibility by ensuring that its platforms are not misused to distort history or enable harm. In moments like this, silence is not neutrality—it is complicity. We trust the University will act with moral clarity and institutional courage.

Sincerely,



Chairman  
Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights (ALC)