

Press Release

**Nagorno Karabakh, the CCEE appeal to overcome the humanitarian emergency.**

Looking with concern at the humanitarian emergency taking place in Nagorno Karabakh, the Presidency of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences joins the Pope's repeated calls for a negotiated solution in the region that has been at the centre of conflict for too long and asks the international community to alleviate the humanitarian emergency of the hundreds of thousands of displaced.

According to the latest figures, there are about 100,000 ethnic Armenians who have fled Nagorno Karabakh. The region, which is controlled by Azerbaijan, but has a high Armenian population, has been the subject of an international dispute for some 30 years. This is also endangering the Christian heritage of the region.

After the 2020 conflict, which had led to a painful peace for Armenia with the loss of control of the territories of some historic monasteries, for months the Lachin corridor, the only access route between the Nagorno Karabakh capital Stepanakert and the Armenian capital Yerevan, was blocked by activists, creating a first humanitarian crisis.

In recent weeks, Azerbaijan launched an 'anti-terrorist operation' in the region which caused an exodus of all ethnic Armenians. Over 100,000 have left the ancient land of Artsakh.

The bishops of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences look on this humanitarian tragedy with great concern. Together with Pope Francis, they appeal “for dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia, hoping that the talks between the parties, with the support of the international community, will favour a lasting agreement that will put an end to the humanitarian crisis”.

At the same time, the CCEE calls for a monitoring of the Christian heritage in Nagorno Karabakh. According to a European Parliament resolution from 10 March 2022, there are 1456 Armenian monuments that came under Azerbaijan's control after the ceasefire in 2020 and were already damaged during the war.

It also hopes that the international bodies will find a negotiated solution that guarantees the safety of the displaced and their right to return to the lands where they grew up with their traditions; that the international resolutions that called for free access to the Lachin corridor will be respected; that the humanitarian emergency will be resolved with solutions that put the human person, and not political interests, at the centre of decisions.

*Saint Gallen, 5 October 2023*