



The Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman)
of the Republic of Azerbaijan

MONITORING REPORT

ON THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE CEMETERIES BELONGING TO
OTHER NATIONS AND RELIGIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN



1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Azerbaijan has historically been a place where different nations, ethnic groups, and religious communities have coexisted, and where multicultural values have developed. One of the significant elements of this multicultural heritage is the cemeteries established at various periods across the country, belonging to individuals of different nations and religions.



Those cemeteries are not only burial sites but also symbolize respect for historical memory, cultural diversity, the principle of equal dignity, and fundamental moral human values.

As stated in Decree No.858, dated 22 December 2025 by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the declaration of 2026 as the “Year of Urban Planning and Architecture” in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the country’s centuries-old traditions of urban planning and architecture constitute one of the fundamental pillars of national culture, and the preservation of this heritage is among the priority directions of state policy.

The Decree specifically notes that urban planning and architecture represent not only functional and aesthetic fields of activity but also carry historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. In this context, historic cemeteries, which constitute an integral part of the urban environment, should also be regarded as important components of the broader architectural and cultural landscape.

As stated in the aforementioned Decree, the cities of Azerbaijan have historically preserved the key characteristics of local culture while incorporating architectural trends from different periods, developing through the interaction between Eastern and Western civilizations.

In this context, cemeteries associated with different nationalities, religions, and confessions hold particular significance within the urban environment, serving as living expressions of cultural diversity, historical continuity, and multicultural heritage.

According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments,” historical and cultural monuments include archaeological and architectural sites, buildings, and memorial places associated with historical events and personalities, as well as sites related to the religious beliefs of the population. Ancient cemeteries, places of pilgrimage, religious and memorial monuments, and ancient roads are classified as archaeological monuments.

Cemeteries are not only of archaeological and historical significance but are also constitute an important part of the cultural memory and spiritual heritage of society.



In Azerbaijan, cemeteries established in different periods and belonging to individuals of various nationalities and religions are protected by law as both historical and cultural monuments and integral elements of the urban planning and architectural environment.

The strategic approach outlined by the President of the country in connection with the “Year of Urban Planning and Architecture” requires the implementation of the State’s obligations related to the preservation, protection, improvement, and use of these sites.

The aforementioned legal and conceptual approach establishes that these cemeteries should be preserved not merely as burial sites but as heritage objects with historical, architectural, cultural, and religious value, and that the principles of equality and non-discrimination must be ensured in their protection and management.

The on-site investigations are carried out within the framework of the independent monitoring mechanism of the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan for ensuring the right to equality and preventing discrimination. Their purpose is to assess whether cemeteries located across the country, established in different periods and belonging to persons of various nationalities and religions are currently protected, managed, or maintained in accordance with the existing legal regulatory framework and relevant international instruments, with due regard to the principle of equality.

2. LEGAL BASIS

The report makes reference to the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan,” the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments,” the Land Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and other normative legal acts.

The report also referred to relevant international instruments to which Azerbaijan is a party, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, as well as the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

National legislation

- **The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan** – Article 25 – the right to equality; Article 40 – cultural rights; Article 77 – protection of historical and cultural monuments;
- **The Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan”** – Article 1.3-1: the Ombudsman performs the functions of an independent monitoring mechanism for monitoring and promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as for ensuring the right to equality and the prevention of discrimination;
- **The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments”** – regulates relations related to the protection, study, and use of historical and cultural monuments;
- **The Land Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan** – Article 29 – lands designated for historical and cultural purposes;

International treaties

- **The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** – Article 2(2): States Parties to the Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights recognized in the Covenant will *be* exercised without discrimination of any kind, such as race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status; Article 15(a): everyone has the right to take part in cultural life;
- **The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions** – Article 1: the objectives of the Convention include creating conditions for cultures to flourish and to freely interact with each other in a mutually beneficial manner; recognizing the distinctive nature of cultural activities, goods, and services as vehicles of identity, values, and meaning; and reaffirming the sovereign right of States to adopt, support, and implement policies and measures they consider appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions within their territories.

3. PROGRESS OF THE MONITORING AND FACTS

In January 2026, within the framework of the monitoring process, employees of the Office of the Ombudsman, together with the staff from the Ombudsman’s Regional Centers, inspected cemeteries and memorial sites reflecting the multicultural historical heritage of the Republic of Azerbaijan and belonging to persons of different nationalities and religions who settled in the country during various historical periods.

The sites, visited during the monitoring included the “German Cemetery” belonging to persons of German origin who settled in the territory of the Göygöl district of Azerbaijan in the early nineteenth century; cemeteries in the cities of Baku, Mingachevir, and Sumgayit where German prisoners of war were buried after the Second World War; the British Military Memorial located in Baku; several Christian cemeteries, particularly graves belonging to the Polish community that reflect the historical heritage of Polish architects.

4. PURPOSE OF THE MONITORING AND TASKS SET

4.1. MAIN PURPOSE OF THE MONITORING

The main objective of the monitoring is to assess cemeteries in Azerbaijan established in different periods and belonging to persons of various nationalities and religions, as well as cemeteries of prisoners of war from the Second World War, with regard to the following aspects:

- their current condition;
- the level of protection and maintenance;
- their compliance with urban planning and architectural standards; and
- the observance of the principles of equality and the prevention of discrimination.

4.2. TASKS SET DURING THE MONITORING

Within the framework of the monitoring, the following tasks were defined:

- Examining the current condition of cemeteries established in different periods and belonging to persons of various nationalities and religions;
- Analyzing institutional mechanisms related to the management and protection of cemeteries;
- Identifying possible differences in approaches to cemeteries belonging to different religions, confessions, and nationalities;
- Assessing cases of neglect, damage, or lack of maintenance from the perspective of potential risks of discrimination;
- Preparing recommendations for relevant state authorities regarding the problems identified.

4.3. KEY OBSERVATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF RESIDENTS

On-site inspections, visual observations, and discussions with local residents conducted during the monitoring showed that the vast majority of cemeteries in Azerbaijan established in different periods and belonging to persons of various nationalities and religions are regarded as sites that must be preserved as historical, religious, and cultural monuments. These sites are generally treated with respect and reverence by both the State and society.

This approach may be regarded as a practical manifestation of the protection of the rights to equality, non-discrimination, and participation in cultural life for every person, regardless of race, ethnic origin, religion, or language.

4.4. POSITIVE OBSERVATIONS

The monitoring showed that the historical and architectural features of the graves in the German Cemetery located in the Göygöl district have been preserved, and that the tombstones and memorial elements remain undamaged.



According to local residents, this cemetery is regarded as a symbol of respect for the historical, religious, and cultural heritage of persons belonging to other nationalities and religions and has been treated with reverence for many years.

The monitoring also established that the British Military Memorial in Baku and the cemetery of German prisoners of war are maintained in satisfactory condition, that their memorial character has been preserved, and that no cases of use of the areas for purposes other than their designated function were observed.



This situation may be regarded as fully in compliance with the requirements set out in Article 29 of the Land Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which stipulates that lands designated for historical and cultural purposes are subject to a special legal regime.

During the monitoring at the cemeteries of German prisoners of war in Mingachevir and Sumgayit cities, meetings were also held with residents living in the surrounding areas, and their views were gathered.

Residents noted that these areas are generally perceived as quiet and inviolable places and that no instances of discrimination or intolerance have been observed there to date.



Such attitudes demonstrated by the population once again reflect respect for the rights to equality, non-discrimination, and participation in cultural life, as guaranteed in international instruments and national legislation.

The monitoring also found that the inviolability of burial sites is respected in the areas concerned and that no construction or commercial activities inconsistent with their designated purpose were identified within cemetery territories.

This indicates that the norms concerning the protection of historical and cultural monuments and the prohibition of unauthorized interference with their use are being observed.

4.5. FINDINGS

Furthermore, some minor shortcomings were also identified during the monitoring.

In particular, the review of photographic materials shared in open internet sources and social media, together with on-site observations, revealed certain shortcomings in some cemeteries in Mingachevir and Sumgayit, including the lack of absence of informational signages or their inadequate maintenance.



In order to enhance public awareness of the historical and memorial significance of these sites, it is necessary to address these shortcomings.

The monitoring also revealed that certain improvement and maintenance works are needed in the surrounding areas of certain cemeteries.

Although such cases were rare and are also observed in other Muslim cemeteries, addressing these shortcomings in a timely manner is necessary to ensure the proper protection of historical, religious, and cultural sites.

4.6. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Overall, the monitoring results indicated that cemeteries established in different periods and belonging to persons of various nationalities and religions are preserved in accordance with the requirements of the existing normative legal acts and relevant international instruments. The shortcomings identified are limited and mainly of a technical nature.

5. METHODOLOGY

The monitoring was carried out in accordance with the main principles of the independent monitoring mechanism of the Ombudsman, namely objectivity, independence, impartiality, transparency, and respect for human rights.

5.1. USED METHODS

5.1.1. THE FOLLOWING METHODS WERE USED DURING THE MONITORING:

- **On-site investigation and observation**

Inspections were conducted at cemeteries located in Baku, Sumgait, Ganja, Mingachevir, Göygöl, Guba, Ismayilli, Lankaran, and other areas, and the current situation was documented.

- **Normative and Legal Analysis**

The national legislation regulating the establishment, management, and protection of cemeteries, together with the relevant international instruments in this field, was analyzed.

- **Analysis of historical and open sources**

Archival materials, scientific publications, official information, and open sources were examined.

- **Assessment based on equality and non-discrimination criteria**

The current condition of the cemeteries subject to monitoring was assessed based on the

principle of equal treatment, taking into account national affiliation, religious affiliation, and historical origin.

5.1.2. CRITERIA FOR THE ASSESSMENT

- Level of physical protection (fencing, entrance, supervision);
- State of maintenance and hygiene standards;
- Preservation of historical and architectural elements;
- Availability of informational signage;
- Level of attention by state and municipal authorities.

5.1.3. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CEMETERIES INCLUDED IN THE MONITORING

The monitoring covered the following cemeteries:

- The British Military Memorial located in the city of Baku;
- The German prisoners of war cemetery located in the city of Sumgait;
- The cemetery of Soviet and Spanish pilots located in the city of Ganja;
- The German cemetery in Göygöl (Helenendorf);
- The cemetery of prisoners of war from the Second World War located in the city of Mingachevir;
- The old cemetery in the Guba district, as well as the Jewish cemeteries in the Girmizi Gasaba (Red Settlement);
- Cemeteries belonging to Russian and other Christian communities located in Baku and other regions.

6. BRIEF INFORMATION ON THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CEMETERIES SUBJECT TO MONITORING

6.1. BRITISH MILITARY MEMORIAL

The British Military Memorial in Baku is a commemorative site established in connection with the military events that took place in Baku and its surrounding areas in 1918 during the final stage of the First World War. At that time, Baku held significant strategic importance due to its oil resources, making the city a focal point of international military confrontations. Under these circumstances, the United Kingdom deployed military forces to the region, and British servicemen took part in the battles fought in and around Baku, historically known as the Battle of Baku, where they suffered casualties.

The memorial includes the burial site of those who lost their lives during these military operations.



The memorial is located near the Alley of Martyrs, in a quiet area on the left side of the alley on a lower terrace. It is situated approximately 100 meters from the Turkish Memorial, reflecting the coexistence of historical and commemorative sites associated with different peoples and states within the same area.

Photographic materials obtained during the monitoring clearly demonstrate the historical character and commemorative function of the memorial.

The plaque bears the dates “1918–1919,” as well as the inscription “Those honored here died in the service of their country and lie buried in Azerbaijan.” (A total of 46 servicemen from the United Kingdom and one serviceman from India are buried in the area where the memorial is located.)

The orderly maintenance of the area and the preservation of the memorial elements once again demonstrate that the principles of respect and equality are upheld in relation to historical and cultural heritage sites in the country.

6.2. THE CEMETERY OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR LOCATED IN SUMGAYIT CITY

After the Second World War, German servicemen who had been taken prisoner were involved in the construction of residential buildings, industrial facilities, and urban infrastructure in Sumgayit, as well as in other regions of the country.

German prisoners participated in the construction of the pipe-rolling plant, the laying of streets, and the building of several residential houses. Although the majority of prisoners of war were repatriated after the war, some who died in Azerbaijan were buried in Sumgayit, where a separate cemetery was established for them.

A total of 311 prisoners of war are buried in this cemetery.



For many years, due to the secrecy policies of the Soviet period, information about the identities of the German prisoners of war buried in Sumgayit was not publicly disclosed. Only later, on the basis of lists obtained from the Krasnoyarsk archives, did it become possible to restore the names of those buried there.

The official submission of this list and the work carried out in this regard were highly appreciated by the National Leader Heydar Aliyev, who regarded it as an important humanitarian and historical step. The restored list was subsequently presented to the Government of Germany.

This initiative was also positively received at the international level, and the tolerant attitude demonstrated in Azerbaijan was highly commended. At that time, Kresta Eberle, a representative of the German branch of the International Committee of the Red Cross,

emphasized the respect shown by the Azerbaijani people for historical memory and human dignity, stating:

“European nations that consider themselves civilized did not preserve the memory of the Second World War, but your people did. Your people are a great people.”

Currently, official representatives from Germany visit Sumgait each year to commemorate the memory of the German prisoners of war buried there. As a continuation of these historical, cultural, and humanitarian ties, Ludwigshafen Park was established in the city of Sumgayit, while a “Sumgayit” park was created in the German city of Ludwigshafen. These initiatives are regarded as symbols of remembrance and friendship formed between the two peoples.

6.3. THE CEMETERY OF SOVIET AND SPANISH PILOTS LOCATED GANJA CITY

The site in the city of Ganja, known as the cemetery of Soviet and Spanish pilots, is associated with the memory of Soviet and Spanish pilots who lost their lives during military training in the USSR in the 1930s.

During the Spanish Civil War, which began in 1936, the USSR supported the republican forces, and, for this purpose, military pilot schools were established in Ganja. In 1937, 19 Spanish cadets undergoing training at the Military Pilot School operating in Ganja lost their lives during intensive and high-risk flight training exercises.

These pilots were buried in Ganja, and the burial site was later developed into a memorial complex.



In the cemetery complex, the graves are arranged in a crescent-shaped formation, and a memorial plaque bearing the inscription: “Spanish and Soviet pilots who died in the line of duty,” is located at the front of the complex. This site is not only a burial place but is also a point of historical memory, reflecting international cooperation and the human destinies shaped by wartime circumstances in the military history of Ganja. None of pilots buried here died on the battlefield but rather lost their lives during demanding training exercises, which clearly demonstrating the risks associated with military training.

It should also be noted that the heritage of the Spanish pilots in Ganja is not limited to the cemetery. A “Memorial Museum of Spanish Pilots” has been established at Secondary School No. 30 in the city of Ganja. The museum displays photographs of Spanish cadets and instructors, military uniforms, aircraft models, and archival materials. According to local residents, the Spanish pilots were known in Ganja as friendly and sociable individuals and actively participated in the life of the city. Together, this cemetery and the memorial museum represent one of the rare and significant examples of international military-historical heritage of Ganja.

6.4. THE GERMAN CEMETERY IN GÖYGÖL (FORMER HELENENDORF)

The German cemetery in Göygöl (formerly Helenendorf) is closely associated with the historical heritage of German colonists who migrated from southern Germany, primarily from the Württemberg region, and settled in this area in 1819.

That year saw the mass migration of German families to Azerbaijan, leading to the establishment of the Helenendorf colony near Ganja, in what is now the territory of Göygöl. The cemetery began to take shape from the early nineteenth century and became one of the principal historical sites reflecting the social, cultural, and religious life of the German community settled in the area.

The tombstones preserved in the cemetery are regarded as vivid examples of German architectural style and cultural identity.



Historically, the cemetery consists of two sections: a civilian burial area and another mainly associated with German prisoners of war who were held there during the Second World War.

This site reflects the historical period from the early nineteenth century until the deportation of the German population in 1941. During the war years, the vast majority of German families

living in Göygöl were deported, while only some families in mixed marriages with representatives of other nationalities remained in the region.

The last Azerbaijani citizen of German descent who had lived in Helenendorf, Viktor Klein, passed away in 2007.



It should also be noted that one of the important monuments reflecting the German heritage in Göygöl is the Lutheran Church. The construction of the church began in 1854 and was completed in 1857, with the participation of almost all German families living in the settlement.

Later, a large garden was established in front of the church, and the three large German-made clocks installed on it were restored in 2009 by a craftsman invited from Germany.

The German cemetery and the Lutheran Church together continue to be preserved as important elements of Göygöl's multicultural history and of the traces of nineteenth-century German culture in the Caucasus.



6.5. THE CEMETERY OF PRISONERS OF WAR FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR LOCATED IN MINGACHEVIR CITY

By a decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, 10,000 German prisoners of war were involved in the construction of the Mingachevir Hydroelectric Power Station in 1945, and they were accommodated in Prisoner of War Camp No. 434, established in the construction area.



According to researchers, the labor of the prisoners of war was used not only in the construction of the Mingachevir Hydroelectric Power Station but also in the subsequent development of the city in the following years.

Those prisoners of war who died were later buried in Mingachevir city, where a separate cemetery was established for them. A small numbered metal plate was placed on each grave.

In 2011, the cemetery was renovated and fenced by the German-Azerbaijani Society, and it is currently protected by the State.

6.6. THE ANCIENT JEWISH CEMETERY AND THE JEWISH CEMETERIES OF THE RED SETTLEMENT IN THE GUBA DISTRICT

The ancient Jewish cemetery located near the city of Guba, on a hill overlooking the settlement on the right side of the Guba–Gusar highway, is considered one of the oldest Jewish burial sites in the Caucasus.

This cemetery belongs to the early community of Mountain Jews who began settling compactly in this area from the 1730s, and reflects the early stages of their religious, cultural, and social life through numerous material traces.

Ancient tombstones inscribed in the Hebrew alphabet, along with simple and traditional burial forms, predominate at this site.

The cemetery is considered one of the principal historical and cultural heritage sites reflecting the formation and continuity of the Jewish community in the Guba region.



The Jewish cemetery located in the Red Settlement dates to a later period and differs in both size and visual characteristics.

More than three thousand tombstones are preserved in this cemetery, and as seen from the photographs, the graves bear Jewish religious symbols, as well as inscriptions in Hebrew and Russian.

The planned arrangement of the graves, the presence of family burial plots, and the well-maintained pathways clearly distinguish this site from the older and more simply styled cemetery located near the city of Guba.



It should also be noted that the Red Settlement is distinguished not only by its cemeteries, but also by its rich religious and cultural heritage.

The Six-Domed Synagogue (Altı Günbəz Sinaqoqu), built in 1888 and, has become one of the symbols of the settlement with its six domes and red-brick architectural style. It currently functions as a museum reflecting the history of the Mountain Jews.

The museum operating in the settlement and dedicated to the history and cultural heritage of the Mountain Jews is considered the first specialized museum in the world devoted to this subject.



6.7. CEMETERIES BELONGING TO RUSSIAN AND OTHER CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN BAKU AND THE REGIONS

Cemeteries belonging to Russian and other Christian communities located in the city of Baku and various regions of Azerbaijan are regarded as important tangible cultural heritage sites reflecting the country's multi-confessional and multicultural history.

In particular, the Christian cemeteries formed in Baku from the second half of the nineteenth century include burial sites not only of the Russian Orthodox community, but also of people of Ukrainian, Georgian, German, Polish, and other Christian origins. Orthodox crosses, church symbols, and epigraphic inscriptions in Russian and Church Slavonic are widely observed in these cemeteries.



From a historical perspective, these sites also reflect the socio-cultural life of the multinational communities that lived in Baku during the period of the development of the oil industry.

Cemeteries belonging to Christian communities also exist in the regions of the country. Burial sites historically associated with the Russian Orthodox community and other Christian denominations have operated in Ganja, Ismayilli, Guba, and Lankaran, as well as in other cities and districts.

In particular, the village of Ivanovka represents one of the rare examples that has been preserved to this day as a settlement and burial site belonging to the Molokan community. These cemeteries are distinguished by their simple burial style, reflecting the religious beliefs of the local communities, as well as by their distinctive grave forms.

Overall, the cemeteries belonging to Russian and other Christian communities in Baku and the regions reflect the historically established environment of religious equality and coexistence within the territory of Azerbaijan.

These cemeteries are not only burial places but are also regarded as heritage sites that preserve the history, culture, and social memory of different peoples and religious communities.

Their protection and maintenance are of particular importance for safeguarding cultural heritage, ensuring the right to equality, and upholding the principle of non-discrimination on religious grounds.

7. LEGAL ASSESSMENT

7.1. BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE MONITORING:

The monitoring results were analyzed in light of the provisions of the national legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the international treaties to which it is a party.

During the assessment, the principles of ensuring the right to equality, protecting cultural heritage, the inadmissibility of discrimination, and respect for human dignity were used as the main legal criteria.

The current condition of most cemeteries belonging to persons of other nationalities and religions covered by the monitoring indicates that these sites are preserved as historical, religious, and cultural monuments and that no instances of discrimination have been identified with regard to them.

The monitoring results demonstrate that the protection of these historical, religious, and cultural monuments is carried out in full compliance with the obligations enshrined in international instruments to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party, as well as with the requirements of national legislation.

Also, since the cemeteries in question constitute examples of tangible cultural heritage, their protection should not be limited to physical inviolability alone but should also be ensured through continuous maintenance and monitoring mechanisms.

The shortcomings identified during the monitoring, including the absence of informational signs and the need for improvement works in certain areas, have been brought to the attention of the relevant authorities.

7.2. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

- Historical cemeteries belonging to persons of other nationalities and religions in Azerbaijan are recognized and preserved as historical, religious, and cultural monuments, and are treated with general respect, tolerance, and reverence;
- No cases of deliberate destruction or any form of discrimination based on religion, race, or national origin were identified in the cemeteries covered by the monitoring;
- In a number of cemeteries, physical protection, fencing, and the inviolability of the area have been ensured, and no cases of use inconsistent with their designated purpose have been identified;
- In some areas the absence or insufficiency of informational signs was observed, along with the need for improvement and maintenance works in the peripheral parts of certain cemeteries;
- The identified shortcomings are mainly of a technical nature and can be addressed within a short period of time.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the monitoring results, the following recommendations are provided to the relevant state authorities and local executive bodies:

- Strengthening the monitoring and oversight mechanisms regarding historical cemeteries belonging to persons of other nationalities and religions;
- Installing informational signs in the aforementioned cemeteries reflecting their historical, religious, and cultural status, and updating the existing signs;
- Ensuring that maintenance and improvement works are carried out equally and consistently across all cemeteries;
- Increasing the responsibility of local executive and municipal authorities regarding the legal regime governing lands designated for historical and cultural purposes;
- Continuing measures aimed at raising public awareness, particularly among young people about historical memory, multicultural values, and the principles of respect for human dignity.