

REPORT

ON THE **CRISIS THAT HAS EMERGED IN THE
CHURCH AS A RESULT OF THE ACTIONS OF THE
DE FACTO HEAD OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC
HOLY CHURCH AND A NUMBER OF SENIOR
CLERGY, AND ON WAYS TO RESOLVE IT**

The preparation of this Report arises from the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia for 2026–2031 and was carried out on the instruction of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia.

The Report was prepared by the Information and Public Relations Center SNCO of the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia.

Note.

This Report does not in any way contest the doctrinal foundations, the Sacred Tradition or the canonical order of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church. On the contrary, the purpose of the Report is to document violations of those very foundations, of the Book of Canon Law and of ecclesiastical tradition, in defence of the identity and the autonomy of the Church.

In preparing this Report, exclusively widely known information available in open sources and accessible by lawful means was used, and appropriate references to it are provided.

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SECTION 1

Executive Summary

As a result of the actions of the de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (AAHC) and a number of senior AAHC clergy, a crisis has arisen in the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, which manifests itself in the following:

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE CRISIS

- 01** The violation of the vow of celibacy by the de facto head of the AAHC, and his having a child, are incompatible with the canonical requirements that apply to the Catholicos of All Armenians.
- 02** The widely known fact that the de facto head of the AAHC fathered a child after taking the vow of celibacy creates the perception that breaking the vow of celibacy is acceptable, and many other celibate clergy have adopted similar conduct.
- 03** Cases in which senior clergy have violated their vow of celibacy and standards of proper conduct are not appropriately investigated or addressed, and the de facto head of the AAHC has fostered an atmosphere of tolerance around this phenomenon.
- 04** The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church subjects clergy to arbitrary persecution: he disseminates discrediting material about his subordinates and, by unilateral decisions and without due process of inquiry, defrocks clergy who oppose instructions to engage in anti-canonical activity or who criticize the corrupt practices that have taken root in the Church.
- 05** The activities of the AAHC lie beyond any financial transparency, and as a result the Church generates an enormous shadow turnover. No reports are published on how the vast donations made to the Church are managed; against this backdrop, the conspicuous affluence of the family members of the de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church gives rise to reasonable suspicion.
- 06** Contrary to the AAHC Book of Canon Law, the de facto head of the AAHC has consecrated his relatives as bishops, ordained some twenty people from his native village as clergy, and appointed all of them to senior church positions, including as diocesan primates, thereby effectively usurping power within the AAHC.
- 07** The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and a number of senior clergy openly engage in political activity and use various Church structures, as well as its Holy Altar, for political propaganda. The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and his inner circle have compelled members of the clergy to organize or take part in political rallies.

- 08** The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church has created a network of fake and authentic social media users, including clergy, through which he promotes hatred and intolerance and spreads disinformation.
- 09** The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and members of his family use the AAHC to spread foreign influence in the Republic of Armenia.
- 10** Over the 27 years of his reign, and contrary to the statutory requirement to convene the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the de facto head of the AAHC has obstructed the convening of the Church's supreme body, the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, thereby placing the Church under one-man rule.
- 11** The Synod of Bishops and the Ecclesiastical Representative Assemblies have not been convened at the prescribed intervals; as a result, the Supreme Spiritual Council has operated with an unlawful composition, and key statutory documents have largely remained invalid.
- 12** The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church has repeatedly obstructed the adoption of a unified Constitution of the AAHC, as a result of which the Church has operated under personal rule, without a legitimate canonical basis.
- 13** The statutory pressure, arbitrary appointments and interference in property matters carried out by the de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church have caused divisions in the dioceses of the Diaspora and alienated the faithful of those dioceses from the Mother Church.
- 14** For years, under the control of the de facto head of the AAHC, property owned by the Church or entrusted to its management has been misused: it has either been abandoned or used for commercial purposes.
- 15** Throughout his tenure, the de facto head of the AAHC has failed to properly fulfil his mission towards the faithful of the dioceses: he has not made pontifical visits to a number of dioceses in Armenia and the Diaspora, nor celebrated the Divine Liturgy in them.
- 16** The flock of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church in the Republic of Armenia, in the former Soviet states and in a number of Western countries has, in practice, been deprived of the opportunity to participate in the governance of the Church, and the dioceses have been deprived of their self-governance. In a significant proportion of dioceses and parish communities, elections, assemblies and sessions — for delegates to the Diocesan Representative Assembly, for members and the chairmanship of the Diocesan Council, and for community and parish bodies and their leaders or pastors — are not duly held.

SECTION 2

Documentation

This section documents the testimonies, materials and widely known facts that attest to the crisis that has come to a head as a result of the actions of the de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and a number of senior clergy, as well as the canonical foundations that have been undermined by those actions.

01

The violation of the vow of celibacy by the de facto head of the AAHC, and his having a child, are incompatible with the canonical requirements that apply to the Catholicos of All Armenians.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 1.1. In 1972, the future de facto head of the AAHC, then a deacon, was ordained a celibate priest by Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, taking the vow of celibacy and receiving the name Hieromonk (Abegha) Karekin. [1]
- 1.2. For years, numerous testimonies have been made regarding the de facto head of the AAHC's violation of his vow of celibacy and his having a child, and specific personal data and details have been published. Such facts have been reported since the 2010s and have never been denied, either by the Mother See or by the de facto Catholicos personally.
- 1.3. One of the first documented publications about the de facto head of the AAHC's violation of his vow of celibacy and his having a child was an article titled "And Aren't You Interested in the Catholicos's Daughter's Shoe Size?", published by the daily Hraparak on April 1, 2015. It states, in particular:

"A person close to Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, informed us that 'the Catholicos's daughter owns a pharmacy on Saryan Street. Her name is Khatun. Karekin II named his secret daughter after his mother. She is a woman aged 28–32.'" [2]

- 1.4. In early 2019, the news outlet Mamul.am published an article titled "Shocking Revelations About the Catholicos's Wife", which presented substantial details and personal data about the wife and daughter of the de facto head of the AAHC:

"Lola Mikayeli (Mikhaylovna) Grigoryants. Born on July 24, 1962, in the city of Karshi, Uzbekistan. She spent her youth in Leningrad, Russia, where she met Hieromonk Karekin Nersisyan, who at the time had been deported from Germany and had found refuge in the Armenian Diocese of Moscow and New Nakhichevan under the patronage of Archbishop Tiran Kyureghyan. From the intimate relationship between Karekin — or, more precisely, Ktrich — and Lola, their daughter was born, who was likewise named Khatun in honour of her grandmother,

Karekin's mother. Lola continues her concealed marital relationship with Karekin-Ktrich. Many senior clergy know about this but turn a blind eye and stay silent, since most of them, too, had and still have illegitimate wives and children, which is prohibited by ecclesiastical and moral law.” [3]

- 1.5. AAHC clergy have repeatedly stated that the de facto head of the AAHC has a daughter. In particular, in 2018 Hieromonk Koryun Arakelyan and Archimandrite (Vardapet) Khoren Hovhannisyan publicly declared this, stating that they were even prepared to pay for an international DNA test:

“It is known that in 1979–80, when he was a hieromonk studying at the theological academy of the Orthodox Church, he met Lola Grigoryants, and, according to reliable information, as a result of their acquaintance Khatun Ktrichi Grigoryants was born in 1981, bearing her mother's surname.” [4]

- 1.6. Since 2025, current and former AAHC clergy have begun to state and confirm even more frequently and openly that the de facto head of the AAHC violated his vow of celibacy and has a child. This has been attested by Archimandrite Khoren Hovhannisyan, the de facto Catholicos's former staff-bearer and personal secretary, Father Taron Hunanyan, Father Hovhannes Matevosyan and others. [5][6][7] Numerous public and political figures and senior officials have also spoken about and testified to this fact. [8][9]

- 1.7. In response to the allegations that he has a wife and child, the de facto head of the AAHC has addressed the matter only once, and did not deny the allegation. He stated, in particular:

“If any offence or sin is attributed to a clergyman, it must be brought before the competent tribunals, where the matter is examined and an appropriate decision is made — that is the principle. I do not consider it right in any respect for clergy to respond to individual accusations or to issue replies. There is one tribunal — the ecclesiastical tribunal — where a clergyman will answer all questions, whether the accusations are just or slanderous. If someone levels such an accusation against the Catholicos of the Armenians, then he must respect the order of the Church and act accordingly.” [10]

CANONICAL PROVISIONS

- 1.8. Under the AAHC Book of Canon Law, the episcopate — and consequently the throne of the Catholicos of All Armenians — is conferred exclusively on the celibate clergy. All bishops and the Catholicos are bound by a lifelong vow of celibacy, and keeping that vow is one of the primary conditions of their canonical status. Upon becoming celibate, a cleric takes the vow of celibacy — a commitment to renounce marriage and secular life, the outward symbol of which is the veghar (monastic hood). This vow is lifelong in nature: a celibate cleric no longer has the right to marry, just as a married priest cannot unilaterally assume celibate status. [11]

- 1.9. When taking the vow of celibacy, a cleric undertakes, among other things, the following:

“I, ..., by the blessing of God and the will of my nation, with firm conviction, undertake to accept the order of celibate priesthood. Before the Holy Altar of the Descent of the Saviour, I promise and vow: to keep my vow of celibate priesthood in holiness; to serve with faith and devotion the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Armenian people...”

- 1.10.** Under the AAHC Book of Canons, violation of the vow of celibacy (marriage, cohabitation, having a child) is regarded as a grave canonical offence which, if established, entails canonical consequences. The “Apostolic Canons” included in the AAHC Book of Canon Law provide as follows with regard to violation of the vow of celibacy: *“25. A bishop, presbyter or deacon who is caught in fornication, perjury or theft shall be deposed, but not excommunicated from the Church, for the Scripture saith: Thou shalt not take vengeance twice.”* The Canons of St. Basil the Great, also included in the AAHC Book of Canons, provide:

“18. Virgins who have once promised to dedicate themselves to Christ, if they fall into carnal passion, dishonour the covenant they made with God; their sin is worse than that of a man. Such a virgin shall be subject to the penalty of an adulterer. 19. By men under a vow we understand monks who wish to lead a celibate life. From them a plain and definite promise must be taken to remain celibate always; whoever sins shall be subject to the penalty of the dissolute. 60. One who has made a vow of virginity, if he break his oath, shall be subject to the penance of an adulterer; the same penalty shall apply to those who have vowed celibacy.” [12]

SUMMARY

- 1.11.** There are numerous testimonies and attestations that the de facto head of the AAHC violated his vow of celibacy and has a child. Consequently, under the Book of Canons of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the Apostolic Canons and the centuries-old traditions of the AAHC, this person is incompatible with the holy throne of the Catholicos of All Armenians and must vacate it.
- 1.12.** The fact that the de facto head of the AAHC has a daughter has never been denied, either by the Mother See or by the de facto Catholicos personally.

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The widely known fact that the de facto head of the AAHC fathered a child after taking the vow of celibacy creates the perception that breaking the vow of celibacy is acceptable, and many other celibate clergy have adopted similar conduct.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 2.1. There are numerous unrefuted testimonies and publications concerning violations of the vow of celibacy by senior clergy, including: Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan (Primate of the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan), Archbishop Khazhak Parsamyan (Patriarchal delegate for Western Europe), Bishop Ruben Zargaryan, Bishop Tatev Hakobyan (Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Romania), Bishop Arshak Khachatryan (Chancellor of the Mother See), Archbishop Arakel Karamyan (Primate of the Diocese of Kotayk), Bishop Vazgen Mirzakhanyan (Primate of the Diocese of the Baltic States), and many others. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
- 2.2. Keeping the vow of celibacy is one of the key challenges for the higher clergy. Violations of it have always been — and remain — the grounds and cause of various kinds of manipulation, intrigue, leaks and accusations, and arbitrary handling of such cases seriously undermines trust in the AAHC's highest ministers. There are also established facts in this regard. A confirmed confession by a senior cleric to violating the vow of celibacy is on record: Archbishop Tiran Kyureghyan is known to have publicly confessed, in 2018, to violating his vow of celibacy. [6]
- 2.3. There are facts and testimonies indicating that the de facto head of the AAHC has granted celibate status and the veghar to clergy who were previously married but divorced without the grounds provided for by AAHC regulations. A similar confirmed case concerns Hieromonk Asoghik Karapetyan, a member of the Brotherhood of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. According to published reports, until 2019 he was a married priest, wed to the well-known soprano Siranush Gasparyan, with whom he had two daughters. That year the priest divorced without proper ecclesiastical grounds and was granted the status of celibate hieromonk by the Catholicos, which AAHC regulations do not permit. [7] [8]

SUMMARY

- 2.4. The widely known and unpunished violation of the vow of celibacy by the de facto head of the AAHC has created the conditions for other senior celibate clergy to follow the same anti-canonical path. These widespread anti-canonical practices deal a severe blow to the authority of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.

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03

Cases in which senior clergy have violated their vow of celibacy and standards of good conduct are not properly investigated or addressed, and the de facto head of the AAHC has fostered an atmosphere of tolerance around this phenomenon.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 3.1. In connection with ongoing reports of various breaches of the rules of good conduct by AAHC clergy, there is a wide range of testimonies, leaks, media publications and statements concerning conduct unbecoming of clergy and gross breaches of good conduct by a number of persons serving in the clergy. Claims have circulated that moral decay is entrenched within the AAHC's internal structures and seminaries, and that certain clergy suspected or accused of homosexuality and sexual misconduct — in particular, child sexual abuse — not only go unpunished but enjoy the patronage of the Church's top leadership.
- 3.2. The most high-profile publications and testimonies on child sexual abuse concern the brother of the de facto head of the AAHC, Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan. In 2016, a Facebook post by the defrocked priest Grigor (Artsruni) Avetisyan circulated, in which he accused Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan of child sexual abuse:

"In the 1980s, Mikayel (Marcello), an ethnic Armenian boy in Argentina, was orphaned in a car accident. The local diocesan primate, Archbishop Grigoris Buniatyan, sent him to Armenia so that he would not be left without care and could study at the Theological Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin. Taking advantage of the boy's vulnerable and unprotected situation, the brother of the non-Catholicos Karekin II — the anathematized Bishop Ezras, now Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Russia (then a seminary student) — raped Mikayel, and did so many times. It went so far that he paid drug addicts from the town of Etchmiadzin to have intercourse with Mikayel." [1]

- 3.3. On the same subject, a media outlet published an open letter signed "Poghos Churukyan", which reaffirmed this information about Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan: *"This fact is confirmed by students and clergy of the Gevorgian Seminary at the time."* A subsequent open letter on the subject, again signed with the same name, states:

"...the student who was abused by His Grace Ezras, and whom we refer to by the pseudonym 'Marcello' so as not to remind this person of his horrific experiences, is today a clergyman serving in one of the dioceses abroad." [2]

- 3.4. Information about the child sexual abuse and homosexual inclinations attributed to Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan was also published by the outlet Past. Among other things, it states:

“According to the testimony of Artsruni (Father Grigor) Avetisyan, during his years of study at the Gevorgian Seminary, Ezras (secular name Mkrtych) Nersisyan raped several times a young Armenian boy named Mikayel (Marcello), who had come from Argentina and was studying at the seminary. The latter was later ordained a priest under the name Father Masis Gyuyumjyan (Gyumhyan) and served in Spain... At the seminary Ezras had a classmate named Hakob, who was also homosexual. Hakob (nicknamed ‘Judas’) was ordained a deacon, then a hieromonk, and was given the name Father Khoren. Karekin II, knowing that this cleric was homosexual and his brother’s partner, not only granted him the celibate priesthood but also sent him to Zagorsk to study and later appointed him Rector of the Vazgenian Seminary in Sevan. Some time later, Father Khoren left the ecclesiastical sphere.” [3]

3.5. In 2016, further information was published about sexual abuse of children by clergy. The Armenian [4] and French [5] press reported on cases of child sexual abuse attributed to two members (one of whom is now deceased) and one former member of the Brotherhood of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Archbishop Davit Sahakyan, Archimandrite Khad Jundurian, former superintendent of the Monastery of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem, and Father Demetrios Ataryan were accused of sexually abusing Hrayr Yezekekyan, an underage seminarian.

3.6. There are numerous publications and testimonies concerning homosexual clergy, which the Church’s Book of Canon Law does not permit and which is anti-canonical. In particular, in 2013 Sevak Hovhannisyan, co-chair of the youth league MEL, stated that he had reliable facts and photographs proving that Hieromonk Hakob Grigoryan, who worked at the Mother See, was homosexual. [6] Only after this statement and the circulation of the photographs online was the hieromonk defrocked. [7]

3.7. A number of clergy have also published testimonies confirming sexual misconduct within the Church. In particular, Hieromonk Hovhannes Sahakyan, defrocked in 2016, addressed an open letter to the de facto head of the AAHC in August of that year, in which he wrote, among other things:

“...You have built nothing; you have only destroyed. The proof of this is the multitude of homosexual clergy encouraged by you that hold senior positions. Against the backdrop of pervasive effeminacy, it is laughable to speak of spiritual life; one should rather speak of spiritual suicide...” [8]

3.8. Defrocked Hieromonk Harutyun Harutyunyan has given testimony regarding the homosexual inclinations of Archbishop Natan Hovhannisyan and has recounted incidents that he saw and heard about during his seminary years. [9] In 2016, an open letter signed “Mamikon Manukyan” circulated in the press, in which, according to its author, stories attributed to the inner workings of the Mother See were set out:

“...is very close to another member of the Brotherhood, Hieromonk Khoren Arakelyan, Locum Tenens of the Armenian Diocese of Greece, who, according to eyewitnesses, was also noted at the seminary and among the brethren for his homosexual inclinations. There are rumours that Archimandrite Kyuregh Davtyan is also among the members of the Brotherhood with homosexual inclinations.” [9]

3.9. The outlet Past also published a list of so-called “homosexual clergy”, containing the names of some 20 clergymen. [3]

- 3.10.** Another significant, substantiated case relating to breaches of the rules of celibacy and good conduct is the circulation of intimate videos attributed to Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, in which, according to the source, the archbishop has sexual relations with a relative of his. Despite the archbishop's denial, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Armenia carried out a forensic examination of the videos, which confirmed their authenticity. **[10]**
- 3.11.** Following the leak of the video concerning Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, a group of bishops issued an open statement accusing the de facto head of the AAHC of trying by every means to cover up Archbishop Khachatryan's sacrilege, and thereby "patronizing sacrilege". The statement signed by the bishops demanded that Archbishop Khachatryan be removed, which, however, did not happen. **[11]** A commission was set up at the Mother See to examine the videos and present its conclusions; after examining the matter and receiving the expert opinion of the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Armenia, its members wrote to the de facto Catholicos, proposing that all positions and church ministries held by Archbishop Khachatryan at the Mother See be suspended for a certain period. The de facto head of the AAHC disregarded the findings of the examination presented by the very commission he himself had established. **[12]**
- 3.12.** The media have also carried reports that during the 2017–2018 academic year a case of self-mutilation (self-castration) by a student occurred at the Vazgenian Seminary in Sevan. According to the publication, the Rector, Archimandrite Nshan Hmayakyan, gave an interview on the matter, but it was removed from the internet a few days later. Commenting on the subject, Father Taron Hunanyan said that the young man had suffered harm and pointed to the poor teaching of Christian doctrine to the students as a possible cause:

"...under the influence of the mentality of church leaders devoid of spiritual character and of those who take after them, or by following their example, a young man could misunderstand Christian doctrine, and that is why such cases can happen." **[13]**

- 3.13.** There is testimony about the unhealthy atmosphere in the seminaries and the harsh, cruel treatment of students from none other than the former Vice-Rector of the Gevorgian Seminary, Hieromonk Yeghia Khachatryan:

"Instead, the seminary had, by chance, admitted some unprepossessing students who, with their street manners and 'thieves' code' mentality, were no different from the boys outside. When I tried to call these students to order, I met with serious resistance from the Rector's office, because, as I later discovered, these individuals were acquaintances and relatives of various clergymen. They set a bad example for the rest of the seminary's students. The Rector treated them so harshly and cruelly that I was horrified." **[14] [15]**

CANONICAL PROVISIONS

- 3.14.** The listed breaches relating to the good conduct of clergy are impermissible and condemnable under the canons of the AAHC Book of Canon Law, and clergy who commit them must be removed from the ranks of the Brotherhood. Nevertheless, given the atmosphere of tolerance and selective punishment that the de facto head of the AAHC has displayed towards such breaches, there are no impartial and transparent mechanisms for investigation and adjudication.
- 3.15.** The Commission on Awards and Disciplinary Matters, established at the Mother See in 2011, has no charter approved through the required procedures; its members are appointed unilaterally by the de facto head of the AAHC, and it has no jurisdiction to examine matters concerning bishops or the

Catholicos. In other words, there is in practice no authorized body to examine allegations against the Catholicos and senior clergy. [16]

SUMMARY

- 3.16. Reported cases of violations of the vow of celibacy and of good conduct by senior clergy are not properly investigated. The nominal mechanisms for examining the conduct of clergy that the de facto head of the AAHC has put in place not only lack impartiality and neutrality but are entirely subordinate to his unilateral decisions and lack any legitimate basis, while there is in practice no authorized body to examine allegations against the Catholicos and senior clergy.**

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The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church subjects clergy to arbitrary persecution: he disseminates discrediting material about his subordinates and, by unilateral decisions and without due process of inquiry, defrocks clergy who oppose instructions to engage in anti-canonical activity or who criticize the corrupt practices that have taken root in the Church.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 4.1. In connection with the crisis surrounding the intimate video featuring Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, the testimony of Bishop Gevorg Saroyan deserves particular attention. According to Bishop Saroyan's public statement, the material was first circulated among the bishops themselves, on the instructions of the de facto head of the AAHC. [1]
- 4.2. According to testimonies, in 2001 the de facto head of the AAHC defrocked Archbishop Tiran Kyureghyan, then Primate of the Armenian Diocese of New Nakhichevan and Russia, by telephone, without convening a canonical tribunal, and replaced him with his own brother, Ezras Nersisyan. To lend this arbitrary decision a retroactive appearance of legality, he used the Supreme Spiritual Council, which he had unilaterally and unlawfully reconstituted; the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople categorically opposed this and refused to sign the decision. [2] According to Archbishop Kyureghyan, under Karekin II the Mother See *"is driving all honest and qualified clergy out of the field through statutory levers for centralizing financial assets and a punitive style of governance."* [3]
- 4.3. In a series of open letters to the de facto head of the AAHC, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, spoke out about the atmosphere of fear, threats and arbitrariness prevailing at the Mother See, as well as the systematic neglect of spiritual values in the shadow of material construction projects. The Patriarch sharply criticized gross violations of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, whereby distinguished clergy are persecuted and driven out for the sake of personal whims or political interests, "while the system is filled with spineless and sycophantic elements." In the Patriarch's words, *"these realities not only disrupt healthy generational renewal within the Church but also expose the Mother Church to the danger of complete spiritual and structural ruin."* [4] [5]
- 4.4. A letter to the de facto head of the AAHC from the former Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop Mesrob Mutafyan, directly addresses the de facto head of the AAHC's gross violation of the Church's centuries-old traditions and statutory provisions. The Patriarch sharply criticized his one-man style of governance, manifested in interfering in the jurisdiction of other hierarchical Sees, signing documents with the Vatican that have no canonical force without the prior consent of the Church's lawful bodies, arbitrarily dismissing diocesan primates, and unilaterally appointing, by his own order, the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, whose members are supposed to be elected. [6] In addition, a US diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks records Patriarch Mesrob Mutafyan of Constantinople stating directly that *"Karekin's election as Catholicos in 1999 was not democratic and was, in essence, orchestrated by the President of the Republic of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan."* [7]
- 4.5. In 2013, the dismissal of Hieromonk Yeghia Khachatryan, former Vice-Rector of the Gevorgian Theological Seminary, became a subject of public debate about internal church governance and disciplinary practice. In an open letter addressed to Karekin II in August 2013, he stated that he had been subjected to "unbearable persecution" on account of his "spiritual character and worldview", and that he had repeatedly reported this to the Catholicos in writing, to no avail. [8] In a subsequent letter, the hieromonk described in detail the "corrupt practices" and worldly atmosphere prevailing at the seminary, his tensions with the Rector's office, and the "anti-canonical, groundless and capricious" punishments imposed by the Chief Sacristan. [9] In December of the same year, by order of the de facto head of the AAHC, Hieromonk Yeghia Khachatryan was defrocked on the grounds of "breach of vows and conduct unbecoming of a clergyman." Later, now a layman, he sharply criticized the de facto head of the AAHC and the governance of the Mother See in a public interview, asserting that a "personality cult" had formed in the Church, that positions were handed

out on the basis of kinship and personal ties, that defrocking had become a tool of intimidation, and that there was no mechanism for reviewing the grounds for defrocking. [10]

4.6. In 2014, the defrocking, by order of the de facto head of the AAHC, of Father Martiros Berberyan, who had served for 14 years in the Armenian Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan, caused a major public outcry. Father Martiros Berberyan enjoyed great renown and respect among Moscow's Armenians for his irreproachable and devoted ministry, and especially because he performed all kinds of rites and services for the faithful without accepting any money or donations. [11] As the priest also received no salary from the diocese, his only source of income was a toy-trading company he ran with his brother. On this pretext he was persecuted for many years by the brother of the de facto head of the AAHC, Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan, and was eventually defrocked "for conduct unbecoming of a clergyman." [12]

4.7. In 2025, Father Aram Asatryan published a Facebook post criticizing senior Church clergy and voicing his concerns about the Church's internal governance, the conduct of spiritual authority and its disciplinary mechanisms:

"Today it has become a necessity, and it is important to acknowledge, that independent judicial and disciplinary bodies must be established within the Church authority. Unlike today's 'disciplinary commissions' — in which the roles of judge, prosecutor, jurors, advocates, and those who render and overturn verdicts are not separated, and which are, in essence, forums for trampling on the rights and dignity of clergy — such bodies would review measures taken against priests, ruling out unfounded sanctions and false justifications. Clear rules must be applied that will restore the unlawfully restricted rights of priests." [13]

Father Aram Asatryan subsequently continued his criticism of the Church's upper echelons on the air of the First Channel. As a result of these statements, the priest was later defrocked by order of the de facto head of the AAHC, citing a report by the Primate of the Diocese of Aragatsotn and the conclusion of the disciplinary commission. [14] [15] [16] Following Father Aram Asatryan's public criticism, two of the clergy who had expressed support for him, Father Taron Hunanyan and Father Tade Takhmazyan, were also defrocked by the de facto head of the AAHC. [17] [18] [19] [20]

4.8. In two interviews on Public Television, Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, Primate of the Diocese of Masyatsoth, discussed the internal problems of the AAHC, its system of governance and the need for reform. [21] [22] Following this, by order of the de facto head of the AAHC and on the basis of a decision of the Supreme Spiritual Council, Bishop Gevorg Saroyan was likewise removed from his position as Primate of the Diocese of Masyatsoth and subsequently defrocked. [23] The bishop filed a lawsuit against the AAHC over his unlawful dismissal as Primate of the Diocese of Masyatsoth; the court granted his motion and applied an interim measure securing the claim, reinstating Bishop Gevorg Saroyan as Primate of the Diocese of Masyatsoth. [24] The court's final judgment later upheld the interim decision. [25] At the same time, since the de facto head of the AAHC and certain bishops had obstructed the enforcement of that judicial act, the Prosecutor's Office approved the indictment in the case against six bishops and the Catholicos and sent it to court. [26]

4.9. In 2025, a recording of a 2023 telephone conversation between Archbishop Nathan Hovhannisyan, director of External Relations and Protocol Department at the Mother See, and Hieromonk Aghan Yernjakyan, the Catholicos's former staff-bearer, circulated online. In it, Hieromonk Aghan Yernjakyan complains of arbitrary treatment by the de facto head of the AAHC and of the punishments imposed on him for refusing to obey anti-canonical orders. During the conversation, Hieromonk Aghan Yernjakyan states:

"The Catholicos says to me, 'Why don't you take your family and go hold a rally against Nikol?'... The Catholicos told me, 'Nikol is the embodiment of sin; a clergyman who doesn't fight sin isn't worthy of being called a clergyman'... What does 'take your mother and go protest against Nikol' even mean?... And not carrying out that order means disobedience..." [27]

On December 1, 2023, Hieromonk Aghan Yernjakyan was defrocked by pontifical order of the de facto head of the AAHC. Official public sources cite no disciplinary violation, political statement or other reason as the basis for the decision; instead, they state that the defrocking was carried out at the hieromonk's own request. However, the recording makes it evident that the de facto head of the AAHC made such anti-canonical demands of the hieromonk and put such pressure on him that he was forced to request release from ministry. A criminal case has now been opened in connection with the recording. [28] [29]

- 4.10.** At various times, many other churchmen, both serving and defrocked clergy, have spoken out about the persecution and harassment they have suffered and about various corrupt practices at the Mother See, including Rev. Abel Manukyan [30], Rev. Sahak Galustyan [31], Hieromonk Hovhannes Sahakyan [32], Archimandrite Khoren Hovhannisyan [33], Hieromonk Yeghia Khachatryan [34], Hieromonk Garegin Harutyunyan [35], and many others [36].
- 4.11.** According to an official statement by the Mother See, more than 100 clergy were defrocked during the 26 years of the de facto head of the AAHC's reign. According to that clarification, 38 left the ministry at their own request, 27 voluntarily abandoned their place of service, 15 were defrocked on the basis of petitions submitted by diocesan primates, and 21 directly by the Catholicos. [37] Judging by the above, as well as by numerous other reports and testimonies, it is established practice under the de facto head of the AAHC to present forced defrockings officially as being "at the cleric's own request", as in the case of Hieromonk Aghan Yernjakyan.

CANONICAL PROVISIONS

- 4.12.** As noted in 3.15, the Committee for Ecclesial Awards and Disciplinary Issues, established at the Mother See in 2011, has no charter approved through the required procedures; its members are appointed unilaterally by the de facto head of the AAHC, and it has no jurisdiction to examine matters concerning bishops or the Catholicos. The functions of judge, prosecutor, defence and decision-maker are not separated within this committee, which renders the proceedings a mere formality dependent on the will of one person.

SUMMARY

- 4.13.** Throughout the catholicosate of the de facto head of the AAHC, and especially in 2025–2026, disciplinary proceedings have been fully instrumentalized. Through a committee that lacks any canonical basis and is subject to one-man control, the de facto head of the AAHC arbitrarily persecutes and defrocks clergy who have publicly criticized the Church's governance or supported its critics — including a bishop who is a member of the Supreme Spiritual Council — while clergy facing serious allegations of misconduct remain in office and their cases go unexamined.

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05

The activities of the AAHC lie beyond any financial transparency, and as a result the Church generates an enormous shadow turnover. No reports are published on how the vast donations made to the Church are managed; against this backdrop, the conspicuous affluence of the family members of the de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church gives rise to reasonable suspicion.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 5.1. The transparency of the AAHC's financial activities and property management has long been one of the central topics of public and political debate. Criticism has focused mainly on the Church's lack of financial accountability, the non-disclosure of donations, income and expenditure, and the status of its tax obligations.
- 5.2. In May 2024, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated in the National Assembly that the Government had proposed to the Armenian Apostolic Church that it introduce a tax accounting system, while undertaking to return the full amount of taxes collected from the Church to the Church itself. The proposal was rejected, which the Prime Minister linked to the issue of financial transparency. [1] In response, the Mother See issued an official statement that offered no clarification regarding the Prime Minister's assertion that the proposal had been rejected, and it never subsequently explained on what grounds it had been rejected. [2] In April 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reiterated that the Church should not be exempt from the universal declaration and tax system, noting that clergy, too, should declare their income, and that the State was prepared to return the collected taxes to the Church in full and, if necessary, to provide additional funding. [3]
- 5.3. In May 2024, Bishop Ararat Galtagchyan, Chairman of the Auditing Commission of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, acknowledged that the bulk of the Church's income is untaxed and, in effect, undeclared: *"Overall, the income from the sale of candles and other items covers 10–15 per cent of the Mother See's expenditure. The obvious question arises: how, then, do we cover our other expenses? We cover them from the grants and donations we receive... Under the Tax Code, assets received free of charge by non-commercial organizations are not considered taxable income. Accordingly, expenditure made from such assets received free of charge is not considered a tax expense either. In other words, a significant portion of the Church's expenditure is made from donations received, which, as assets received free of charge, are not included in profit tax calculations."* [4] Regarding donations and reporting on their use, the bishop stated:

"The financial support and donations given to the Mother See come from foreign foundations or from individual benefactors living in various countries around the world... In general, all funds donated to the Mother See are earmarked, and we regularly submit all reports on them to the donors." [4]
- 5.4. In May 2026, the daily Hraparak reported that the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin had been presented with substantial tax claims, including value-added tax on paraffin as well as penalties and

finances. The claim amounted to some AMD 220 million, and the sum was paid by the Mother See in order to avoid further legal consequences. [5] This information was later confirmed by Father Yesayi Arsenyan, Head of the Information Center of the Mother See, who noted that large sums related to candles had been paid into the state budget. [6]

5.5. During his tenure, the de facto head of the AAHC has made key structural changes to the financial and economic system of the Mother See. Some 20 years ago, following a recalculation and re-inventory, the immovable property (churches, diocesan headquarters, charitable institutions, educational centres) and movable property belonging to the AAHC dioceses were placed under the direct management of the Mother See, and all certificates of title and lease for such premises were taken from the diocesan headquarters. Diocesan primates lost the ability to receive direct monetary transfers from the benefactors of their dioceses. Today, in order to renovate or build churches or carry out other construction in any diocese, diocesan primates may receive financial support from benefactors only through the Mother See, into whose bank account the benefactors' funds are transferred. It is the de facto head of the AAHC who decides the amount and timing of the funds allocated to any given diocese. The de facto Catholicos made these decisions unilaterally, whereas under the applicable regulations this should have been done — or at the very least ratified — with the approval of the AAHC's supreme body, the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, which has never once been convened during the reign of the de facto head of the AAHC.

5.6. The issue of the financial transparency of the Church's activities has also been raised from a national security perspective. According to this view, the Church's financial inflows and expenditures lack clear institutional mechanisms of public accountability; under these conditions, uncontrolled funds may enter the country under the guise of various church formats and donations, and may be channelled into political processes or used to finance money laundering and other criminal activity — flows that may remain outside the oversight of the financial and banking system. Some 70 religious organizations are registered in the State Register of Legal Entities of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia; they, too, taking advantage of the absence of requirements for financial accountability and transparency, may allow their financial channels to be used by foreign criminal organizations for money laundering. In an interview with Public Television in February 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated:

"There must be mechanisms for the integrity, financial transparency and accountability of senior Church representatives, because today we have information — currently being verified — that, including through the formats of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, shadow funds are entering the Republic of Armenia to be used for political purposes in Armenia." [7]

5.7. In the absence of oversight of the Church's financial flows and of mechanisms for verifying the origin of benefactors' funds, numerous cases have been reported in which the construction and renovation of churches and chapels were financed with the funds — or at the direction — of persons with property of unknown origin, criminal authorities and individuals linked to the criminal subculture, while the consecration of these buildings was performed by senior AAHC clergy, up to and including the de facto Catholicos. [8] [9]

5.8. Martiros Miroyan, founder and head of Miroyan Tuf, a company that operated for years in Shirak Province, testified in 2018 that in 2008 Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan personally and fraudulently misappropriated tuff stone worth some USD 300,000 from his company, supplied ostensibly for the construction of an Armenian church in Moscow. As a result of the fraud, the company, which employed around 100 people, went bankrupt and closed. The fraud consisted of under-recording the value of the goods supplied, Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan's failure to honour his verbal guarantees, and the use of the de facto head of the AAHC and Karen Karapetyan, then Head of the

Presidential Administration, as instruments of pressure against the businessman, who was silenced with threats. Initially, Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan attributed the non-payment for the goods to delayed or absent donations; later, the businessman was forced to present the transaction as a donation for the construction of the church. [10]

5.9. In 2015, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) published the results of its “Swiss Leaks” investigation, according to which the de facto head of the AAHC was among the major account holders at the Swiss branch of HSBC: an account in the name of “His Holiness Karekin II Nersis” held USD 1.1 million in 2006–2007, and the account appears in the bank's records from 2000. In a clarification to the ICIJ, the Mother See's press spokesperson stated that the account had been opened for the benefit of the Church, for charitable purposes. [11]

5.10. Over the years, the media have published numerous materials, never refuted, about the business assets of the de facto head of the AAHC and his family members.

- In particular, the petrol stations, greenhouses, livestock farms and cultivated land in the village of Voskehat are attributed to the de facto head of the AAHC or his family. [12] According to the same publication, as of 2018 the Paradis and Mush restaurant complexes belonged to the de facto head of the AAHC or his relatives, with food supplied to them by the business of the de facto Catholicos's nephew (his sister's son), Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan, Primate of the Diocese of Aragatsotn. According to the report, the latter set up a bakery producing lavash, gata and pastries next to Mughni Monastery, from which he supplies food daily both to the above-mentioned establishments and to the refectory of the Brotherhood of the Mother See.
- According to public figure Sargis Hatspanyan, Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan, brother of the de facto head of the AAHC, holds a stake in a large antiques business: *“In my opinion, a constraining factor for Karekin II is the business partnership between his well-known brother, Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan, Primate of the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan, and Aram Ateshyan. Together they run an antiques business in Russia and have grown it to the point where it generates income running into the millions. Financially, Aram Ateshyan is probably the richest clergyman, with businesses, houses and other sources of income in a wide range of countries.”* [13]
- According to media reports, the property of former prosecutor Koryun Nersisyan — son of Gevorg Nersisyan, brother of the de facto head of the AAHC — reportedly includes the Beluga restaurant complex in the village of Lusagyugh, the Marli brand store, gas filling stations, a funeral parlour service, a supermarket and more. [14] According to officially registered rights, Gevorg Nersisyan, his wife Sonik Nersisyan and his son Koryun Nersisyan jointly own 4 land plots in the village of Voskehat and one plot in Aparan. Koryun Nersisyan separately owns 22 land plots in the village of Voskehat, Armavir Province. Gevorg Nersisyan's daughter, Khatun Nersisyan, owns two shops operating in Etchmiadzin and is also the beneficial owner of Sone LLC, which is engaged in retail trade in non-specialized stores. [15] Four land plots in the village of Voskehat are jointly owned by Khatun Nersisyan and her relatives.
- Hambardzum Nersisyan, the other son of Gevorg Nersisyan (brother of the de facto head of the AAHC), owns 12 land plots in the village of Voskehat, 2 plots in the village of Voskevaz in Aragatsotn Province, and 4 properties of various designations in the city of Etchmiadzin. Hambardzum Nersisyan is the director of Li Gaz LLC, which is engaged in the retail sale of liquefied and compressed gas (the company is registered in the name of his mother, Sonik Nersisyan) [16]; a part-owner of Arajin Tsitsernak LLC, which trades in liquefied and compressed natural gas [17]; and a 50% shareholder of Arma Grow LLC, which is engaged in retail trade and greenhouse cultivation. [18] Hambardzum Nersisyan also owns one of the car

service stations in the village of Voskehat, Armavir Province, the open-air swimming pool next to it, the Flox restaurant complex, and the Paradis leisure area next to the Li Gaz filling station.

- Gevorg Nersisyan, brother of the de facto head of the AAHC, headed the Voskehat community for almost two decades from 2002. According to a 2016 investigation by Hetq, 37.5 per cent of the community's own revenue was channelled to persons recognized as “needy”, who were mainly municipal employees, members of the council of elders and relatives of the de facto head of the AAHC — in particular, the village head's son. [19] The surnames of the beneficiaries of community welfare payments mentioned in the Hetq investigation (Dishlaryan, Gyozyalyan) coincide with those of clergy from the same village ordained by the de facto head of the AAHC.

5.11. There are numerous publications, facts and testimonies regarding the stark social inequality among the Church's clergy.

- Lower-ranking clergy receive no salary at all from the Church. Clergy themselves have testified to this. Speaking in 2007 about priests accepting donations for performing rites, Father Shmavon Ghevondyan stated: *“A priest has no salary; only the celibate clergy working at the monastery receive a salary. So what is that man supposed to live on? How is he supposed to support a family? Therefore, there is nothing abnormal about a person kissing the cross and making a donation to the Church.”* [20] This fact has been attested by many others as well. Aram Dilanyan, a researcher at the Matenadaran and a former acolyte, said: *“It is well known that an Armenian priest receives no salary and is left to depend on the community... the priest must either let his family starve or go here and there to scrape something together. It would be right to set a salary for priests, within reasonable limits, so that the priest can devote himself solely to spiritual ministry.”* [21]
- In 2020, clergy who remained anonymous disclosed to the media the salary levels paid by the Mother See: *“Priests serving in the dioceses of Armenia, other than the priests of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, receive no salary at all... Clergy in this position do not benefit from any programme of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin or of the State to which they are entitled under the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia... Deacons serving in the Armenian dioceses, regardless of their marital status, have no clear, fixed salary but are paid at the discretion of the diocesan primates... Celibate clergy of the Mother See, starting from the rank of hieromonk, receive a monthly salary equivalent to USD 400, which rises with ecclesiastical rank, reaching about USD 1,000 per month for bishops and archbishops.”* [22]
- Another deacon of the Church testified on the subject: *“The priests of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin — about a dozen of them — are called ‘elite’ priests. They are graduates of the Gevorgian Theological Seminary, and not only do they receive a monthly salary in drams equivalent to USD 1,000, but on Saturdays and Sundays they are assigned to the monasteries of Etchmiadzin as officiating priests. Meanwhile, priests serving in the dioceses of Armenia not only receive no salary whatsoever from their diocese but are also obliged to send the ‘Illuminator's Mite’ and the ‘Narekatsi's Mite’ to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin — a tidy sum, a so-called internal ‘tax’. Seminary-graduate deacons at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin receive 1,000 drams a month — yes, yes, one thousand drams. Only after defending their thesis do they receive 60,000 drams a month, and that is if they are lucky... Clergy do not benefit from any programme of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin or of the State to which they are entitled under the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia. For years, by the Catholicos's high command, basic human rights have been openly trampled on at the Mother See. A cleric who wishes to take out a loan or mortgage from a financial institution or bank must apply with a certificate from his place of employment, but that certificate is issued solely and exclusively by order of the Catholicos. At the Mother See, only the Catholicos can*

authorize a cleric to receive a certificate of employment and salary... And when a cleric asks the Catholicos for financial help as a loan, the latter, like a moneylender, replies that you must pledge your property as collateral to the Mother See. A vivid example is Father Norayr, who serves in Iraq and whose family home remains pledged to the Mother See to this day in exchange for a sum of money. Such is the Catholicos's fatherly love for his clergy. Moreover, even clergy — with the exception of bishops — have to pay for examinations or treatment at the Izmirlian Medical Center, which belongs to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.” [23]

5.12. Fundraising appeals to cover the needs of various clergymen and their families frequently appear in the media and on social networks.

- A fundraiser was organized for the medical treatment of the child of Rev. Fr. Sargis Sardaryan, who serves in the Diocese of Shirak. [24]
- A fundraiser was organized for the medical treatment of the child of Rev. Fr. Yervand Babayan. [25]
- A fundraiser was organized for the medical treatment of Rev. Fr. Yeznik Malkhasyan. [26]
- A fundraiser was organized for the medical treatment of Rev. Fr. Barsegh Andryan. [27]

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

5.13. Under the Nakhshavigh (Preliminary) Charter, approved by the de facto head of the AAHC in 2000 (but never ratified by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly), the Catholicos is the sole and absolute manager of all the property of the Mother See:

“The Catholicos of All Armenians is the master of, and solely responsible for, the estates of the Mother See and all its immovable and movable assets, within and outside Armenia, in all countries of the world. The Catholicos of All Armenians is the sole authorized administrator of all funds of the Mother See held in banks in Armenia and abroad. Any property transaction, payment, collection or monetary operation shall be carried out solely under the signature and seal of the Catholicos of All Armenians.”

(Article 13). [28]

5.14. Under the same Charter, the “Audit Commission” is responsible for overseeing the economic and financial activities of the Mother See and for submitting an annual report to the Supreme Spiritual Council. At the same time, the members of the commission are appointed by the Catholicos (Article 33). In effect, the oversight body is itself appointed by the party it is supposed to oversee.

5.15. In practice, all financial reporting at the Mother See is internal and upward: all reports go to the Supreme Spiritual Council and the Catholicos, and the circulation of financial records carries no requirement of public disclosure. There is no institutional mechanism for full and transparent accountability for the AAHC’s income and expenditure.

5.16. Under the “Special Regulations for Convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly”, the economic affairs of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church fall within the competence of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the Church’s supreme body. [29]

5.17. The legislation of the Republic of Armenia grants the AAHC an extensive package of tax benefits: the import and supply of goods, the performance of works, the sale of religious items and services for organizing religious rites by the AAHC are exempt from VAT; assets received free of charge,

donations and receipts from citizens are not subject to taxation; buildings and land owned by the Mother See are exempt from property tax; and so on. Thus, the Church's main financial flows (donations, grants, ritual services, sales of religious items) are excluded from tax accounting and taxation. [30] [31] [32]

SUMMARY

- 5.18.** There is no institutional mechanism for full public accountability for the Church's income and expenditure. The accountability mechanisms under the current "Nakhashavigh" Charter are accessible exclusively to the Catholicos and are not public. At the same time, under this unratified Charter, the Catholicos is the sole manager of all the property of the Mother See. Almost 90 per cent of the Church's turnover is subject to no state, public or functioning internal Church oversight. For the past 27 years, the de facto head of the AAHC has obstructed the sessions of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly — the supreme body with competence over the AAHC's economic affairs and the authority to hear reports on them.
- 5.19.** Only the de facto head of the AAHC has full information on the donations and other income received by the Church and on how those funds are spent, and he alone manages them at his discretion, without accountability. The Church has no procedure whatsoever for verifying the origin of benefactors' funds and donations. As a result, the construction and renovation of churches and chapels have repeatedly been financed with the funds of crime bosses and individuals linked to the criminal subculture, and in some cases extortion has been recorded under the guise of donations. There is evidence that in certain cases consecration has been directly tied to financing, including the transfer of money in exchange for consecration (see 13.3). The faithful, as well as the Church hierarchy, are deprived of the opportunity to learn about the donations made to the Church and how they are spent.
- 5.20.** For decades, part of the Church's funds was held abroad in an account opened in the name of an individual — the de facto head of the AAHC — and that account has never been reflected in any official Church document or report. As a result of these shadow activities, the Church has become, in the hands of the de facto head of the AAHC and his narrow circle, a "black box" whose enormous inflows and outflows are controlled by one person without accountability.
- 5.21.** The de facto head of the AAHC rejects the mechanisms for introducing financial accountability proposed by the State. Given shadow activity on such a scale, the persistent avoidance of accountability gives rise to reasonable suspicion that donations to the Church are being invested in private businesses and that tax-exempt infrastructure is being used for personal or commercial purposes.
- 5.22.** The income of the clergy is undeclared. As a result:
- Some clergy grow rich while others live on the verge of poverty, their livelihood depending on their place of service and on the arbitrary appointments of the de facto head of the AAHC. It is the de facto head of the AAHC who arbitrarily decides which cleric serves in which locality and for how long; as a result, clergy serving in sparsely populated communities are condemned to poverty, since they have neither a salary nor transparent income.
 - Operating in the shadow economy, clergy cannot access the state system of social services and guarantees and are deprived of full access to the pension system.

- **The shadow budget accumulating in the hands of the de facto head of the AAHC has become a moneylending mechanism: clergy facing serious health or social hardship are forced, at the demand of the de facto head of the AAHC, to pledge their property to the Mother See in order to obtain funds.**

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06

In violation of the Book of Canons of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (AAHC), the de facto head of the AAHC has consecrated his relatives as bishops, ordained some two dozen people from his native village as clergy, and appointed all of them to senior ecclesiastical posts, including as diocesan primates, thereby effectively usurping power within the AAHC.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 6.1. Over the years, discussion and criticism of the concentration of power in the administrative system of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the closed nature of its decision-making, and its personnel appointments have been voiced in political, public and ecclesiastical circles alike. At the core of this criticism have been the lack of transparency in decision-making and documented evidence of the possible influence of family ties.
- 6.2. Immediately after his election as Catholicos, the de facto head of the AAHC dismissed Archbishop Tiran Kyureghyan, the long-serving Primate of the Diocese of New Nakhichevan and Russia, who had led the diocese for more than 25 years, and appointed in his place his own brother, Hieromonk (Abegha) Yezras Nersisyan, who at the time held neither the rank of bishop nor even that of vardapet (archimandrite), but was a mere hieromonk. Subsequently, in 2001, the de facto head of the AAHC personally consecrated Yezras Nersisyan as bishop, while Archbishop Tiran Kyureghyan, who had objected to the Catholicos's decision, was defrocked that same year for "disorderly conduct and disobedience" and removed from the Church hierarchy. [1] [2]
- 6.3. Another senior position in the Church is held by the son of the de facto head's sister, Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan. In 2010, he was consecrated bishop by the de facto head of the AAHC and appointed Primate of the Diocese of Aragatsotn, a post he holds to this day. [3] Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan's name has been linked to a number of high-profile incidents and reports of abuse. In particular, there are reports of business activities conducted next to churches in Aragatsotn Province, of land being seized from local residents, and of people being coerced into attending rallies. [4] [5] [6]
- 6.4. From his native village of Voskehat in Armavir Province, the de facto head of the AAHC ordained some 20 people as clergy of various ranks, most of whom now hold senior positions within the Mother See system. Below is a list of clergy who are fellow villagers of the de facto head of the AAHC:
 1. Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan (the Catholicos's brother; Primate of the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan)
 2. Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan (Chancellor of the Mother See)
 3. Bishop Hovakim Manukyan (Primate of the Diocese of the United Kingdom and Ireland; son of a classmate of the Catholicos)

4. Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan (son of the Catholicos's sister; Primate of the Diocese of Aragatsotn)
5. Fr. Hakob Khachatryan (brother of Archbishop Arshak; priest in Yerevan)
6. Fr. Ararat Poghosyan (Director of the Mother See's publishing house, official press and library)
7. Archimandrite (Vardapet) Gabriel Sargsyan (Shoghakat Monastery; former Sacristan of the Mother See)
8. Hieromonk (Abegha) Grigor Minasyan (Commissioner of the Catholicos; in charge of the material assets of the Veharan, the Patriarchal Residence)
9. Hieromonk (Abegha) Shahan Melkonyan (Khor Virap Monastery)
10. Fr. Vard Gyzalyan (Eastern Diocese of the USA)
11. Fr. Hrachya Gyzalyan (brother of Fr. Vard; priest in Yerevan)
12. Fr. Manase Nadanyan (priest in Yalta)
13. Fr. Gabriel Vardanyan (Armenian Diocese of Canada)
14. Fr. Oshin Hayrapetyan (Saghmosavank)
15. Deacon Narek Minasyan (brother of Hieromonk Grigor Minasyan; host at the Veharan)
16. Deacon Armen Dishlaryan (deacon of the Veharan)
17. Fr. Nahapet Karapetyan (Mother See)
18. Deacon Kajik Yeghoyan (Mother See)
19. Deacon Hrant Janoyan (deacon of the Veharan)
20. Fr. Arshavir Asatryan (Diocese of Tavush)

CANONICAL PROVISIONS

- 6.5. The Book of Canons of the AAHC prohibits a bishop (including the Catholicos) from consecrating a relative as bishop. Specifically, the “Apostolic Canons” contained in the AAHC Book of Canons state:

“A bishop must not, to please his brother, his son or any other relative, consecrate as bishop whomever he pleases, for it is not right to hand down the episcopate and the Church of God as an inheritance. Whoever does so, the ordination shall be invalid, and he himself shall be cast out of the Church”.

” [7]

SUMMARY

- 6.6. **In violation of the traditional provisions of the AAHC Book of Canons, the de facto head of the AAHC has consecrated his relatives as bishops and appointed them diocesan primates. Episcopal consecrations based on kinship are non-canonical: both the one who consecrates and the one consecrated are liable to be expelled from the Church.**

- 6.7.** The de facto head of the AAHC has ordained numerous people from his native village as clergy of various ranks, appointed them to senior ecclesiastical posts and granted them high salaries, thereby usurping power within the Church.
- 6.8.** Through non-canonical ordinations and appointments, the de facto head of the AAHC has dismantled the Church's traditional model of conciliar governance and decision-making, establishing mechanisms of clan-based rule instead.

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07

The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and a number of senior clergy are engaged in overt political activity, using various Church structures and its Holy Altar for political propaganda. The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and his inner circle have compelled members of the clergy to organize or take part in political actions.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 7.1.** In the past, the de facto head of the AAHC and the senior clergy consistently displayed loyalty toward Armenia's former political leadership and never intervened in political processes in a manner contrary to the authorities' position. The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin either stayed out of contentious issues or offered the authorities a degree of support. This pattern was evident, for example, during the events of 1 March 2008, when the de facto head of the AAHC and the Church as a whole played no role in de-escalating the crisis. Moreover, although numerous serious violations were reported in the 2008 presidential election and a significant share of citizens protested against electoral fraud and an unfair vote, the de facto head of the AAHC congratulated Serzh Sargsyan on his victory the very day after the election [1], and his position on the protests against electoral fraud was as follows: *"This country does not need a revolution."* [2] Notably, on 29 February, the day before the events of 1 March, an ecclesiastical assembly chaired by the de facto head of the AAHC issued a message that in effect criticized the post-election rallies and marches organized by the opposition, describing them as "not the proper path":

"We call on the representatives of the opposition who do not accept the election results to act within the framework of the law, so that the stability of our country remains intact and the

achievements of our people and the peace of their lives are not endangered. Rallies and marches are not the proper path for contesting the final results of an election that has taken place”.

” [3]

- 7.2. The stance of the de facto head of the AAHC and a number of senior clergy toward the government changed dramatically immediately after the signing of the statement of 9 November 2020. On the second day of the war, the de facto head of the AAHC had in fact expressed his support for the political leadership:

“Through the Prime Minister, His Holiness expressed his support to the authorities of the Republic of Armenia, stressing the importance of joint efforts and unity in the sacred cause of defending our native Artsakh and keeping our borders impregnable”.

” [4] Immediately after 9 November, however, the statements of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Catholicos's messages became marked by language framing a political crisis and by formulations implying a political agenda.

- 7.3. A statement issued by the Supreme Spiritual Council at a session chaired by the de facto head of the AAHC described the protesters' attacks on and vandalism of the Government and National Assembly buildings as “righteous indignation”, thereby encouraging the mass riots and acts of violence carried out by the gangs that had formed: *“The trilateral statement of 10 November on the ceasefire, its consequences and the prevailing uncertainty, and the fact of the loss of part of Artsakh took the public by surprise, leading to righteous indignation...”* [5] At the same time, for the first time, an AAHC statement put forward a political demand:

“The competent officials of all the relevant bodies must bear responsibility for the decisions taken during this period, for such a resolution of the conflict and for the restoration of national solidarity, not excluding the possibility of resignations”.

”

- 7.4. The turning point came with the message of the de facto head of the AAHC of 8 December 2020, in which he openly announced a demand for the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan:

““...We also met with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Mr. Nikol Pashinyan. Guided by the growing internal tension facing the country, by serious external and internal challenges, and by the lack of public trust in the person of the Prime Minister, we paternally urged him to take responsibility and lay down the powers of Prime Minister in order to prevent upheavals in public life, as well as possible clashes and tragic consequences”.

” [6]

- 7.5. This statement was followed by a meeting between the de facto head of the AAHC and Vazgen Manukyan, the prime ministerial candidate of the “Homeland Salvation Movement” formed by opposition forces. Notably, the official press release of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin captioned a joint photograph of the Catholicos and Vazgen Manukyan *“Vazgen Manukyan, the joint candidate for Prime Minister”*, even though at the time there was no official procedure for electing a prime minister ahead of schedule and no official candidate for the post. [7]

- 7.6.** It should be noted that the involvement and active role of the de facto head of the AAHC and the senior clergy aligned with him in domestic politics was not confined to the post-war shock or to statements alone; it became regular, sustained and active. The de facto Catholicos repeatedly reaffirmed his demand for the Prime Minister's resignation in 2021–2023, even after Nikol Pashinyan had resigned and then won the snap parliamentary elections of June 2021, stressing that *“There is no change whatsoever in our positions”* and that *“Our appeal is not limited by time.”* [8] [9] Moreover, the de facto head of the AAHC confirmed in his public remarks that the Church (the Catholicos and the clergy aligned with him) had decided to become involved in post-war political developments, whereas it had deliberately refrained from intervening in earlier political problems: *“The Church itself decides under what circumstances and in what situations to raise its voice and make itself heard. In such situations (1 March, election fraud, etc. – ed.) the Church does not have the facts, and the Church cannot respond or speak out on the basis of guesswork and conjecture.”* [10]
- 7.7.** The culmination of the opposition political activity of senior clergy, and specifically of the de facto head of the AAHC, began in 2024 in the form of the “Tavush for the Homeland” / “Sacred Struggle” movement. Whereas initially he stated that *“We have in no way urged or called on the people to take to the streets and take any corresponding action”* [10], later the Church, in the person of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, began mobilizing discontented citizens and waging a street campaign on the grounds of opposing the border delimitation process. It is important to stress that this process, in Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan's own words, took place with the direct blessing of the de facto head of the AAHC: *“His Holiness the Patriarch has blessed the movement.”* [11] Regarding the practice of the “Patriarch's blessing”, it should be noted that clergy, and Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan personally, repeatedly took part in opposition rallies, again “with the blessing of His Holiness”. The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin: *“With the blessing of His Holiness, the Primate of the Diocese of Tavush, Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan, will take part in the rally of the ‘Resistance’ movement to be held on (2022 – ed.) 5 November in France Square”*; Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan: *“I (to the opposition rally – ed.) will bring the blessing and greetings of the Catholicos of All Armenians, and I will also speak...”* [12] [13]
- 7.8.** It is an established fact that the de facto head of the AAHC and senior clergy not only became involved in political processes themselves but, according to testimonies, also urged or compelled clergy subordinate to them to take part in opposition political actions. Fr. Aram Asatryan has testified to this: *“I took part in almost all the opposition protests in 2021, but not of my own will; it was my superior's (the Catholicos's nephew – ed.)”* [14] According to testimonies, ahead of the 2021 snap elections the Primate of the Diocese of Aragatsotn, Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan (the son of the Catholicos's sister), instructed the clergy of his diocese not to vote for the ruling party and to attend opposition rallies. [15] In October 2025, criminal proceedings were instituted against Proshyan on charges of coercing citizens to take part in rallies and obstructing the exercise of electoral rights; he was placed in pre-trial detention, which in February 2026 was replaced with house arrest. There is also a recording of a telephone conversation between Archbishop Nathan Hovhannisyan and Hieromonk Aghan Yernjakyan, in which the hieromonk states that the Catholicos had pressured him to take part, together with his family, in anti-government protests and, after he refused, tried to have him punished (see 4.9). [16]
- 7.9.** At the end of the 44-day war, the first public anti-government step by a senior cleric was taken by Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan, Chancellor of the Mother See, who on 11 November, immediately after the trilateral statement of 9 November, issued a statement demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. [17]

- 7.10.** A qualitatively new stage in the political role of the clergy came in February 2022, when opposition leader and second President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan proposed entrusting the powers of the President of the Republic to one of the senior clerics. [18] In this context, the stance of Archbishop Mikayel Ajapahyan, Primate of the Diocese of Shirak and member of the Supreme Spiritual Council, became especially prominent: he publicly declared that the Church could assume political power: *“If need be, we can take political power as well. Why does that frighten you so much?”* [19] Later, on various occasions, he called for a military coup in Armenia:

““So isn't it clear from my activity over these last six years what I'm saying? How many times have I said it openly: what we need is a military coup. I said it during the war, and I said it to the presidents, to Kocharyan and to Serzh...” [20]

]; *“...I said back then that a military coup was needed, and I have said since then that a military coup is needed.”* [21]

- 7.11.** The most pronounced instance of a senior cleric acting as an opposition politician was that of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, Primate of the Diocese of Tavush and member of the Supreme Spiritual Council. In May 2024, Galstanyan transformed a sit-in in Kirants against the delimitation of the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan into the “Sacred Struggle” political movement and, together with opposition political forces, led a march to Yerevan. In Republic Square, Galstanyan turned the demand to halt the delimitation into a demand for the Prime Minister's resignation. [22] After prolonged street protests, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan was put forward as a candidate for Prime Minister of Armenia, having, in his own words, “suspended his spiritual ministry” [23]. (It should be noted that his ministry was not terminated, nor was he defrocked; rather, it was “suspended”, which is provided for by no rule of either the AAHC or any other traditional church, since the episcopal rank signifies an authority inherited from the Apostles. Furthermore, there is a known precedent of the Catholicos defrocking a cleric for engaging in “party activity and propaganda”, a measure that was not applied in Galstanyan's case [24].) A serving cleric's bid for the office of Prime Minister was unprecedented in the history of the AAHC. Throughout this period, Galstanyan repeatedly stated that he was acting with the blessing of the Catholicos. [25]

- 7.12.** The peak of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan's political activity came on 12 June 2024 with a protest outside the National Assembly building, when, on the archbishop's command, a group of opposition MPs attempted to break through a police cordon, followed by an attempt by protesters to enter the National Assembly grounds. It all ended in an attempted assault by protesters on law enforcement officers and the parliament building, forcing law enforcement to use preventive measures to stop it. More than 100 people, law enforcement officers and protesters, were injured in the incident. [26] A year later, law enforcement authorities issued a statement accompanied by evidence in the form of audio recordings and other materials, according to which participants and leaders of the “Sacred/ Sacred Struggle” movement had planned to carry out acts of terrorism and actions aimed at seizing power in Armenia. [27] Bagrat Galstanyan and others were arrested in connection with the case.

- 7.13.** According to testimonies, most AAHC bishops opposed Galstanyan's activities of this kind. In particular, Bishop Gevorg Saroyan confirmed in an interview that at a meeting of bishops convened on the matter, the overwhelming majority opposed Galstanyan's political activity because it was non-canonical:

“Twenty-four bishops took part in the discussion, and 20 of the 24 were against Bagrat Srbazan launching a political movement, because it is non-canonical. Yes, his ministry was suspended, but the man appeared in his vestments as a leader, and a great many people, identifying him

with the Armenian Church, went and joined him. But that a churchman should not have done such a thing is established by the canons of the Church”.

” [28]

7.14. Cases have been recorded in which, for political reasons, clergy refused to perform sacraments or barred citizens from entering a church because of their political views.

- Fr. Oshin Hayrapetyan of Saghmosavank urged a couple preparing to marry not to have a godfather (best man) affiliated with the ruling party [29].
- Fr. Sebeos Ghalachyan of the Armenian community of Nizhny Novgorod refused to baptize a child because the godfather was a member of parliament from the ruling party. [30]
- Fr. Paren Petrosyan, pastor of Marmashen, announced in a public post that he would bar from church and throw out “those suffering from the diseases of Nikol's ideas”: *“In any church or holy site within my pastoral area and under my jurisdiction, if I notice any such person entering the church or hear them making improper remarks, I will categorically forbid them and will not let them enter the church or its grounds; I will throw them out in a very rough manner.”* [31]
- Other cases of hate speech by clergy are listed in item 8.4.

These and other similar cases are episodes in stark contradiction with Church regulations, yet they have received no official assessment from the Mother See.

7.15. The PACE observation mission also noted the interference of the Church in domestic politics under the influence of the de facto head of the AAHC, stating that *“The delegation noted the unprecedented involvement of the Armenian Apostolic Church in politics.”* [32]

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

7.16. In the Republic of Armenia, relations between the State and the Church are regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the Law “On Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church”, the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations”, and other laws and legal acts. Article 17 of the Constitution (“The State and Religious Organizations”) stipulates: *“1. Freedom of activity of religious organizations shall be guaranteed in the Republic of Armenia. 2. Religious organizations shall be separate from the State.”* Under Article 17 of the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations”, the Church is prohibited from participating in state governance.

7.17. The Book of Canon Law of the Armenian Church deems it non-canonical for clergy to assume secular power. Canon 81 of the “Apostolic Canons” contained in the AAHC Book of Canons states:

“81 (75). We have said that it is not fitting for a bishop or a priest to involve himself in matters of public administration, but rather to diligently fulfil his ecclesiastical duties. Let him either desist or be deposed, for no one can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24)”.

” Furthermore, the “Nakhashavigh” Charter currently registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia contains no provision allowing clergy to engage in any activity other than spiritual ministry.

SUMMARY

- 7.18.** Amid the electoral fraud of 2008 and the violence of 1 March, the Church not only remained silent but condemned the protests and congratulated the authorities on their victory. In December 2020, for the first time in the history of Armenia's independence, the Catholicos of All Armenians issued a political ultimatum demanding the resignation of an elected Prime Minister. The de facto head of the AAHC himself explained this difference: *"The Church itself decides under what circumstances to make its voice heard."* This admission confirms that the Church's voice is raised according to the criterion of political expediency.
- 7.19.** The de facto head of the AAHC and a number of senior clergy fall directly under the penalty of Apostolic Canon 81. The canon – *"it is not fitting for a bishop or a priest to involve himself in matters of public administration... Let him either desist or be deposed"* – leaves no alternative. No one has desisted, and no canonical consequences have been applied to anyone, because the duty to enforce the canon rests with the de facto head of the AAHC himself, who was the first to violate it.
- 7.20.** The politicization of the Church is not the will of the episcopate but the decision of one person or a small group. At the meeting of bishops, 20 out of 24 opposed Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan's political activity as non-canonical. The de facto head of the AAHC disregarded the position of the overwhelming majority of bishops and, with his blessing, sanctioned this activity, up to and including a serving cleric's bid for the office of Prime Minister. The canonical principles of collegiality and of inviolable, unshakable unity have been replaced by personal will.
- 7.21.** As a result of the non-canonical conduct of the de facto head of the AAHC, spiritual obedience within the Church has been turned into a tool of political mobilization. There are documented cases of clergy being forced by their superiors to take part in opposition actions, while those who refused were punished, up to and including defrocking. The obedience vowed at ordination has been exploited for political ends, which is the gravest form of abuse of spiritual authority.
- 7.22.** As a result of the divisive political activity of the de facto head of the AAHC, numerous cases have been recorded of clergy barring citizens from entering church on the basis of their political affiliation, threatening them with expulsion from the Church, and refusing to baptize a child or to marry a couple. Restricting church sacraments on political grounds contradicts the Gospel, the fundamental teaching of the Church and the Book of Canons. The Mother See has given no official assessment of these cases, which turns them into a tacitly endorsed practice.

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The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, with the involvement of clergy, has created a network of fake and genuine social media users through which he propagates hatred and intolerance and spreads disinformation.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 8.1.** According to publications and testimonies, since 2024, on the initiative of the de facto head of the AAHC and under the coordination of certain senior clergy, a closed (Telegram) group of clergy has been set up within the Church for the purpose of conducting coordinated propaganda and disinformation against the Armenian government on social media. **[1]** *“The priests were selected personally by Ktrich Nersisyan [the secular name of Catholicos Garegin II – transl.]. The group included priests who had already proven their reliability through anti-government activity, such as Fr. Aharon Melkumyan and Fr. Pargev Zeynalyan of the Diocese of Syunik, Fr. Smbat Sargsyan of the Diocese of Kotayk, and others,”* a media report on the subject states. Members of the group met regularly, first at the Mother See and later in the Araratian Pontifical Diocese and elsewhere.

“The same names keep coming up throughout this whole process: Bishop Mushegh Babayan and Fr. Hambardzum Danielyan. They are actively involved in coordinating politically inspired online attacks using fake accounts, anonymous pages and manipulative techniques”,

” the article notes.

- 8.2.** According to the report, two priests from each diocese in Armenia were selected as members of the Telegram group:

- Araratian Diocese – Archpriest Petros Malyan, Fr. Bardughimeos Hakobyan
- Diocese of Aragatsotn – Fr. Mushe Vahanyan, Fr. Paren Arakelyan
- Diocese of Masyatsotn – Fr. Ghazar Torosyan, Fr. Poghos Mikayelyan
- Diocese of Gugark – Fr. Vahan Azaryan, Fr. Mikayel Shaghoyan
- Diocese of Armavir – Fr. Nerses Rushanyan, Fr. Aharon Grigoryan
- Diocese of Gegharkunik – Fr. Stepanos Ignatevosyan, Fr. Simeon Hovhannisyan
- Diocese of Tavush – Fr. Aram Mirzoyan, Fr. Abel Kartashyan
- Diocese of Vayots Dzor – Fr. Nerses Ashughbabayan, Fr. Aram Karapetyan
- Diocese of Shirak – Fr. Nshan Panforyov, Fr. Narek Antonyan
- Diocese of Kotayk – Fr. Sahak Sahakyan, Fr. Smbat Sargsyan
- Diocese of Syunik – Fr. Aharon Melkumyan, Fr. Pargev Zeynalyan
- Diocese of Artik – Fr. Vigen Ghazaryan, Fr. Levon Hovhannisyan

The group's first meeting took place in early July 2025 at the Mother See, chaired by the de facto head of the AAHC. The second meeting was held in late July 2025 at St. Sargis Church in Yerevan,

and the third in August 2025 at St. Thaddeus Church in the town of Masis, in the Diocese of Masyatsotn.

- 8.3.** The creation and activity of the closed group of clergy has also been confirmed by one of its members, Fr. Bardughimeos Hakobyan, who described these meetings and confirmed that the group's task was to conduct information work ahead of the 2026 elections so that "*Nikol would not be elected.*" In particular, Fr. Bardughimeos Hakobyan said:

"It was unacceptable to me when the call went out: 'We must get to work and prepare for the 2026 elections; we must set aside a great many of our duties and work to make sure Nikol doesn't get elected.' Those ideas were unacceptable to me, and when I came back from the meeting, I lodged a complaint with my primate, Archbishop Navasard, saying that I did not want to stay in a place where I had been sent to do propaganda. The archbishop urged me to stay".

" [2]

- 8.4.** Some of the clergy on the above list have regularly spread hate speech and language and labels sowing enmity on their social media pages and in various public appearances.

- Fr. Aharon Melkumyan: *"If a priest goes to bury them, it turns into a curse. Whoever has gone against the Church, shut the doors of a church or attacked a clergyman – if a priest goes and prays over their dead, it will become a curse. They must die unburied, because they are not Armenians; an Armenian would not rise up against his own identity."* [3]
- Fr. Aharon Melkumyan: *"No Armenian traitor has ever died a natural death to this day – Judas is the witness. This is Satan; he serves the enemy of the Armenians. These people are the enemy, and it is clear that this enemy must attack the institution that has preserved us. They are accursed. They are spiritual lepers: it is Satan who is attacking the Church, and this man is Satan's servant, wreaking his havoc."* [4]
- Archpriest Petros Malyan: *"After the Azerbaijani-Turkish revolution of 2018, the attacks on the Church turned into an organized campaign. The liberal fascists had by then unlawfully seized power and controlled the levers of the state so as to pursue anti-clericalism at the state level."* [5]
- Fr. Aharon Melkumyan: *"I have said many times in my interviews that they were never registered anywhere as husband and wife; therefore their union was a fornicating relationship, and the children they bore are the fruit of fornication, born of a bed of debauchery."* [6]
- Other cases of clergy disrupting sacraments and barring citizens from entering church on account of their political views are also listed in subsection 7.14.

SUMMARY

- 8.5.** The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, with the involvement of clergy, has created a network of fake and genuine social media users through which he propagates hatred and intolerance and spreads disinformation. Instead of carrying out their spiritual ministry, AAHC clergy, under pressure from their superiors, have been drawn into political propaganda and counter-propaganda work.

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09

The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and members of his family use the AAHC to spread foreign influence in the Republic of Armenia.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 9.1. In late 2025, national security concerns emerged regarding the brother of the de facto head of the AAHC, Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan. In December 2025, the National Security Service of Armenia reported that in 1986–1988 Archbishop Yezras had been recruited by and had cooperated with the USSR State Security Committee (KGB) under the code name "Karo". In March 2026, the director of the National Security Service publicly reaffirmed this information, adding that there is also evidence of his current contacts with representatives of foreign intelligence services, which may pose a threat to the interests of the Republic of Armenia. [1][2] The fact of his recruitment by a foreign intelligence service takes on particular significance given that Archbishop Yezras heads the largest Armenian diocese in Russia, is the brother of the de facto head of the AAHC and is a member of the Supreme Spiritual Council.
- 9.2. Since 2002, Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan has been a member of the Council for Coordination with Religious Associations under the President of the Russian Federation. Over the course of his career, Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan has repeatedly received Russian state awards: the Medal of the Order "For Merit to the Fatherland", 2nd class (2001); a medal of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation (2002); the Order of Friendship (2009); the Order of Honour (2019); and the Order of Alexander Nevsky (2025), as well as the Russian Orthodox Church's Order of St. Daniel of Moscow, 3rd class (1995) and 2nd class (2009). [3]
- 9.3. In 2025–2026, the structures of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church's dioceses in the Russian Federation became an organizational instrument for public and political actions directed against the Armenian government, and these actions were carried out directly on church premises and with the official participation of diocesan bodies. In December 2025, reports circulated publicly that certain structures in Russia were discussing a scenario of relocating the de facto head of the AAHC to the Russian Federation in the event of his possible removal. Under this scenario, the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan and the Diocese of Southern Russia would be merged in Russia, and a so-called Catholicos See "in exile" would be established. [4]
- 9.4. In December 2025, an assembly convened on the initiative of the Diocesan Council of the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan at the diocesan headquarters of the Armenian Church in Moscow was attended by the clergy of the diocese, members of the Diocesan Council and, according to the document adopted, the chairs and representatives of parish councils from the territory stretching

“from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad, from Central Asia to Belarus and Moldova.” The joint statement adopted at the end of the assembly is entirely political in content. [5] Thus, an assembly of clergy convened at an Armenian Church administrative center operating in a foreign state issued a collective political act challenging the legitimacy of the current government of the Republic of Armenia.

- 9.5. In November 2025, a rally under the slogan “We Are with Etchmiadzin” was held outside the Armenian Embassy in Moscow and the Armenian Consulate General in St. Petersburg, joined, according to Russian media, by clergy of the AAHC Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan. Participants described the policies of the Armenian authorities as “anti-religious” and “church-seizing” and demanded the release of the detained senior clergy and of businessman Samvel Karapetyan. [6] [7] A similar rally was held in February 2026, again in Moscow, in defence of the de facto head of the AAHC personally. [8] The timing of the rallies in relation to visits by Armenia's top leadership is telling: on 1 April 2026, the day of the Armenian Prime Minister's visit to Russia, a protest was staged outside the Armenian Embassy in Moscow, during which protesters publicly burned a portrait of the Prime Minister and declared that the Armenian authorities were “destroying Armenia”. According to reports, clergy also joined the protest. [9] [10]
- 9.6. The de facto head of the AAHC and his brother, Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan, Primate of the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan, made extensive use of the Church as an instrument for projecting foreign influence during the run-up to the 2026 parliamentary elections, openly campaigning in favor of Samvel Karapetyan, leader of an opposition political force, and organizing statements and actions against the Armenian government.
- 9.7. On 10 May 2026, after the election campaign had already begun, the de facto head of the AAHC met with Samvel Karapetyan, leader of an opposition political force. At that meeting, held at S. Karapetyan's home, the de facto head of the AAHC “brought the blessing of Holy Etchmiadzin” to him: *“His Holiness brought the blessing of Holy Etchmiadzin to the eminent son of the Armenian nation and wished him perseverance and faith in facing the current difficulties and trials.”* [11] During the pre-election period he also met with three former presidents, which he publicly confirmed at a press conference on 2 June 2026. [12] On 24 May, the de facto head of the AAHC issued a statement directed against the government: *“It is with pain that we note that servants of the Armenian Church continue to this day to be persecuted and imprisoned in Armenia by the authorities on unfounded charges.”* [13]
- 9.8. Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan has made campaign-style statements in which he sharply criticized the government and called for a vote for “Strong Armenia”. [14] In particular, he declared that voting for Civil Contract was tantamount to committing a sin: *“A person who casts their vote for Civil Contract's anti-Church program, which contains an unconstitutional provision, unwittingly commits a sin and places themselves outside our Holy Apostolic Church.”* [15] In a statement on 22 May, he ascribed fateful significance to the elections:

“On 7 June, decisive elections will take place in the motherland, which will determine whether our homeland and Armenian statehood are to be or not to be. It is therefore our sacred duty to take part in the elections unconditionally, so as to save the pillars of our identity, our homeland and our statehood from destruction. Let us not sin through indifference, so that later on... because of our own indifference at the 2026 elections, we are not stripped of our Armenian passports in our own homeland, as the Armenians of Artsakh were in Artsakh”.

” [16] Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan has regularly appeared in the Russian media with statements assessing domestic political processes in Armenia. [17] [18] [19]

- 9.9.** Under the influence of the de facto head of the AAHC and his brother, some other clergy also engaged in election campaigning. Deacon Artashes Ajapahyan declared that by voting for the ruling Civil Contract party, believers would place themselves outside the Armenian Church and go against God: *“To vote for Nikol Pashinyan means to go against God and against the Church.”* [20] In late May 2026, the newly consecrated Bishops Ruben (Zargaryan), Isahak (Poghosyan) and Zakaria (Baghumyan), days after their consecration, released video messages via an opposition media outlet with the call *“Go and vote – for the strengthening of Armenian statehood, for the steadfastness of the national Church...”*, implicitly suggesting whom to vote for. [21][22][23]
- 9.10.** There are testimonies and factual data regarding the transfer of clergy from Russia and Belarus to Armenia during the pre-election period. According to a report by Fr. Aghan Yernjakyan, clergy were brought from Russia to Armenia during the pre-election period in order to take part in the elections. [24]

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

- 9.11.** Article 23 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia prohibits religious organizations from organizing or conducting election campaigning and from distributing campaign materials. Election campaigning also includes any action aimed at persuading voters to vote for or against a particular political force. [25] Consequently, electoral appeals made by diocesan primates and other clergy in favor of a particular force during the official pre-election period bear the indicia of prohibited election campaigning.

SUMMARY

- 9.12.** Through the efforts of the de facto head of the AAHC and members of his family, the institutions of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church – its diocesan structures, church premises, parish network, media resources and the authority of the Catholicos of the Holy See – have been instrumentalized for exerting foreign influence in the Republic of Armenia. Through decisions of senior Church bodies, through Church infrastructure, through the Church's official platforms and through activities carried out in the Church's name, the political content of foreign influence is being imported into Armenia, directed against the constitutional order and sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia.
- 9.13.** During the run-up to the 2026 parliamentary elections, the Church's structures functioned as mechanisms of electoral influence in favor of an opposition political force. This role was played along the entire vertical: after the campaign began, the de facto head of the AAHC “brought the blessing of Holy Etchmiadzin” to the leader of the opposition force and met with three former presidents; his brother issued a direct call to vote for the opposition force, ascribing to the elections the significance of whether statehood was “to be or not to be”; newly consecrated bishops released video messages via opposition media outlets; and at the lower levels, overtly punitive language was used: “To vote for Nikol Pashinyan means to go against God and against the Church.” Voters' religious feelings were used as a tool for influencing electoral behaviour.
- 9.14.** The brother of the de facto head of the AAHC – Primate of the AAHC's largest diocese and a member of the Supreme Spiritual Council – has since 2002 been institutionally part of a state body operating under the President of the Russian Federation, and in 2025 he was awarded a high Russian state order precisely for that service. Standing membership in a presidential body of a foreign state, combined with the established fact of Soviet-era cooperation with

that state's security service, makes the highest level of the AAHC hierarchy a direct conduit of foreign influence.

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Throughout the 27 years of his tenure, contrary to the requirements of the Charter on Convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the de facto head of the AAHC has obstructed the convening of the Church's supreme body – the National Ecclesiastical Assembly – thereby placing the Church on a foundation of one-man rule.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

10.1. The supreme canon-making body of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the National Ecclesiastical Assembly (NEA), was last convened on 27 October 1999 with 445 delegates, and its outcome was the election of the de facto head of the AAHC as Catholicos. [1] Since that day – for 27 years – the supreme canon-making body of the AAHC has not been convened. In other words, the NEA last functioned precisely to elect the de facto head of the AAHC, and since then, throughout his entire tenure, it has been postponed time and again and never held.

10.2. The first officially recorded reference to the need to convene the NEA appears in the Charter of the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly (ERA) adopted by that Assembly in 2014, which states that the Charter is subject to reconfirmation by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly: *“This Charter is subject to reconfirmation by the forthcoming NEA”* (Article 19). [2]

10.3. The next official reference came in 2017, when the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly discussed and adopted a new Charter on Convening the NEA and recorded the need to convene the National Ecclesiastical Assembly in order to approve it:

“After two days of comprehensive, article-by-article discussion of the draft and the additions proposed, the participants of the Assembly adopted the document by vote; it will receive final approval from the forthcoming National Ecclesiastical Assembly”.

” [3] Since the NEA has not convened after 2017 either, that document, like many other statutory documents, has remained without force. Thus, statutory reform has been made dependent on an assembly whose convening is controlled by the de facto head of the AAHC, creating a closed statutory loop.

10.4. The NEA Charter adopted at the 2017 Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly provides that the National Ecclesiastical Assembly must be held at least once every seven years: *“The session of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly shall be convened by the Catholicos of All Armenians at least once every seven years.”* [4] Nine years after its adoption, the NEA has not convened yet.

10.5. A date and agenda for convening the NEA were officially set following the session of the Supreme Spiritual Council held in November 2018. According to the press release, the Supreme Spiritual Council decided to convene the NEA the following year, 2019:

“As a result of the discussions, it was decided to convene a National Ecclesiastical Assembly next year under the theme ‘The Armenian Church in the 21st Century: Present and Future’. The issues to be included on the Assembly's agenda were examined”.

” [5]

- 10.6.** Four months after that decision, in March 2019, a session of the Supreme Spiritual Council chaired by the de facto head of the AAHC decided to postpone the convening of the Assembly, moving the NEA to November 2020. Two reasons were cited for the postponement: *“Taking into account the scale and time-consuming nature of the preparatory work for the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, as well as the progress of the renovation of the Mother Cathedral.”* [6]
- 10.7.** The NEA planned for November 2020 was not convened either. This time, the Mother See attributed yet another postponement to the pandemic and the war: *“Unfortunately, it was postponed because of the pandemic and the Artsakh war. We hope that an NEA will take place at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in the near future.”* [7] From 2020 to the date of this report, no new date for convening the NEA has been announced.
- 10.8.** In the history of the Armenian Church, National Ecclesiastical Assemblies have been convened not only upon the death of a Catholicos and for the election of a new one, but also to discuss and decide on national-ecclesiastical and canonical matters, to hear reports, and to address other issues. One such National Ecclesiastical Assembly was convened by His Holiness Vazgen I from 30 September to 5 October 1962, with 141 delegates, of whom 46 were clergy and 95 laity. [8] The agenda of that Assembly was as follows:
- Report on the seven years of the Catholicos's activity;
 - Financial report of the Mother See;
 - Drafting of a Book of Canon Law of the Armenian Church;
 - Strengthening the unity of the Armenian Church;
 - Election of the Supreme Spiritual Council and the Audit Commission;
 - Program of forthcoming construction at Holy Etchmiadzin. [9]

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

- 10.9.** The National Ecclesiastical Assembly (NEA) is the supreme canon-making body of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church. This status is enshrined in the very first provision of the *“Special Charter on Convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly”* adopted and ratified by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly of 1945: *“The supreme canon-making body of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church is the National Ecclesiastical Assembly.”* [10] Under the same Charter, all fundamental matters of the organization of Church life fall within the exclusive competence of the NEA:

“(a) Election of the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians; (b) Election of the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council of Holy Etchmiadzin; (c) Approval of the National Ecclesiastical Constitution; (d) Examination and resolution of ecclesiastical and other canonical and general matters; (e) Regulation of the economic state of the Church”.

” [10] In other words, the election of the Catholicos, the formation of the Supreme Spiritual Council, the adoption of the Constitution, the resolution of canonical disputes and the regulation of the Church's economic affairs all fall within the competence of this supreme body.

- 10.10.** The NEA is a representative body in which the faithful are represented alongside the Church hierarchy. Under the Charter, its members include the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople, all primates and bishops of the Armenian Church, four representatives from each of the brotherhoods

of the four hierarchical Sees, and “*competent parishioners aged thirty or over, elected by the people*”, with one delegate per up to 25,000 faithful from each diocese. [10] Consequently, the failure to convene the NEA deprives not only the episcopate but also the Church's flock of their canonical opportunity to take part in the governance of the Church.

10.11. The Charter in force assigns the duty to convene the NEA to one person alone: “*The National Ecclesiastical Assembly shall be convened by the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.*” The only exception is the death of the Catholicos. In other words, during the Catholicos's lifetime there is no other mechanism for convening the NEA, and whether or not the Church's supreme body is convened is exclusively a matter of the Catholicos's competence and obligation.

SUMMARY

10.12. Throughout the 27 years of his tenure, contrary to the requirements of the Charter on Convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly and to the obligations recorded at various assemblies and in various documents, the de facto head of the AAHC has failed to convene, and has repeatedly postponed or obstructed the convening of, the Church's supreme body – the National Ecclesiastical Assembly – thereby placing the Church on a foundation of one-man rule.

10.13. By failing to convene and repeatedly obstructing the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the de facto head of the AAHC has deprived not only the Church hierarchy but also the faithful of their canonical opportunity to take part in the governance of the Church. None of the statutory documents adopted since 1999 by the unilateral decisions of the de facto head of the AAHC have been ratified by the Church's supreme canon-making body.

10.14. None of the official pretexts for failing to convene and repeatedly postponing the NEA has been valid for years: the war ended in 2020, the pandemic wave ended in 2021, and the renovation of the Mother Cathedral was completed in 2024. [11] Despite the removal of the obstacles cited as justification at various times, the NEA has not been convened so far.

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11

The Synod of Bishops and the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly has not convened with the prescribed regularity, as a result of which the Supreme Spiritual Council has operated with an unlawfully composed membership and key statutory documents have for the most part remained without force.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 11.1.** During the years of Armenia's independence, the Synod of Bishops of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church has convened twice – in 2013 and 2014 – mainly on matters relating to the centenary of the Genocide and the canonization of the 1.5 million martyrs. [1] They were attended by 62 and 58 bishops respectively. [2] [3] Other gatherings with the participation of bishops have been organized in various years, and statements have been issued in the name of bishops or over their signatures; however, these were largely gatherings of the bishops based in Armenia and, in the canonical sense, were not Synods of Bishops – that is, they did not conform to the principle of episcopal synodality that exists in all traditional churches. [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]
- 11.2.** The Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church has been convened six times: in 1997, 2003, 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2017. [9] Despite the statutory requirement to convene it every two years, the ERA has not been convened since 2017.
- 11.3.** The members of the Supreme Spiritual Council were last elected, for a four-year term, by the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly held at the Mother See on 6–8 June 2017. [10]

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

- 11.4.** The Synod of Bishops is the assembly of the episcopate of the hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church. It is an administrative and canonical body attached to the Catholicos which considers religious, disciplinary, administrative and other matters submitted by the dioceses. At the last two Synods, in 2013 and 2014, it consisted of all the bishops of the Armenian Church, and, according to tradition, the Catholicos of All Armenians was its president, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia its vice-president, and the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople its chairs. Decisions are adopted by majority vote and submitted to the Catholicos for approval and implementation. Under the “Nakhashavigh” Charter approved by the de facto head of the AAHC in 2000 (but never ratified by the NEA), the Synod of Bishops is to be convened at least once every three months (Article 25). [11]
- 11.5.** The Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly (ERA) of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church is a body established by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly (NEA) which convenes in the intervals between NEAs. The ERA is authorized by the NEA to consider and adopt decisions on important matters relating to the continuity of the Church's mission and to its activities. Under the 2014 Charter of the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly, ratified by the de facto head of the AAHC but not by the NEA, the ERA convenes once every two years (Article 8). [12] Under the same Charter, the ERA's competence includes approving chapters of the AAHC Charter, considering and resolving all administrative, structural, financial and economic matters delegated by the NEA, considering

matters relating to the effective organization of Church life and, where necessary, providing statutory solutions for them, and so forth.

- 11.6.** Article 7(b) of the “Special Charter on Convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly”, adopted and ratified by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly of 1945, provides that the election of the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council falls within the competence of the NEA. **[13]** Under the 2014 Charter of the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly, ratified by the de facto head of the AAHC but not by the NEA, the ERA elects two thirds of the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council (Article 3) – yet no ERA has been convened since 2017. **[12]** Under the “Nakhashavigh” Charter approved by the de facto head of the AAHC in 2000 (but never ratified by the NEA), some members of the Supreme Spiritual Council are elected by the Synod of Bishops and the rest are appointed by the Catholicos (Article 31) – yet no Synod of Bishops was convened before 2013. **[11]**
- 11.7.** Under the Charter of the Supreme Spiritual Council, which has not been ratified by the NEA, the members of the Council are elected for a four-year term (Article 3). **[14]**

SUMMARY

- 11.8.** Because of the person-centered, one-man rule exercised by the de facto head of the AAHC, the Synod of Bishops and the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly have not been convened with the canonical regularity prescribed, as a result of which the Supreme Spiritual Council has operated with an irregularly constituted membership, key statutory documents have remained without force, and the Church has functioned in conditions of canonical chaos.
- 11.9.** For almost the entire period of the de facto head of the AAHC's tenure, the Supreme Spiritual Council has operated with an irregularly constituted membership, and changes to its membership have been made by unilateral decisions. From the outset, the de facto head of the AAHC violated the provision of the NEA's 1945 Charter in force concerning the election of members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, and the NEA has elected no members because it has not been convened since 1999. He then violated the provision on electing members of the Supreme Spiritual Council laid down in the “Nakhashavigh” Charter he himself had approved, since he convened no Synod of Bishops before 2013 and no members of the Council were elected. He then also violated the ERA Charter by convening no assembly after 2017, so that members of the Supreme Spiritual Council were not elected in the lawful manner but appointed solely at the discretion of the de facto Catholicos. This means that the current composition of the Supreme Spiritual Council is likewise unlawful.

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12

The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church has repeatedly obstructed the adoption of a unified Constitution of the AAHC, as a result of which the Church has functioned under personal rule, without valid canonical foundations.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 12.1. The requirement to adopt a unified Constitution of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church is enshrined in a number of the Church's canonical documents as a primary and important task; yet, on various pretexts, a complete Constitution has still not been adopted.
- 12.2. Work on drafting a Constitution of the AAHC began in the middle of the last century, and the main drafting was carried out during the tenures of Catholicos Vazgen I and Catholicos Karekin I. The patriarchal encyclical issued by Vazgen I on the drafting of a new Constitution of the AAHC states:

"...over some 20 years we formed commissions of learned and capable senior clergy, who drew up drafts of an ecclesiastical constitution not greatly differing from one another, grounded in the canons and traditions of our Church, in the spirit of conciliar and democratic principles that are characteristic of the historically consecrated order of the Armenian Apostolic Church and of the mentality of the Armenian faithful".

" [1] In February 1999, at the instruction of Catholicos Karekin I, the Statutory Commission presented a version of the draft "Constitution of the Armenian Church", which was to receive final approval from the National Ecclesiastical Assembly. [2]

- 12.3. In addition to the election of a new Catholicos, the agenda of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly held on 27–28 October 1999 included one further item: the adoption of the Constitution of the AAHC, on which a decision was taken and a commitment was imposed on the newly elected Catholicos. During the Assembly, Archbishop Vache Hovsepyan, chair of the commission for organizing the National Ecclesiastical Assembly and drafting the Church's Constitution, proposed

"that the newly elected Catholicos of All Armenians convene, in June 2000, a Representative Assembly with the participation of all the bishops and one representative from each diocesan council, and authorize that Representative Assembly, under the presidency of His Holiness, to consider in detail the matters brought from the Synod of Bishops and the latest draft of the charter (the Constitution – ed.) submitted to it, and, after ratifying it, to send it to all dioceses for implementation".

” [3] Archbishop Vache's proposal was approved by a vote of the NEA, and it was decided to convene, under the presidency of the newly elected Catholicos and no later than October 2000, a joint assembly of the bishops and of delegates authorized by the diocesan councils to examine the draft Constitution of the Armenian Church. [4] Although the NEA had instructed the de facto head of the AAHC to convene this assembly in 2000, it was convened only in 2003, and its agenda did not include discussion of the draft Constitution. [5] [6]

- 12.4.** From the 2000s onward, the de facto head of the AAHC began to separate the drafting and ratification of a unified Constitution, introducing different chapters of the Constitution into Church practice at different times without ratification by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly. At the Ecclesiastical Representative Assemblies held at the Mother See in 2009 and 2014, separate charters were approved for the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly and the Supreme Spiritual Council, both of which were put into effect by decision of the de facto head of the AAHC without ratification by the NEA.

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- 12.5.** The commitment to adopt a full Constitution of the AAHC was enshrined by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly of 1999 in the form of convening an ERA and, after ratifying the then-latest draft of the Constitution, sending it to all dioceses for implementation (see 12.3).
- 12.6.** The commitment to adopt a full Constitution of the AAHC is also enshrined in the “Nakhashavigh” Charter approved by the de facto head of the AAHC in 2000 (but never ratified by the NEA):

“In the near future a charter (Constitution) of the Armenian Apostolic Church is to be drawn up, which will be the fundamental law of its entire hierarchical structure. Thereafter the present charter will be incorporated into that fundamental law as a constituent part of it”.

” [7]

SUMMARY

- 12.7.** The de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church has failed to convene the assembly mandated by the AAHC's supreme body, the NEA; he has stratified and fragmented the draft unified Constitution and, over the years, has subjected individual chapters of the Constitution to incomplete ratification, as a result of which the Church has functioned amid a statutory vacuum and a fragmentation of its normative and canonical acts.
- 12.8.** The de facto head of the AAHC has repeatedly obstructed the adoption of a full Constitution of the Church, as a result of which the Church has functioned under personal rule, without full and valid canonical foundations.

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13

The statutory pressure, arbitrary appointments and interference in property matters carried out by the de facto head of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church have caused splits in Diaspora dioceses and have estranged the faithful of those dioceses from the Mother Church.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 13.1. The personnel policy and administration pursued by the de facto head of the AAHC with regard to Diaspora dioceses, and his interference in matters of property ownership, have for decades been a source of conflict and discontent. The ruptures that have arisen and deepened between Diaspora dioceses and the Mother See are recurrent and follow a consistent pattern, and at times they have also led to conflicts with the legislation of the host states.
- 13.2. In September 2019, the Russian Service of the BBC published an investigation presenting a series of conflicts that had arisen between the AAHC Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan and local Armenian communities in numerous Russian cities. According to the publication, the episodes follow the same scenario: a local community builds a church with its own funds, then receives a demand from the diocese headed by the brother of the de facto head of the AAHC to transfer title to the church and the adjoining land to the diocese, to adopt the parish charter sent to it, and to transfer a certain sum to the diocesan fund in the form of a donation of several million roubles. [1]
- 13.3. In Izhevsk, the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator was built entirely with the Armenian community's own funds in 2009–2012, after which the community approached Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan, Primate of the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan and brother of the de facto head of the AAHC, requesting that the church be consecrated. In exchange for consecrating the newly built church, the Primate demanded that the church and all its surrounding land be transferred to the ownership of the diocese and that the diocesan charter be adopted. The community met these conditions, yet the church remained unconsecrated. The Primate then put forward new demands: that a salary be paid to a cleric sent from Moscow (in addition to the income he received for performing sacraments), as well as a bribe of USD 20,000 or 1.2 million roubles for consecrating the church. [1] [2] Because of these demands, for some 12 years after it was built the Izhevsk church remained unconsecrated and unused, and members of the community were obliged to perform their religious rites in Moscow or through clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church. The church was consecrated and opened only in 2024, as a result of the community's prolonged efforts. [3]
- 13.4. According to the publication by the Russian Service of the BBC, cases identical to the Izhevsk scenario were also recorded in Novokuznetsk and Novosibirsk, in the Kirov, Kemerovo and Sverdlovsk regions and in the Altai Republic, as well as earlier in the Riga parish. [1] Representatives of 12 Armenian communities in Russia also raised the same problem in the summer of 2019, during the visit to Moscow of Zareh Sinanyan, the Armenian Prime Minister's High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs. [4]

- 13.5.** In Novosibirsk, the parish council was dissolved by decision of the diocese, and an attempt to challenge that decision in court ended in the claim being dismissed, with the court finding the actions of the diocesan authorities lawful. In the Kirov region, according to the principal donor who funded the church's construction, the parish council lost control of the church it had built with its own funds in the same way. [1]
- 13.6.** Independently of one another, Armenian communities in the Altai Republic and the Kemerovo region were obliged to turn to clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church to have khachkars (cross-stones) consecrated. According to the heads of the community organizations, they took this step after the AAHC made the consecration of a khachkar conditional on transferring the land to the diocese. Khachkars erected in Tatarstan and the Vologda region were likewise consecrated by clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church. [1]
- 13.7.** According to testimonies, the Armenian Museum of Moscow was closed under pressure from Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan. Ruben Grigoryan, one of the benefactors who funded the construction of the Armenian cathedral complex in Moscow, sponsored and created the interactive “Armenian Museum of Moscow and Culture of Nations” on the grounds of the complex in 2015. Shortly after it opened, Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan decided to create a museum of his own and deprived the benefactor and his museum of the premises. According to Grigoryan, Archbishop Yezras posted his own guards at the museum entrance and closed it without giving any reason. In Grigoryan's view, the conflict stems from the documentary concentration of all church property in the hands of one person: *“Today the Catholicos owns and disposes of everything”*, as a result of which, in his assessment, the Armenian Diaspora has been deprived of its collective space. David Tonoyan, co-founder of the Union of Armenians of Russia, also testified to the consequences of this rupture with the community, stating that *“the attitude of Armenian young people in the Russian capital toward the AAHC hierarchy is absolutely negative”*, while the clergy *“have no contact whatsoever with Armenian youth.”* [1] [5] [6]
- 13.8.** In 2026, Andranik Shakaryan, chair of the Diocesan Council of the AAHC Diocese of Bulgaria, addressed an open letter to the Prime Minister of Armenia setting out the details of a conflict with the Mother See lasting more than fifteen years. [7] According to the letter, in 2013–2014 an attempt was made to impose on the diocese a charter drafted in Etchmiadzin; delegate elections were repeated until the desired result was obtained; detailed minutes of the assembly were missing; and, instead of these circumstances being investigated, the vicar responsible was consecrated a bishop and appointed to another diocese. The new charter adopted by the diocese in 2018–2019 and registered with the competent Bulgarian court was not recognized by the Mother See. The authors maintain that the diocese was thereafter subjected to administrative sanctions: a number of communities were left without clergy, and the newly built cathedral in Sofia went unconsecrated for a long time. According to the letter, the charter drafted in Etchmiadzin contradicted the legislation of the host state and could not be registered. In other words, the imposition of an internal Church act collided not only with the diocese's position but also with the legal system of the country under whose jurisdiction the diocese operates. [8] [9]
- 13.9.** The conflict between the Mother See and the community of the Church of St. Mary Mother of God in Nice – one of the founding parishes of the Diocese of France – arose over the imposition of a unified (“model”) charter. In 2007, the general assembly of the parish voted to reject the unified charter imposed by the de facto head of the AAHC, under which control of church property and finances was transferred to the ecclesiastical authorities. The parish's position, based on the legislation of that country, was that the subject matter of the charter is the secular administrative sphere, whereas the canons of the Church must relate exclusively to the religious sphere. The parish's activities were governed by the French laws of 1901 and 1905. Because of the refusal to

adopt the charter, in 2012, after losing in the French courts, the de facto head of the AAHC deconsecrated the Chapel of St. Mary, stripped the entire church community of its Apostolic status and removed the parish from the Diocese of France – in effect deliberately placing an entire Armenian community of faithful outside the Armenian Church. [10] [11]

13.10. In 2011, the de facto head of the AAHC unlawfully defrocked Fr. Abel Manukyan, pastor of the Church of St. Hakob in Geneva, Switzerland, and appointed Archimandrite Mesrop Parsamyan in his place. The de facto Catholicos intended to reorganize the Armenian Church community in Switzerland, which the local Armenian community firmly opposed, wishing to preserve the status of a church community and not to form a diocese. Of the 90 members of the council of the Geneva church, 88 voted against the creation of diocesan structures. Despite this, the de facto head of the AAHC created a new parish of Geneva and the Lake Geneva region in parallel with the long-standing church community and removed the pastor respected and accepted by the traditional community. [12]

13.11. In July 2013, after 45 years of service in the Church, Archbishop Norvan Zakarian, Patriarchal Legate in Western Europe and Primate of the Diocese of France, resigned under pressure from the de facto head of the AAHC, addressing direct accusations to him. The immediate cause of the resignation was an ultimatum concerning Fr. Vache Hayrapetyan, a former priest of the Nice parish: a French court had given him a suspended sentence for an act of violence, while the de facto head of the AAHC demanded that he be reinstated in service and paid a salary. In June 2013, at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, the de facto head of the AAHC publicly threatened the diocesan primate: *“If you do not reinstate him by 1 July... then you have no business with the Mother See.”* Despite the archbishop's request, under pressure from the de facto head of the Church he submitted his resignation with effect from the end of his seven-year term as primate. The resignation resonated widely within the Armenian community of France, where Zakarian enjoyed great authority, and it was immediately after this episode that the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, published his unprecedented letter of criticism addressed to the de facto head of the AAHC (see 4.3). [13] [14]

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13.12. In 2009, the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly adopted, and the de facto head of the AAHC approved (without ratification by the NEA), the document “Guideline for the Diocesan Charter of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church”, under which all Diaspora dioceses were required to bring their historic and local charters into line with a single model. The document is formally a “guideline”, since it was sent in advance for consideration to all diocesan primates; however, the overwhelming majority of its articles are marked with an asterisk as mandatory for inclusion in the charters of all dioceses, and a number of articles are declared “not subject to amendment” (Articles 1.5, 2.1.2). This converts the diocese, as a self-governing community of the faithful, into an administrative subdivision of the Mother See. The Guideline's key provisions substantially curtail diocesan autonomy in the areas of statutory amendments, decision-making, the election of councils, the distribution of revenues (the diocese transfers 4 per cent of its budget to the Mother See annually) and the principles of the possession and disposal of property. Among the provisions most sensitive for the dioceses have been these: elected parish and diocesan councils may be dissolved by decision of the primate or the Catholicos (5.9b, 10.11b, 1.10); and upon the dissolution of a parish its property passes to the diocese, while upon the dissolution of a diocese it passes to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin (7.2, 17.3). [15]

13.13. In most cases, the imposition of the Guideline on Diaspora dioceses ran into three fundamental contradictions.

- Traditional: for a century, the charters of Diaspora dioceses have rested on the principle of separating spiritual and administrative governance – the laity are responsible for administrative and financial matters and the clergy for spiritual life and pastoral work – whereas the Guideline runs counter to that principle by making the decisions of bodies elected by the community dependent on ratification by an ecclesiastical superior.
- Legal: Diaspora dioceses and parishes operate as legal entities created and registered under the law of the host state, and texts drafted on the basis of the Guideline contradicted local legislation in a number of countries and could not be registered.
- Canonical: the procedure for adopting the Guideline itself excluded any genuine participation by the dioceses' parish representatives in the governance of diocesan affairs; in only some dioceses were formal discussions held, at the discretion of the primate bishops and in the presence of the clergy, whose observations were subsequently not accepted by the de facto head of the Church. [15]

SUMMARY

13.14. The drive of the de facto head of the AAHC to appropriate the governance of the Church and to redistribute property ownership has become the principal factor behind the confrontation and rupture between the Mother See and the Diaspora. The “Guideline” charter imposed on Diaspora dioceses and parishes has generated disputes and splits within communities and has caused the interruption of the service of a number of distinguished clergy and the estrangement of active members of the Diaspora. For years, in various communities in Russia, Bulgaria and other countries, the faithful have been deliberately deprived of the opportunity to receive spiritual services, as a result of arbitrary personnel appointments by the de facto head of the AAHC and the heads of those dioceses, the extortion of funds and the imposition of problematic statutory principles.

13.15. For decades, the brother of the de facto head of the AAHC, Archbishop Yezras Nersisyan, Primate of the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan, has pursued in the AAHC's largest diocese a practice of redistributing property ownership and extorting vast sums from the faithful in the form of “donations” in exchange for sacramental services. Cases have been recorded in which the faithful were obliged to turn to the clergy of other churches to receive spiritual services and sacraments, which in essence means the deliberate estrangement of Armenian Christians from the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.

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14

Under the control of the de facto head of the AAHC, property owned by the Church or entrusted to its management has for years been used for purposes other than those intended – left abandoned or used for business purposes.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 14.1. After independence, the Republic of Armenia transferred to the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, free of charge, a considerable number of churches and monastic complexes that are historic and cultural monuments, together with their adjoining land. [1] By a Government decision of 2005, the land plots of monasteries and churches previously granted for use were likewise transferred into ownership free of charge. In February 2013, detailed lists were approved of the buildings, structures and land plots owned by the Mother See or held by it in permanent use free of charge and exempt from land tax and property tax. [2] According to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, as of June 2025 some 1,340 immovable monuments that are churches and monastic complexes were included in the state lists in Armenia, of which more than 300 are the property of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. [3]
- 14.2. According to available inventory data, more than 100 immovable properties owned by the AAHC or entrusted to its management in nine provinces of Armenia and in Yerevan are abandoned, not used for their intended purpose, or exploited commercially. They comprise more than 120 hectares of land, of which 62 hectares are two pastures and the remaining roughly 60 hectares are plots and developed areas, as well as more than 43,000 square metres of buildings, including culture houses, cinemas, kindergartens, workshops, residential houses and apartments. The Church has acquired or received from municipalities more than two dozen land plots with a total area of about 12

hectares on condition that churches be built on them, yet not a single church has been built on any of them.

- Shirak Province – 12 land plots (Alvar, Aghvorik, Amasia, Ardenis, Aregnadem, Berdashen, Garnarich, Zarishat, Zorakert, Tsaghkut, Hovtun, Voghji) registered in 2014–2018, totalling 1.41 hectares, all unused; a thirteenth, in the village of Lusaghbyur (0.2 hectares), is used by villagers as a football pitch;
- Gegharkunik Province – Varser (0.1 hectares, 2008), Tsovaghyugh (0.3 hectares, 2007) and 2 hectares of the municipal park in Sevan (2004);
- Ararat Province – Vedi (2022), Yeraskh (2023), Geghanist (2023), Argavand (2010);
- Yerevan – Nor Nork (2/1 Totovents St., 4.5 hectares), allocated in 2006, the park is in poor condition; Shengavit (junction of Chekhov and Hayk Hovsepyan streets), 4,350 sq m, allocated in 2005, abandoned; Avan, allocated in 2005, no work carried out; Ajapnyak (junction of Shiraz and Janibekyan streets), 1 hectare, allocated in 2001; Davtashen (between the 1st and 2nd districts), 1 hectare, allocated in 2004. In response to an inquiry by FIP on the subject, the Mother See provided no information on the start and completion dates of construction. **[4]**
- Other purpose-specific allocations have likewise gone unrealized: 0.1 hectares in Masis for the construction of a social center (2020); 0.42 hectares in Lusashogh for spiritual youth camps (2021); 500 sq m in Jermuk for the restoration of the St. Hakob Chapel (2007); and 3.86 hectares of land of historic and cultural designation provided by the Ministry of Culture in Saghmosavan for the expansion of the monastery grounds, which in fact serves as a hayfield.

14.3. Municipalities and the State have transferred to the AAHC, free of charge, numerous buildings and premises of public significance, in each case on condition of a specific public purpose, yet the conditions of their use have not been fulfilled:

- Sevan: the former municipal culture house at 22 Shahumyan St. was donated to the Church in 2005 for the Christian education of young people and the creation of a computer center, but to this day it is not used for any purpose. The building is currently in poor condition and its premises require major renovation;
- Aparan: the half-finished building of the culture palace on Gai Street, together with the land, was donated to the Church in 2007 to be converted into a Hayordyats Tun (Armenian youth center); no work has been carried out and the building has decayed and been damaged;
- Talin: kindergarten No. 1 and its land were donated in 2012 on condition of purpose-specific use; it operated only until 2013, and the building is currently unused and has fallen into disrepair;
- Charentsavan: the municipal cinema building has been on the Church's balance sheet since 2004 and has not been used at all during that time, remaining abandoned. In 2025, the Civil Contract faction of the Charentsavan municipal council initiated a process to return the building to the municipality and restore it as a cinema;
- Ararat: the “Avarayr” cinema building – a 916 sq m structure with adjoining land – was transferred to the Mother See free of charge by a 2010 Government decision for conversion into a Hayordyats Tun, but no conversion has been carried out; the building has in effect turned into a rubbish dump and is in a dire state;
- The historic building on the grounds of the Mother See, erected in the 18th century on the instructions of Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi as a monastic refectory, is now used as the “Agape” café-restaurant;

- A two-storey stone structure built 150 metres from the Haghartsin monastic complex, on state-owned forest land, which was intended to be used as a seminary, has not served that purpose: the building was renovated and furnished and, from 2018 until February 2025, operated as the “Vanatun” hotel. The structure has no certificate of ownership, and its electricity and gas were therefore supplied directly from the Haghartsin monastic complex. According to published reports, the de facto head of the AAHC and Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, then Primate of the Diocese of Tavush, were aware of the building's construction and of the hotel's operation. [5]
- 14.4.** In 2013, Susanna Gabrielyan, a resident of the village of Ohanavan in Aragatsotn Province, stated during a protest outside the Government building that a business facility was to be built on the historic grounds of the village church, taking away her plot of land, and that this was being done under the patronage of the nephew of the de facto head of the AAHC, Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan, Primate of the Diocese of Aragatsotn, and through the pastor Yeprem Zargaryan. According to her testimony, the practice is systemic: those individuals have business premises in the yards of the churches of several neighbouring villages, and in Mughni “they set up a school building on the grounds of St. Gevorg Church, and after it had operated for 3 months they turned it into a business center – a bakery for gata and lavash”. [6] This testimony corroborates the report cited in subsection 5.10 about the lavash and gata workshop adjacent to Mughni Monastery.
- 14.5.** The attitude of the de facto head of the AAHC toward church-owned monuments is on record in his own words. According to a July 2011 publication by the “We Will Not Be Silent” youth initiative, the monument scholar Samvel Karapetyan presented to the de facto head of the AAHC the dire condition of the 10th-century Sanahin monastic complex (a UNESCO World Heritage site) – trees growing on the roofs, collapsing structures – and proposed that funds being directed to the construction of new churches be redirected to the preservation of Sanahin. In reply, the de facto head of the AAHC declared: *“I have no business with monasteries and churches up in the mountains.”* [7]
- 14.6.** According to the testimony of monument scholar Samvel Karapetyan, when members of the UNESCO commission were assessing the Noravank monastic complex, having *“seen from a distance the structure built next to the complex, they did not even approach Noravank”*: *“every monument has a protected zone, and if modern structures appear within that zone, then by UNESCO's criteria the historic monument cannot be included on the list.”* As a result of the development, the complex was left out of the UNESCO World Heritage list. [8] This episode represents a measurable institutional loss caused by the commercial exploitation of monument land: the loss of the opportunity to be included on the World Heritage list.
- 14.7.** Fr. Taron Hunanyan has also given testimony on the misuse of church property, addressing circulating reports about the sale of burial places at the Mother See's church: *“In any case, a great many people are talking about it, and naturally this is their business-minded approach, which is unbecoming of a churchman.”* [9]
- 14.8.** The practice of alienating sacred relics without a decision of the Church's competent bodies is a separate matter. It is known that a fragment of the Holy Lance was donated to Patriarch Alexy II of the Russian Orthodox Church on the occasion of his 75th birthday. According to reports, the donation took place in 2004 but became publicly known only in 2018, during the protests demanding the resignation of the de facto head of the AAHC. [10] In addition, there are reports that auctions were organized in the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, in New York, at which relics were sold:

"Before selling relics, Garegin II first commissions certain jewellers to make an exact copy of the antique item, for example a reliquary; the original is then replaced with it and placed in the treasury of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, while the original is sold for millions, as if nothing had happened... Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, during his time as Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, was involved in the sale of relics and exceptional sacred objects, and at times was the very organizer of it".

" [11] There is also a known case of the sale of an expensive alcoholic beverage organized with the "blessing" and signature of the de facto head of the AAHC, which is categorically contrary to the traditions and values of the Armenian Church. [12]

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

- 14.9.** The "Apostolic Canons" contained in the AAHC Book of Canon Law accord the bishop the status of steward, not owner, of church property, and define the purposes for which property may be used exhaustively. Canon 38 (36): "The bishop shall take care of the goods of the Church and administer them as is pleasing to God; but he shall not steal them or bestow them on his relatives; rather, he shall only aid the poor, and shall not, on that pretext, take anything from them for himself."
- 14.10.** In Armenian law, the following binding norms apply to church-owned monuments. Under Article 36 of the Law "On the Preservation and Use of Immovable Monuments of History and Culture and of the Historic Environment" (11.11.1998, HO-261), the owner of a monument is obliged to "ensure the preservation and safety of the monument", to "provide the authorized body with a preservation undertaking for the monument in the established manner", and to "ensure the accessibility of the monument for study and for supervision of its preservation". Article 38 provides that "monuments shall be used predominantly for scientific, educational, cultural and informational purposes", while "the use of monuments for economic and other purposes shall be permitted if such use is compatible with the nature of the monument".
- 14.11.** Under the Tax Code of the Republic of Armenia, religious and worship buildings are exempt from immovable property tax, as are churches owned by the Mother See that do not have monument status and "buildings used for spiritual and cultural, educational, ecclesiastical and ritual purposes and for the production and sale of ritual items". [13] The scope of the exemption is therefore defined not by the owner but by the actual purpose for which the property is used: the operation of a church-owned building as a hotel, restaurant, cinema or for other commercial purposes falls outside the exemption and is subject to taxation under the general rules.

SUMMARY

- 14.12.** During the tenure of the de facto head of the AAHC, a substantial part of the property owned by the Church or entrusted to its management has for years been used for purposes other than those intended – for business purposes – or left abandoned. In nine provinces of Armenia and in Yerevan, more than 100 immovable properties owned by the AAHC or entrusted to its management – over 120 hectares of land and more than 43,000 square metres of buildings – are abandoned, not used for their intended purpose, or exploited commercially.
- 14.13.** There are documented cases in which immovable property entrusted to the Church's management has been exploited directly for commercial purposes. Such use contradicts

Armenian legislation on monuments, under which use for economic purposes is permissible only insofar as it is compatible with the nature of the monument.

- 14.14.** On at least 24 land plots and gardens obtained from municipalities on condition that churches be built – with a total area of about 12 hectares – no church has ever been built, and they have remained abandoned and littered for decades. The same fate has befallen the plots allocated for a social center, a youth camp and the expansion of a monastery. This practice means that the declared purpose of church construction has in fact served as a means of acquiring municipal land free of charge and commercializing it.

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15

Throughout his tenure, the de facto head of the AAHC has failed to duly fulfill his mission toward the faithful of the dioceses: he has not made patriarchal visits to certain dioceses in Armenia and the Diaspora and has not celebrated the Divine Liturgy in them.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 15.1.** A patriarchal visit is a special visit by the spiritual leader (the Patriarch) to a diocese, community, church, institution or group of faithful in order to meet them, establish spiritual communion, strengthen them in the faith and show paternal care. It is not merely an official visit but an expression of spiritual service and love, during which the Patriarch appears as the father and leader of the Church – to hear the concerns of the people, to encourage them, to convey his blessing and

to strengthen the unity of the Church; and in the case of Diaspora dioceses, also to strengthen Armenia–Diaspora ties. A patriarchal visit usually includes:

- meetings and conversations with the faithful;
- presiding over the Divine Liturgy and other religious services;
- the delivery of a spiritual message;
- familiarization with the work of the church community;
- meetings with clergy and church workers;
- meetings with local state officials and discussion of administrative matters;
- the bestowal of blessing and the demonstration of paternal care.

- 15.2.** According to the biography posted on the official website of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, *“the pontifical and patriarchal visits of His Holiness Catholicos Garegin II began in the months following his enthronement”* – to the dioceses of Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora. **[1]** Yet a study of the data published by the Mother See itself shows that, as regards the dioceses operating in the Republic of Armenia, this assertion has no factual basis.
- 15.3.** Of the 12 dioceses operating on the territory of the Republic of Armenia, the de facto head of the AAHC has made a pontifical visit to only two – the Diocese of Shirak (2000) and the Diocese of Gugark (2004) – and the latter lasted a single day and was cut short. In the remaining 10 dioceses, no pontifical visit has ever been made in 27 years. **[2]**
- 15.4.** Araratian Pontifical Diocese (covering the capital, Yerevan, and, until 2021, Ararat Province as well). Over the past 27 years, the de facto head of the AAHC has never celebrated the Divine Liturgy in this diocese, except on certain major feast days at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Yerevan, which is in fact under the control of the Mother See rather than of the Araratian Pontifical Diocese. During those years he consecrated several churches. Over the years, the de facto head of the AAHC has visited the National Academy of Sciences and Yerevan State University in Yerevan on a number of occasions, attended state ceremonial events and concerts, been present at ceremonies honoring or bidding farewell to cultural and public figures, visited the Tsitsernakaberd memorial and the Yerablur pantheon, and, under the previous government, taken part in several opening or reopening ceremonies for buildings. None of these visits is a patriarchal visit, nor does any of them substitute for one.
- 15.5.** Diocese of Armavir (covering Armavir Province). In 27 years, the de facto head of the AAHC has made no patriarchal visit to the diocese closest to and immediately adjoining the residence of the Mother See, and has never celebrated the Divine Liturgy there. He consecrated St. Ghazar Church in Metsamor (22.10.2005) and reconsecrated the renovated Holy Mother of God Church in the village of Sardarapat (01.11.2010). During the years of the Mother Cathedral's renovation, the liturgies for the Feast of the Ghevondiants were celebrated several times at St. Gayane Monastery in Vagharshapat, at which the de facto head of the AAHC was present. Within the diocese he has visited the Sardarapat memorial, and under the “One Day in One Diocese” program he spent a few hours on the diocese's territory (08.06.2012).
- 15.6.** Diocese of Masyatsothn (covering Ararat Province). From the day of its founding (January 2021) to the present, the de facto head of the AAHC has not visited this diocese. **[3]**

- 15.7.** Diocese of Artik (covering the Artik area of Shirak Province). To this day, the de facto head of the AAHC has not visited this diocese. Within the diocese's territory there operates the preparatory seminary of Harichavank, which is directly subordinate to the Mother See and does not belong to the Diocese of Artik. [4]
- 15.8.** Diocese of Vayots Dzor (covering Vayots Dzor Province). From the diocese's founding (2010) to the present, no patriarchal visit has been made. Only the reconsecration of the Holy Cross Monastery of Arkaz was performed (11.09.2011). When the territory of Vayots Dzor was part of the Diocese of Syunik, the de facto head of the AAHC consecrated St. Trdat Church in Vayk (06.08.2000), St. Anna Church in Malishka (04.11.2000) and St. Gayane Church in Jermuk (17.11.2007).
- 15.9.** Diocese of Syunik (covering Syunik Province). The de facto head of the AAHC has made no patriarchal visit to this diocese. In June 2021, as part of a patriarchal visit to Nagorno-Karabakh, he visited Shurnukh and St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Goris. Within the diocese he consecrated St. Mesrop Mashtots Church in Kapan (01.12.2001) and also attended the opening of the Tatev cable car (2010).
- 15.10.** Diocese of Kotayk (covering Kotayk Province). The de facto head of the AAHC has never made a patriarchal visit to this diocese; on several occasions he accompanied personal guests to Bjni and Tsaghkadzor. In the diocese he has consecrated four churches: Holy Saviour in Charentsavan (21.07.2001), Holy Martyrs in Teghenik (05.07.2003), St. John in Abovyan (14.05.2013) and Holy Savior of All in Nor Hachn (22.07.2015).
- 15.11.** Diocese of Gegharkunik (covering Gegharkunik Province). No patriarchal visit has been made to this diocese either. In May 2015 he consecrated the Church of the Holy Archangels in the town of Sevan (donor-funded), and he has also visited on a number of occasions the Vazgenian Seminary he opened on the Sevan peninsula in 1990, which is directly subordinate to the Mother See and does not belong to the Diocese of Gegharkunik.
- 15.12.** Diocese of Tavush (covering Tavush Province). The de facto head of the AAHC has never visited this diocese on a patriarchal visit. Within the diocese he consecrated St. John Church in the town of Berd (14.09.2014), presided over the reopening of Haghartsin Monastery (2013) and laid the foundation of a church under construction in Dilijan (18.10.2019). When Tavush Province was part of the Diocese of Gugark, he consecrated the rebuilt St. Gayane Church in Voskevan (04.11.2003) and the St. Vardan Zoravar Chapel in Aknaghbyur (09.12.2007).
- 15.13.** Diocese of Aragatsotn (covering Aragatsotn Province). There has been no patriarchal visit. The de facto head of the AAHC reconsecrated the Holy Cross Church in Aparan (05.05.2002) and consecrated St. Stepanos Church in Chknagh (20.06.2004), the Holy Mother of God Chapel in the village of Agarak (04.10.2008) and the newly built altar of St. Marianeh Church in Ashtarak (20.02.2020).
- 15.14.** Diocese of Gugark (covering Lori Province). This is one of the two dioceses to which the de facto head of the AAHC has made a patriarchal visit – on 6 September 2004, lasting one day, and the visit was cut short because of poor weather. [5] In addition, in the diocese he consecrated the Church of the Holy Resurrection in the town of Spitak (23.12.1999), St. Gregory of Narek Church in Alaverdi (2001), the Holy Mother of God Church in the village of Arevashogh (09.12.2004) and St. Gregory of Narek Church in Vanadzor (25.10.2005), and he attended the opening ceremony of the Hayordyats Tun in Vanadzor (23.09.2010).

- 15.15.** Diocese of Shirak (covering Shirak Province; since 2012, excluding the Artik area). From 24 to 30 July 2000, the de facto head of the AAHC made a patriarchal visit to the Diocese of Shirak, visiting towns and rural settlements of the province and laying the foundation of St. Hakob Church in Gyumri. This is the only full patriarchal visit to a diocese in Armenia in 27 years. In subsequent years there were individual visits: the consecration of St. Hakob Church in Gyumri (29.08.2002) [6], presiding over the opening ceremony of the Hayordyats Tun in Gyumri (04.12.2014), and the reconsecration of the Holy Saviour Church in Gyumri (07.12.2024). [7]
- 15.16.** During his tenure, the de facto head of the AAHC has himself founded four new dioceses – Vayots Dzor and Tavush (2010), Artik (2012) and Masyatsothn (2021) – yet he has made no patriarchal visit to any of them from the day of their founding to the present. In other words, the creation of dioceses was not accompanied by any expression of patriarchal care.
- 15.17.** An analysis of the documented data shows that the overwhelming majority of the de facto head of the AAHC's visits within the country have been connected not with spiritual communion with the faithful but with consecration ceremonies for newly built churches, which almost without exception were carried out with the funds and in the presence of specific donors. The elements that constitute the substance of a patriarchal visit – meetings with parish communities, consultations with the diocese's clergy, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the dioceses – have in practice been absent.
- 15.18.** The de facto head of the AAHC has never made a patriarchal visit to the Armenian Diocese of Iraq (which he has never visited at all), the Armenian Diocese of Germany, the Diocese of Greece, or the Diocese of Krasnodar and Southern Russia.

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

- 15.19.** The very title of Catholicos of All Armenians entails the pastoral duty: he is the Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, and pastoral care for the flock is not a matter of his discretion but an obligation assumed by the vow of ordination and anointing. Moreover, in the case of the Araratian Patriarchal Diocese, the de facto head of the AAHC is also the diocese's own diocesan primate, in whose stead day-to-day governance is exercised by a vicar. Consequently, the failure to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in that diocese for 27 years is a failure to perform the pastoral duty not of the Patriarch in general but directly of the diocesan bishop.
- 15.20.** The “Apostolic Canons” contained in the AAHC Book of Canon Law qualify the avoidance of pastoral care as a canonical offence and prescribe a direct penalty for it. Canon 36 (34): *“If a bishop does not accept his office and does not shepherd his flock, let him be cast out of the Church until he accepts it; and likewise the presbyter and the deacon.”* Canon 58 (53):

“A bishop or presbyter who is negligent toward the clergy and the people of the Church and does not teach piety shall be cast out; and if he persists in idleness and negligence, let him be deposed”.

” [8] [9]

- 15.21.** The patriarchal visit is a continuous and documented tradition of the Armenian Church: the patriarchal visits of previous Catholicoi to the dioceses were regularly covered in the Mother See's official journal, the Etchmiadzin monthly, as a routine component of the Church's life. [10] [11]

SUMMARY

- 15.22.** In 27 years on the throne, the de facto head of the AAHC has made a patriarchal visit to only two of the 12 dioceses operating in the Republic of Armenia – the Diocese of Shirak (2000) and the Diocese of Gugark (2004) – and the latter lasted one day and was cut short. In 27 years, the faithful of the remaining 10 dioceses have never received a patriarchal visit from their Patriarch. In the Araratian Patriarchal Diocese, whose own diocesan primate he is, the de facto head of the AAHC has never celebrated the Divine Liturgy in 27 years. The same applies to Armenia's other dioceses. Patriarchal liturgies have been celebrated exclusively at his residence, the Mother See, and at St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral, which is directly subordinate to the Mother See.
- 15.23.** The de facto head of the AAHC himself founded four new dioceses – Vayots Dzor, Tavush, Artik and Masyatsoth – yet he has made no patriarchal visit to any of them from the day of their founding to the present. The creation of the dioceses has thus had an administrative and managerial, rather than a pastoral, content.
- 15.24.** This de facto abandonment of pastoral care contradicts the direct requirements of the AAHC Book of Canon Law. The Apostolic Canons qualify the failure to perform pastoral duty and negligence toward the people as grounds for being cast out of the Church and, if persistent, for deposition. The failure to convene the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the obstruction of the Ecclesiastical Representative Assemblies and the deprivation of the flock of the opportunity to take part in the governance of the Church are different manifestations of the same phenomenon: the de facto head of the Church is estranged from the faithful.

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The flock of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church in the Republic of Armenia, in the former Soviet states and in certain Western countries is effectively deprived of any opportunity to take part in the governance of the Church, and the dioceses are deprived of autonomy. In a significant number of dioceses and parish communities, elections, assemblies and sessions – for delegates to the Diocesan Representative Assembly, for members and chairs of the Diocesan Council, and for community and parish bodies and their leaders or pastors – are not duly held.

FACTS AND TESTIMONIES

- 16.1.** The Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, like the first apostolic communities and all the traditional Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches that descend from them, was for centuries governed through a chain of elections running from the bottom up – except during periods of foreign domination, when outside interference and direction were exercised, for example by Persian shahs, Arab caliphs, Byzantine emperors, Ottoman sultans, Russian tsars and the Soviet Communist Party. The National Ecclesiastical Assembly, by a majority of the votes of its clerical and lay delegates, elects one of the members of the episcopate as Catholicos of All Armenians. The bishops appointed to the office of diocesan primate were in turn elected from among nominated candidate vardapets by a majority of the votes of the members of the diocesan assembly. The assembly of the parish community selected and nominated candidates for the priesthood from among its young faithful, who, with the consent of the diocesan primate, were sent to study at a seminary or preparatory school. Many communities, especially in urban settings, often chose for themselves who the pastor or serving deacon should be, from among the candidates presented by the primate. In this chain the lay faithful are not guests but the majority: two thirds of the membership of the Church's supreme body are laypeople. [1]
- 16.2.** This order is not a historical memory but a requirement in force, enshrined also in two documents approved by the de facto head of the AAHC but never ratified by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly: the “Nakhashavigh” Charter of 2000 and the “Guideline for the Diocesan Charter of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church” of 2009. Under Article 60 of the “Nakhashavigh”: “Each diocese shall have a Diocesan Representative Assembly and a Diocesan Council... Each community shall have its community membership assembly and a Parish Council.” [2] [3] The documents also lay down precise intervals at which the assemblies of the various bodies are to be convened.
- 16.3.** In the dioceses in Armenia and in the dioceses in the post-Soviet countries, these provisions are in no way complied with. Neither the official website of the Mother See nor the individual pages of the dioceses in Armenia publish any information about any elected body – diocesan assembly, diocesan council, audit commission or parish council. [4] There are no public records of the election of such bodies or of their sessions, and in essence these statutory assemblies are not convened. Seventeen years after the adoption of the “Guideline”, not a single diocese in Armenia has published a charter adopted in accordance with its requirements.
- 16.4.** Diocesan primates are not elected but appointed by the personal decision of the Catholicos. The Araratian Pontifical Diocese – the Church's largest – is, by its official description, “governed directly by a vicar appointed by the Catholicos of All Armenians”. [5] For the other dioceses, the “Guideline”

provides for the election of a primate at the diocesan assembly, but an accompanying note immediately restricts this: it applies “exclusively in dioceses that have a tradition of electing the primate; otherwise the primate is appointed by the Catholicos of All Armenians” (Articles 8.2, 8.3). [3] In these circumstances, the dioceses in Armenia and in the post-Soviet countries are left without any possibility of electing their diocesan primate.

- 16.5. One consequence of the effective inactivity of diocesan councils and assemblies is that it creates a substantial obstacle to convening the Church's supreme body, the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, or its smaller counterpart, the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly, because of the legitimate election of delegates. Article 10.9 of the “Guideline” provides that if the diocesan assembly is not convened, the diocesan council may elect delegates to other assemblies, “*with the exception of delegates to the National Ecclesiastical Assembly.*” [3] In other words, only the diocesan assembly may elect NEA delegates. Since it is not convened regularly, the canonical composition of the NEA simply cannot be formed, or else delegates may be elected through fictitious diocesan assemblies. A further substantial challenge is the problem of dioceses inflating their numbers of adherents: with one delegate elected per 25,000 adherents, dioceses inflate the figures and send larger numbers of delegates to the assemblies (as, for example, in the case of Russia and certain other countries).
- 16.6. Both documents declare the audit commission to be the only body that is not chaired by an ecclesiastical superior and whose members must be elected by the Diocesan Representative Assembly: the primate chairs all diocesan structures “with the exception of the audit commission” (Guideline, Articles 3.4, 8.8a). [3] This is therefore the only independent oversight provided for over church funds; yet, because diocesan delegate assemblies are not duly convened, this oversight mechanism likewise does not function.
- 16.7. The irregular functioning of assemblies and councils also leaves the clergy themselves unprotected. Annex 1 to the Guideline establishes a procedure for removing a primate from office: the charge is examined by the diocesan council, then the diocesan assembly creates a special commission, and only thereafter is the case submitted to the Catholicos. [3] In Armenia and the post-Soviet countries this procedure cannot be applied, because its component parts either do not exist or are purely formal. In particular, Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, Primate of the Diocese of Masyatsotn, was first removed from office and then defrocked by the sole decision of the de facto head of the AAHC, and he was reinstated in his office as primate not by a Church body but by the decision of a secular court, because the ecclesiastical procedures are in fact dysfunctional (see 4.8).
- 16.8. A comparison shows that in the historic Diaspora and in the newly established dioceses in Western countries – operating under the same Mother See – this system works with a certain effectiveness, depending on the legal practice for registering dioceses in the country concerned, whereas in the dioceses of Armenia and the post-Soviet countries the whole of it remains dysfunctional to this day:
 - In the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, the diocesan assembly is convened annually and itself elects the Primate: the current Primate was elected at the 120th Diocesan Assembly in May 2022, and the most recent diocesan assembly was convened in May 2026. [7] [8] Moreover, the Eastern Diocese publishes an annual report presenting accounts of the work carried out during the preceding year. [9]
 - In the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, the 99th annual diocesan delegate assembly was held on 1 May 2026, electing 15 officers and approving the diocesan budget. [10]
 - In the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, the National General Assembly is convened every four years, the diocesan assembly at least once a year, and the diocesan council is elected for a two-year term. [11]

- In other words, in some Diaspora dioceses the sequential numbering of assemblies has reached 124 and 99, whereas in Armenia's 12 dioceses not a single instance of such an assembly being convened has been publicly recorded.

CANONICAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

16.9. Elective lay participation is nothing new for the Armenian Church. In the case of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, it rests mainly on the model of the 1860 Armenian National Constitution of Constantinople and partly on Church tradition, and it is ultimately enshrined in the provisional charter adopted by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly of 1945, under which the NEA includes “competent parishioners aged thirty or over, elected by the people”, with one delegate per up to 25,000 faithful from each diocese. [12] [13]

16.10. In both documents in force – the “Nakhashavigh” and the “Guideline” – the formation of diocesan and parish bodies and their meeting at regular intervals is established as an obligation, not a matter of discretion.

- The diocesan assembly (“the diocese's highest body”) – at least once a year;
- The diocesan council – elected for 2–4 years, meeting at least four times a year;
- The parish general assembly (“the parish's highest body”) – at least once a year;
- The parish council – elected, meeting once every two weeks;
- The audit commission – elected for 4 years and auditing the diocese's finances at least once a year.

(“Guideline”, Articles 9.1, 9.2, 10.2, 10.4, 4.1, 4.4, 11.1–11.3; “Nakhashavigh”, Articles 71, 74, 75, 77-xi, 85, 87, 95) [2] [3]

SUMMARY

16.11. The system of governance of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church presupposes that the faithful themselves elect the parish and diocesan bodies and, through them, take part in the governance of the Church. Yet since 1999 – that is, for 27 years – this canonical order, which is fundamental to Christianity, has not functioned at all in Armenia and in a number of Diaspora dioceses.

16.12. The composition of the elected diocesan and parish bodies and the intervals at which they meet are set out in detail in two provisional documents approved by the de facto head of the AAHC, which to this day await approval by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly. Under them, the diocesan assembly was to be convened once a year, the parish assembly once a year, the diocesan council was to meet four times a year, the parish council once every two weeks, and the audit commission was to audit the diocese's finances annually. There is no public evidence in Armenia that any of these requirements has been duly fulfilled. What is at issue is the systematic and continuous non-implementation of rules in force.

16.13. As a result of the complete breakdown of the Church's conciliar governance, the faithful are deprived of their canonical right to take part in the governance of the Church, the dioceses in Armenia and certain Diaspora dioceses are entirely deprived of autonomy, and the governance of the Church has been turned into a top-down vertical of appointees with one person standing at its summit.

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SECTION 3

Proposed Solutions

This section sets out, from a canonical standpoint, the ways of overcoming the crisis summarized in Section 1 and documented in Section 2. The proposed solutions are structured as a roadmap for the reform of the Church and for regulating Church–State relations – a sequence of steps for emerging from the crisis.

All the proposals are made from a canonical standpoint and rest on the Book of Canon Law of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the Apostolic Canons, the 1945 “Special Charter on Convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly” and the centuries-old tradition of the AAHC. The aim of the solutions is not to alter the Church's doctrine or Holy Tradition in any way, but solely to restore the Church's autonomy and return its administrative and canonical life to its own canonical course.

Underlying Principles of the Solutions

The entire proposed framework rests on the following six principles which, under the canon law of the Church, can serve as guidance for every phase of reform and for all those involved:

- **Canonicity.** Every step of the reform must have a foundation grounded in the AAHC Book of Canon Law, the Apostolic Canons and the tradition of the Church. The cause of the crisis is precisely the violation – or near-total absence – of canonical order; its resolution therefore cannot be achieved by means that lie outside canonicity.
- **Conciliarity.** Decision-making is returned to the canonical assemblies of the Church – the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the Synod of Bishops, the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly, and diocesan and parish bodies – which must be convened in the prescribed format and at the prescribed intervals. The core of the reform is the replacement of personal rule with canonical, conciliar governance.
- **Depoliticization.** The Church ceases to be an instrument of political struggle, electoral influence and foreign interference. This principle applies equally to positions taken toward the government and toward the opposition and is not tied to any particular time or political configuration.
- **Transparency and accountability.** The Church's financial flows, the management of its property and its personnel decisions are subject to institutional, regular and public accountability – first and foremost to the Church's own bodies and to the faithful.

- **Integrity and dignity.** The requirement of integrity for clergy applies equally at all levels of the hierarchy, while internal disciplinary proceedings guarantee a cleric's right to a defense and to appeal, ruling out defrocking as an instrument of intimidation.
- **Separation of State and Church.** The reform is carried out by the Church, through the efforts of its clergy and its faithful. The State acts exclusively within the scope of its constitutional and statutory competence, preserving the framework of the special laws on Church–State cooperation and not interfering in the Church's internal doctrinal and canonical independence.

The Roadmap for Reform

Step One: Reaffirming and Promulgating the Reform Agenda

Reaffirming and promulgating the reform agenda and presenting its canonical grounds to the clergy, the faithful, the dioceses and the communities of the Diaspora.

- Forming a Reform Coordinating Group with the participation of clergy and laypeople, and publishing the procedure for expanding its membership;
- Ensuring public access to the documentary materials of this report as the evidentiary basis for the need for reform;
- Organizing, through the Group, discussions in the dioceses and parish communities on the evidentiary basis of this report and on the reform agenda, with the participation of clergy and parishioners;
- Organizing, through the Group, consultations with Diaspora dioceses, in particular those that have preserved an autonomous electoral tradition;
- Informing the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia and the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople and establishing a consultative format with them.

Step Two: The Removal of the de facto Head of the AAHC (Retirement from Office)

Section 2 documents the canonical grounds and the violations which, individually and especially in combination, make the continued occupancy of the throne of the Catholicos of All Armenians by the de facto head of the AAHC incompatible with that office:

- **violation of the vow of celibacy and fathering a child** (by force of the Apostolic Canons and the Canons of St. Basil the Great – documentation 1);
- **failure to hold to account senior clergy who have violated the vow of celibacy and, on the contrary, encouraging them** (by force of the Apostolic Canons and the Canons of St. Basil the Great – documentations 2 and 3);

- **the 27-year failure to convene the Church's supreme body, the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the years-long obstruction of the convening of the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly and the collapse of conciliar governance of the Church as a whole** (by force of the 1945 Special Charter on Convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly and of the Charter on Convening the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly – documentations 10, 11, 12 and 16);
- **the establishment of clan-based governance in the Church, the consecration of relatives as bishops and the usurpation of power** (by force of the Apostolic Canons – documentation 6);
- **engaging in political activity, serving the interests of foreign states and interfering in the affairs of the secular authorities in violation of Armenian legislation and the Church's canons** (by force of the Apostolic Canons – documentations 7, 8 and 9);
- **the arbitrary persecution of members of the Church hierarchy and their defrocking without canonical grounds** (by force of the Apostolic Canons – documentation 4);
- **provoking splits in Diaspora dioceses and estranging them from the Mother Church through statutory pressure, arbitrary personnel appointments and interference in property matters** (documentation 13);
- **failure to perform patriarchal duties** (by force of the Apostolic Canons – documentation 15);
- **the unaccountable and arbitrary exploitation of the Church's property, funds and donations, the enrichment of obedient subordinates and the impoverishment of clergy who refused to submit to unlawful acts** (Apostolic Canons – documentations 5 and 14).

Step Three: Election of a Locum Tenens of the Catholicosate

With the throne vacant, the election of a Locum Tenens of the Catholicosate in the prescribed manner, that is, by the Synod of Bishops, whose principal mission is not the ongoing governance of the Church but the proper preparation of the next two steps of the reform: the adoption of a unified Constitution of the Church and the election of a Catholicos.

THE LOCUM TENENS'S MANDATE SHOULD INCLUDE

- full preparation for convening the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, including ensuring the canonical election of delegates in the dioceses;
- finalizing the draft unified Charter of the AAHC;
- a full inventory and independent audit of the Church's financial and property position, as a record of the baseline situation handed over to the new Catholicos;
- launching a procedure for reviewing the cases of clergy who have been defrocked;
- ensuring that elections to diocesan and parish elective bodies are held, so that they function normally and so that delegates to the NEA are properly elected.

The Locum Tenens's term should be clearly defined and as short as possible. The Locum Tenens may not be a candidate for Catholicos of All Armenians in the election he himself prepares; this restriction prevents the office of locum tenens from becoming an interim stage in the usurpation of the throne. During the period of the locum tenency, no episcopal consecrations, appointments of diocesan primates or defrockings are carried out.

Step Four: Adoption of a Unified Charter of the AAHC

The adoption, by the forthcoming National Ecclesiastical Assembly, of a unified Charter of the AAHC, putting an end to the statutory fragmentation that has existed since 1999 and to the situation of operating under personal rule.

The minimum content that the Charter must necessarily regulate:

A) GOVERNING BODIES AND THE INTERVALS AT WHICH THEY MEET

- The National Ecclesiastical Assembly as the supreme canon-making body, meeting at mandatory intervals (at least once every seven years), and with a mechanism for convening it independently of the Catholicos at the demand of a specified number of dioceses or bishops; this rules out any repetition of the situation documented in 2.10, in which the convening of the supreme body depends exclusively on the will of one person;
- The Synod of Bishops and the Ecclesiastical Representative Assembly, meeting at mandatory intervals, with canonical consequences applicable in the event that they are not convened;
- The Supreme Spiritual Council, with a membership elected by the NEA, with clearly defined powers and with limits on unilateral appointments by the Catholicos;
- Diocesan and parish elective bodies, with mandatory procedures for their election and accountability.

B) OVERSIGHT AND DISCIPLINARY MECHANISMS

- A canonical court as a permanently functioning tribunal, administratively independent of the hierarchy, whose jurisdiction extends also to bishops and to the Catholicos;
- An audit body with an elected membership and a mandatory annual public report.

C) INTEGRITY AND TRANSPARENCY REQUIREMENTS

- Enshrining integrity requirements for clergy and the consequences of their violation;
- Mandatory standards of financial transparency and accountability;
- A prohibition on ordinations and appointments based on kinship;
- A prohibition on political activity and canonical consequences for its violation.

D) TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

- Determining the status of all statutory acts adopted since 1999 and not ratified by the NEA (the “Nakhashavigh”, the ERA Charter, the Supreme Spiritual Council Charter, the “Guideline”): ratification, amendment or repeal;
- A procedure for ensuring that the charters of Diaspora dioceses comply with the legislation of the host states.

Step Five: Election of the Catholicos of All Armenians

The convening of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly in the manner prescribed by the new Charter and the election of the Catholicos of All Armenians.

MANDATORY CONDITIONS

- Delegates to the NEA are elected in the dioceses by canonical diocesan assemblies, ensuring the lay representation prescribed by the unified Charter;
- Establishing a methodology for the verifiable calculation of the number of adherents of each diocese, so as to rule out the formation of delegations on the basis of inflated figures as recorded in 16.5;
- Preliminary and public verification of the canonical requirements applicable to candidates for Catholicos, including questions of integrity and observance of the vow of celibacy;
- Publicity and proper recording of the election procedure.