

PATRIARCH KIRILL CALLS FOR CONTINUED CEASEFIRE IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia issued a statement on the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh yesterday, calling on both sides to respect and continue the ceasefire agreed upon on Saturday and to take the opportunity to meet and discuss peacefully.

The current troubles, which began on September 27, are the latest manifestation of the conflict over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region that began in the late 1980s and grew into a full-on war following the breakup of the USSR in 1991. The war ended with a ceasefire in 1994, which has been repeatedly violated over the years. While a new ceasefire was proclaimed on Saturday, both sides accused the other of immediately violating it.

“The lives of many people today and the peaceful future of your peoples depend on your decisions,” the Patriarch writes in his appeal to the Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities:

I deeply empathize with the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh and the peoples of Azerbaijan and Armenia in connection with the new round of the armed conflict that has been going on for more than 30 years now. Settlements are being shelled again, people are being killed, and religious sites, cultural heritage monuments, and civilians' homes are being destroyed. I sincerely sympathize with all the victims of this terrible war and offer my condolences to the families of those who have died.

From the very beginning of the conflict, the Russian Orthodox Church has done and will continue to do everything possible to work together with the religious leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to establish peace in the much-suffering land of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Today I address the Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and the Chairman of the Muslim Council of the Caucasus Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade. Dear brothers, we have come a long way working to ensure that this confrontation does not become an inter-religious conflict and that problems be resolved peacefully. Today, each of us and all of us together must do everything possible to stop the bloodshed.

I consider the agreements reached between the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia with Russia's mediation to be very important. I appeal to the state leadership of both countries to use the truce to move the resolution of the issues into a political channel. For the sake of the future of both these neighboring peoples, I call on you to extend the ceasefire and use it for peace talks.

A bad peace is better than a good fight: this old truth is more relevant today than ever. With peace, you can meet, discuss, seek solutions to problems. But when there is war, when human blood is spilled and crimes are committed, it is difficult to make joint political decisions in these conditions.

I fervently appeal to all participants in the conflict to spare each other's lives. Let the chronometer of bloody strife stop in the name of a peaceful future. Armenia and Azerbaijan have historically been and will continue to be neighbors, and in any case, Azerbaijanis and Armenians live side by side with each other.

I wish all participants of the current conflict success in finding a peaceful solution to the existing problems. I ask you to use all your experience and wisdom to achieve real results and overcome the obstacles standing in the way of mutual understanding. The lives of many people today and the peaceful future of your peoples depend on your decisions.

His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II has also spoken about the conflict, noting that, "The escalation of the conflict is particularly painful for us, as we are neighbors and friends, and many Azerbaijanis and Armenians live in Georgia."

"We pray for the restoration of the peace in Azerbaijan and Armenia and the whole Caucasus," he assured.

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