



INPUT

for the preparation of the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights pursuant to the Human Rights Council resolution 57/24 ‘Education as a tool to prevent racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance’

Introduction

Education occupies a unique position among State institutions; it does not merely transmit knowledge, but actively shapes collective memory, civic identity, and the moral frameworks through which children perceive other communities. Under international human rights law, States bear positive obligations to ensure that public education serves as an instrument to dismantle prejudice, promote equality, and foster intercultural understanding.

When a State instead weaponizes its educational apparatus to systematically disseminate racial stereotypes, construct collective enemies, and normalize hostility toward a specific group, education ceases to function as a safeguard against discrimination. Instead, it becomes a structural mechanism through which racism is institutionalized and reproduced across generations.

The incumbent president of Azerbaijan has repeatedly emphasized that his administration has successfully nurtured a “wonderful young generation” defined by patriotism, professionalism, and loyalty to national traditions. He stated that the absolute majority of those who took part in the second Karabakh war were young people - young people who grew up on the basis of our policy and received good education both in society and in their families.¹

This submission by the Protection of Rights Without Borders NGO (PRWB) provides documented evidence demonstrating that xenophobia, intolerance, and systematic racial discrimination against ethnic Armenians have been institutionalized within the public education system of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's case study demonstrates how education, including systems, content, structures, teaching methods, curriculum and ways of delivery and management, perpetuates racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The state-sponsored Armenophobia has created a comprehensive educational ecosystem spanning early childhood education, compulsory primary and secondary textbooks, children's literature, school commemorative rituals, and specialized university research centers. By constructing ethnic Armenians as a dehumanized, permanent enemy and questioning the legitimacy of their sovereign

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https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_ilham_aliyev_we_have_raised_such_a_wonderful_young_generation_that_raises_the_flag_of_our_country_both_in_sport_arenas_and_on_the_battlefield-2438495

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territory, this educational environment erodes empathy, fuels hate crimes, and contributes to the structural conditions associated with hate crimes and atrocity risks.

II. Education as an Instrument of Institutionalized Racism

International human rights law recognizes education as a means of promoting understanding, tolerance, respect for human rights and friendship among peoples. Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child² requires that the education of the child be directed toward the development of respect for human rights, cultural identity and the values of peace, tolerance and equality. Similarly, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights³ and Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴ emphasize that education should strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and ethnic groups. Against these standards, the institutionalization of hatred, dehumanization and demonization of Armenians within Azerbaijan's education system raises serious human rights concerns. The incorporation of ethnic hatred into school curricula, textbooks and educational materials is incompatible with the purposes of education under international law and risks fostering discrimination, hostility and intolerance from an early age.

These obligations require States not only to refrain from discrimination in education, but also to ensure that educational systems actively prevent prejudice, challenge discriminatory stereotypes and foster respect for the equal dignity of all persons. Education is therefore not merely a public service but a central component of States' obligations to prevent racism.

The information examined for this submission indicates that Azerbaijan has failed to fulfil this preventive function. Rather than promoting intercultural understanding and respect for diversity, official educational policies and practices contribute to the institutionalization of anti-Armenian prejudice through mutually reinforcing mechanisms operating across different stages of education.

The documented practices extend beyond isolated examples of biased textbooks. Anti-Armenian narratives appear consistently in history, literature and language textbooks, children's literature, patriotic education programmes, classroom activities, commemorative events and extracurricular initiatives. Following the 2020 armed conflict, similar narratives have increasingly been incorporated into university programmes, newly established academic centres and educational initiatives devoted to the concept of “Western Azerbaijan”. The consistency of these messages across educational institutions suggests a systemic pattern rather than isolated deficiencies in curriculum development.

² Convention on the Rights of the Child

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

³ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>



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The authority of public education gives these practices particular significance. Schools play a unique role in shaping children's understanding of history, citizenship and relations with other communities. Information transmitted through official curricula and state-approved educational materials carries the authority of the State and is generally perceived by children as objective knowledge rather than political opinion. Where discriminatory narratives become embedded within formal education, prejudice risks acquiring institutional legitimacy and being reproduced across successive generations.

After the 44-Day-War, president Aliyev emphasized the role of this education stating that: ‘these young people who stepped forward were raised in the spirit of patriotism, and the liberation of the Motherland was the most honorable mission for them. The young people who stepped forward and were prepared to die carried the mission of restoring our national dignity—and we achieved exactly that’.⁵

International human rights mechanisms have repeatedly expressed concern regarding this pattern in Azerbaijan. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has expressed concern about educational materials promoting prejudice and racial hatred against Armenians and recommended that Azerbaijan revise textbooks and curricula to eliminate discriminatory content. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities have similarly warned that educational and public discourse continue to reinforce hostility towards Armenians, undermining tolerance and reconciliation. The International Court of Justice in its provisional measures also touched upon this issue.

It has been observed by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe that ‘an entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now been raised with a rhetoric of hate, hostility and victimhood, which may have an impact on prospects of future reconciliation.’⁶

The UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted with concerns in the 2022 Concluding Observations on Azerbaijan, that ‘school textbooks promote prejudice and incite racial hatred, particularly against ethnic Armenians, and that ethnic minorities are marginalized in history education in the State party. It is also concerned about the lack of detailed information on measures taken by the State party to combat prejudice and intolerance and to incorporate human rights principles into school curricula and university programmes.’⁷

Also, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance raised deep concerns that ‘the use of hate speech linked to the long-lasting conflict and confrontations with neighbouring country

⁵ Ilham Aliyev: ‘We completely crushed the Armenian army on the battlefield in just 44 days’, 14.02.2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/63979>

⁶ Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Fourth Opinion on Azerbaijan, 8.11.2017, <https://rm.coe.int/4th-acfc-opinion-on-azerbaijan-english-language-version/1680923201>

⁷ CERD, Concluding Observations on the combined tenth and twelfth periodic reports on Azerbaijan, CERD/C/AZE/CO/10-12, 30 August 2022, available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fAZE%2fCO%2f10-12&Lang=en



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Armenia, has been observed among young people in and outside schools and could eventually provide a breeding ground for further hostilities. Given the crucial role of schools in the transmission of social skills and fundamental values, such as human dignity, tolerance and respect for others, ECRI considers that there is a need to engage with the younger generation through an education that promotes the very idea of human rights.⁸

Taken together, these developments indicate that education has increasingly become a vehicle through which anti-Armenian stereotypes are normalized rather than challenged, contrary to the preventive objectives assigned to education under international human rights law.

III. From Institutionalized Racism to Dehumanization: The Educational Construction of the Armenian “Other”

Education influences not only the acquisition of knowledge but also children's moral development, perceptions of identity and understanding of those entitled to equal dignity and respect. For this reason, educational systems occupy a central place in international efforts to prevent racism, discrimination and identity-based violence.

The educational materials reviewed for this submission consistently portray Armenians through collective and essentialized characteristics rather than as individuals or as a diverse national community. Armenians are repeatedly associated with aggression, cruelty, betrayal and hostility, while positive representations of Armenian history, culture or peaceful coexistence are largely absent. Historical conflicts are frequently presented in ways that attribute responsibility collectively to Armenians as a people rather than distinguishing between individual actors, governments or specific historical circumstances.

Such representations contribute to constructing Armenians as a permanent ethnic “other”. Rather than encouraging critical engagement with history or recognition of the complexity of inter-ethnic relations, educational materials present a simplified dichotomy between a virtuous national community and an inherently hostile external group.

International human rights bodies and atrocity prevention frameworks have long recognised that dehumanization is not limited to explicit expressions denying the humanity of another group. It also encompasses narratives that systematically deny a group's individuality, equal dignity or legitimacy, reducing its members to stereotypes associated with danger, guilt or collective responsibility. Educational systems that consistently reinforce such representations contribute to the normalization of discriminatory attitudes and diminish the capacity of future generations to engage with members of the targeted group as equal human beings.

The ultimate manifestation of the policy of dehumanization of Armenians in Azerbaijan, including largely through education, were instances of torture and execution of ethnic Armenians, elderly civilians and/or prisoners of war with particular cruelty, including beheading while alive.⁹

⁸ ECRI, Report on Azerbaijan (sixth monitoring cycle) 2023, available at <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-azerbaijan/1680ab9e35>

⁹ See more at Fact-finding Report. Human Rights Violations During the 44 Day War in Artsakh, https://demdev.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Fact-Finding-Report_FINAL_ENG.pdf

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➤ *Denial of agency to Armenians and new concepts*

Another most often concept promoted in Azerbaijan, including through education, is the concept that Armenians do not belong to the place, and are moved here by other actors. This includes denial of presence for centuries, but also attribution of Armenian cultural and religious heritage to other nations. Most often it is claimed that Armenian churches used to belong to Caucasian Albanians living in the region many centuries ago.

The incorporation of the “Western Azerbaijan” narrative into formal education illustrates how these dynamics have evolved in recent years. The concept has been integrated into school curricula, university programmes, research institutes, teacher training and children's literature, transforming a political narrative into an educational framework. Pupils are taught that the internationally recognised territory of the Republic of Armenia constitutes “Western Azerbaijan” and that Armenian statehood was established on “historical Azerbaijani lands”.

The concern raised by this development is not the existence of competing historical interpretations as such. Human rights law neither prescribes a single historical narrative nor prevents academic debate. It does, however, require educational systems to respect the identity, dignity and equality of all peoples. Educational materials that deny the historical legitimacy of Armenians or portray their presence in the region as inherently illegitimate move beyond historical interpretation and contribute to the exclusion of an entire people from the region's legitimate historical narrative.

By embedding these narratives within compulsory education, the State encourages future generations to perceive Armenian identity as historically suspect and politically illegitimate. The educational system thus moves beyond the transmission of prejudice to the construction of an exclusionary national identity in which the legitimacy of other people is systematically questioned.

IV. Education, Hate Crimes and Atrocity Prevention

The concerns identified above extend beyond the content of educational materials. International human rights law increasingly recognises education as a critical component of the prevention of racism, hate speech and identity-based violence. Conversely, educational systems that normalize discriminatory stereotypes and exclusionary narratives may contribute to social environments in which discrimination becomes more readily accepted.

The relationship between dehumanization and identity-based violence has been recognised by United Nations human rights mechanisms, international criminal jurisprudence and the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. Among the risk factors identified by the Framework are systematic discrimination against protected groups, exclusionary ideologies, narratives denying equal dignity and sustained dehumanization. While the presence of these factors does not predetermine future violations, they are recognised as conditions requiring preventive attention.

The educational practices documented in this submission exhibit several of these characteristics. Through textbooks, children's literature, patriotic education, commemorative activities and university programmes, Armenians are consistently portrayed as a threatening and illegitimate “other”. The cumulative effect of these mutually reinforcing narratives is to normalize exclusion rather than foster mutual recognition and respect.



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These developments are particularly concerning in the aftermath of armed conflict and during ongoing efforts to achieve lasting peace in the South Caucasus. Education has a unique capacity to support reconciliation by encouraging critical historical reflection, empathy and respect for the equal dignity of former adversaries. Educational systems that instead reinforce exclusionary nationalism and perpetuate hostility undermine these objectives and diminish opportunities for sustainable peace.

The issues documented in this submission should therefore be understood not merely as shortcomings in curriculum design but as matters engaging Azerbaijan's international obligations to prevent racial discrimination. Addressing discriminatory educational content is an essential component of preventing racism, reducing the risk of hate crimes and ensuring that education fulfils the role assigned to it under international human rights law, as a means of promoting equality, tolerance and peaceful coexistence among peoples.

Info about submitting organization

Protection of Rights without Borders (PRWB) is a non-profit organization founded in Armenia in 2009. Its work focuses on the protection of human rights and development of rule of law in Armenia. In addition to monitoring, reporting, analysis of legislation and provision of pro bono legal aid, PRWB works on the documentation of war crimes and provides legal assistance to victims of violations during armed conflict both on national and international levels. PRWB is also monitoring the situation with discriminatory practices and policies in Azerbaijan.

PRWB is an active contributor to the reviews by the UN treaty bodies both for Armenia and Azerbaijan. More information at prwb.am.