

Pray for Nagorno-Karabakh!

A Call from the Bishop Coventry from the ruins of the Old Cathedral

Christmas 2020

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The ruins of Coventry Cathedral, destroyed in the City's most terrible night of bombing in 1940, are a testament to the destruction, agony and trauma that conflict brings.

There's a small mountain enclave in the Southern Caucasus called Nagorno-Karabakh that knows about such suffering.

Its Armenian population have faced not only the threat of Covid-19 but also the outbreak of fierce fighting with Azerbaijan. It's been only the latest round in a decades of tension and conflict, complex in their origins, between these two peoples.

In this 2020 battle for control of Nagorno-Karabakh, at least 75,000 people have been forced to flee the region, hospitals and homes have been bombed, and even the beloved Cathedral of Shushi has been hit and damaged.

Terrifying weaponry has been used and great cruelty experienced in this bitter conflict.

A cease-fire brokered by Russia was signed on 9th November, but it is a fragile peace.

There have still been outbreaks of violence across the region despite the presence of peacekeepers.

There's great fear that the Armenian people who've lived in Nagorno-Karabakh for centuries won't be able to safely return.

There's real risk that the treasured Armenian cultural identity will be eradicated and its holy sites desecrated – that's why I've joined other bishops in writing to UNESCO to urge them to protect the treasured heritage of the Armenian Church.

Coventry Cathedral has a remarkable story to tell about the horror of war, the hope that Christian Faith brings – the hope that inspired those who committed to the building of the new Cathedral – and of the long journey of reconciliation between enemies.

The road to reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be very long and arduous, and it will need to be built on peace, truth and justice.

But as Christmas comes to us, I want I to say from Coventry to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh that my heart goes out to you; and I want to say to the Ancient Church of Armenia from Coventry Cathedral and the Diocese of Coventry that I hold you in my prayers; and in the name of the Prince of Peace I call on each of us to pray for Nagorno-Karabakh that a just and lasting solution might be found and true peace restored to the region that will see all its people safe.