

# CSI Visits Imprisoned Archbishop in Armenia

*Christian Solidarity International delivers message from Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan to IRF Summit in Washington*

YEREVAN, ARMENIA, February 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "My offense is to speak an unwelcome truth," Armenia's Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan told the International Religious Freedom Summit in a letter from prison published today. "That simple truth is that the Christian Armenian nation faces an existential threat."

Dr. John Eibner, the president of Christian Solidarity International, read the Archbishop's letter [aloud](#) today at a [press conference](#) in Yerevan, held jointly with the Yerevan-based Armenian Center for Political Rights (ACPR).



CSI, Erich Vontobel, and the ACPR held a joint press conference in Yerevan on February 3. photo credit: csi

Earlier in the day, a CSI delegation joined by Erich Vontobel, a member of the Swiss parliament, visited Archbishop Bagrat in prison in Yerevan.

“

These attacks are designed to render the church incapable of being a voice for Armenia's national interests.”

*John Eibner, president, CSI*

The prison visit came as religious freedom experts, advocates and NGOs are gathered in Washington, DC for the International Religious Freedom Summit, and ahead of a planned visit by U.S. Vice President JD Vance to Armenia and Azerbaijan this month. The Archbishop also wrote a letter to Vice President Vance.

Archbishop Galstanyan is one of four bishops who have been detained by the Armenian government in the last eight months. The prime minister has publicly called for the head of the worldwide Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicos Karekin II, to be removed from his position.

Over the weekend, the government charged six bishops with “obstructing a judicial act” and banned them from leaving the country ahead of an Episcopal Assembly planned to be held in

Austria on February 16-19.

Rafael Ishkhanyan, the president of the Armenian Center for Political Rights (ACPR), pointed to an international conference held in Bern, Switzerland, in May 2025, where the Catholicos, the head of the Armenian church, called for the repatriation of Armenians to Nagorno Karabakh and freedom for the Armenian hostages held by Azerbaijan.

“This was the trigger” for the government’s anti-church campaign, he argued. “We are now in the third phase of this campaign – where it is starting to affect the rights of individual believers.”

The ACPR published a comprehensive [report](#) on the anti-church campaign in December 2025.

Erich Vontobel, a member of Switzerland’s National Council, introduced a motion mandating the Swiss government to hold a peace forum between Azerbaijan and representatives of the displaced people of Artsakh, to facilitate their safe return. The motion was approved by the parliament in March 2025.

The Swiss parliamentarian shared with the press conference that when he spoke with the Archbishop about the Nagorno Karabakh issue during the prison visit, the archbishop urged him: “Continue!”

“I promise you here and now,” he said, “I and we will do what we can. The case of Nagorno Karabakh is not closed yet. As long as the displaced people have not returned to their homes, the case cannot and must not be closed.”

Father Peter Fuchs, the CEO of CSI-Germany, who also participated in the prison visit, shared a



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message of solidarity from Christians in Germany to the Armenian Church. He noted that when Pope Leo XIV visited the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul two months ago, he expressly sent greetings to Catholicos Karekin II – recognizing him as the rightful head of the Armenian church.

“This solidarity is more important than ever,” he concluded.

#### About CSI

Christian Solidarity International is an international human rights group campaigning for religious liberty and human dignity.

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