At the end of the 19th century, Tbilisi counted 29 active Armenian Churches, today a mere two are left. Eight Armenian Churches have undergone appropriation efforts and were turned into Georgian ones, in addition thereto frescos, khatshkars and all Armenian references have systematically been destroyed. The fate of five churches, including Norashen, currently lies in the hands of the Georgian patriarchate. And this is just in Tbilisi. The destruction and appropriation process of the Armenian spiritual and ecclesiastical heritage continues throughout Georgia. Many historians already refer to it as the genocide of the Armenian cultural heritage in Georgia (the Armenian Apostolic Church is not alone, all traditional religions face the same problems), as the only Church in Georgia, regulated by Law is the Georgian Orthodox Church. A law is in the making which will enable religious groups to register as legal persons of private law. However, the Armenian Apostolic Church can look back on a centuries old historical presence in Georgia, and declares in one its Press Releases that it has no intention of registering as a person of private law, since the Church, in essence, is of societal nature.

In an interview, Samvel Karapetyan (Research on Armenian Architecture) declares: "Georgia has never been on such a low spiritual level. They blindly destroy a part of their own culture, because it was created by ethnic Armenians. You have to be blind and stupid up to a point... which I can't imagine. Thank God, everything is documented, everything has been photographed. However, by breaking a khatshkar or removing Armenian inscriptions, it is impossible to erase the Armenian himself. Everything will be revealed. They are digging out a ditch for themselves, and this ditch will become an abyss into which they will inevitably fall. And still dare standing alongside other civilized nations. This is not possible. Everything will be revealed."

According to this organization, more than 300 historical monuments have been destroyed throughout Georgia within the last 17 years.

We think that the actions in Georgia are not in accordance with democratic principles and common human values, that Georgia is trying to associate itself with in front of the international community.

Renovating streets and repainting houses before the visit of President Bush, putting up billboards about a Multi-cultural state on the main crossings of Bush's itinerary is not a guarantee for being a democratic and civilized state. The billboards are just the surface, underneath which Armenian khatshkars and gravestones are destroyed and vandalized by the hundreds. It is not acceptable to speak of brotherly friendship between nations and of democracy and to try to change the demographic balance with the aim of creating a mono-national state.

In the last 17 years, 35 Armenian Churches have been appropriated in Georgia (the appropriation was going hand in hand with the destruction of grave stones, the falsification of the remaining, the destruction of khatshkars and Armenian inscriptions, the destruction of the Armenian altar and baptism basins, the falsification of the Churches' history and the writing up of a new one).
Following is the story about the appropriation of Norashen, similar to all the others:

The conflict around Norashen, one of the Armenian churches in Tbilisi, which has started 17 years ago, has just reached another step with the obvious try of changing historical facts.

A few months ago, a hundred year old Georgian grave stones, carrying Georgian inscription have suddenly appeared in the courtyard of the Armenian church Norashen. Or rather, they were transported there using a crane. Our photographer and cameraman filmed these stones still wrapped in their iron wires, thrown randomly into the church's courtyard. Now, these stones are already neatly lined up and safely installed along the church's wall.

The reasoning behind these actions is clear: they are to prove that the church is of Georgian orthodox origin, as according to the words of the Georgian priest, Father Tariel, the Armenians would have never let the Georgians bury in their dead in front of their own church. At the same time when the Georgian stones were brought from an unknown cemetery to Tbilisi, the Armenian stones, located on the other side of the church were vandalised - the Armenian inscriptions were destroyed.

Eventually, in 1989, shortly before Georgia's independence and under the influence of the ultra-nationalist Gamsakhurdia, the Georgians intensified and multiplied their actions aimed at appropriating the church in order to transform it into a Georgian orthodox one. They reached their climax in 1994, when the Armenians from Tbilisi were alert after having been informed that all valuable books were being evacuated from the library. All that was left now were Marx's and Lenin's complete works, which led to believe that Norashen was heading towards the same fate as Karmir Avetaran, which used to be Tbilisi's highest Armenian church (40m high) and which was completely destroyed in an explosion in the fall of 1989.

On 25 January 1995, the Armenians living in the vicinity of Norashen noticed that apparently some works had started inside the church. The official protest, delivered on 2 February to the Georgian priest, Father Tariel, in charge of the renovation works by the Armenian Ambassador in Georgia, H.E. Khatchatrian and the president of the Armenian Association of Charity and Culture, Mr. Muradian, were greeted with contempt. Three days later, Ter Yerishe, the Armenian priest, saw this same Tariel, the axe in hand, busy with the renovation works, that is the destruction of the church's stage. In the Armenian Church, the stage, located opposite to the
entrance, is a bit higher and can be reached by climbing a few steps. Ter Yerishe told him: " You, who are supposed to be serving the Lord, you destroy the Lord's house. Take off your cross and your coat at least! " Father Tariel to answer back: " I am a priest and I do what I have been told. " On 8 February, the writing of Master Petros telling the reconstruction of the cupola in 1650 on the church's wall destroyed. Other Armenian inscriptions, two khtatshkars as well as two magnificent frescoes of the Hovnatanian School from the 19th century were also destroyed.

In the following days, a group of Armenians in the company of a photographer were barred from entering the church, instead they were greeted with fascistic insults by the Georgians and priests present at the scene. They attacked the photographer, who ducked to protect his camera. Thanks to the courageous intervention of one the Armenian women in the group, who in turn jumped at the priest pulling his beard and throwing him down, the photographer was able to escape.

On 15 February, the church was consecrated according to the Georgian orthodox rite. One month later, the Arch-bishops Garegin and Grigoris came from Armenia to Tbilisi, where they met with Iliad II, the Georgian Patriarch and they decided to stop everything until better times would come. The church has been closed since.

Now, after the appearance of the fake Georgian graves, emotions are flying high again, and their consequences cannot be foreseen. To the Armenian clergy in Tbilisi, there is no doubt that Norashen shall open its doors again as Armenian Apostolic Church and that the grave stones need to be returned to their places of origin.
Appropriated Armenian Churches

In Tbilisi
1) Karapi St. Gevorg, built 18th century
2) Blessed Virgin of Bethlehem, built 13th century
3) St. Stepanos, built 18th century
4) St. Cross of Vera, built 1830
5) Blessed Virgin of Djugureti, built 19th century
6) St. Karapet, built 16th century
7) St. Gevorg Zorabashe, built 19th century

In the vicinity of Tbilisi
8) St. Gevorg Teleti, built 18th century
9) St. Gevorg Shavnabad, 18th century
10) Blessed Virgin of Shindisi, 18th century
11) St. Gevorg of Tsekhneti village, 19th century
12) Blessed Virgin of Nakhshir Gora, 19th century
13) St. Gevorg of Lisi village, 19th century

In Kakheti region
14) St. Gevork of Signakhi, 18th century
15) Blessed Virgin of Velitsikhe, 19th century
16) Blessed Virgin of Telavi, 18th century
17) Holy Trinity of Telavi

In Gori region
18) St. Gevork of Tzevgy village, 19th century
19) Blessed Virgin of Akhaltsikhe, 19th century
20) Blessed Virgin of Doesi, 19th century
21) St. Gevorg of Bergu village, 19th century
22) Blessed Virgin of Zerti village, 18th century
23) St. Gevorg of Akhalgori town, 18th century

In Khashuri region
24) St. Grigor Illuminator of Surami, 18th century
25) Blessed Virgin of Vahga village, 19th century

In Kutaisi region
26) St. Gevorg of Kutaisi, 18th century
27) St. Gevorg of Marneuli, 19th century
28) Teleti Blessed Virgin, 18th century
29) St. Gevorg of Mukhad village, 19th century

Armenian Churches, with uncertain fate

In Tbilisi
Norashen, built 15th century
St. Nshan, built 18th century
St. Minas, built 19th century
Mughnu St. Gevorg, built 14th century
Shamkoretsots Blessed Virgin, built 19th century

In Akhaltsikhe
St. Nshan, built 19th century