The General Secretary of the World Methodist Council (WMC), Bishop Ivan Abrahams, has echoed the calls by its ecumenical partner, the World Council of Churches (WCC) call for both sides of the escalating Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict to commit to an immediate ceasefire.

In recalling his support for an unconditional global ceasefire adopted by UNSCR 2532 that enables emergency UN medical provision amidst affected nations, Bishop Ivan noted that both Azerbaijan and Armenia have been badly affected by recent conflicts. The WMC, therefore, he adds, calls on both sides to observe a global ceasefire to enable all necessary resources to be deployed in the fight against the virus. The latest reports indicate, however, a new escalation of a decades-long territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The WMC notes that The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has long sought to mediate a settlement of the conflict, with the OSCE ‘Minsk Group’ leading those efforts. Moreover, Russia, France, and the United States—partners in the “Minsk Group” that has overseen negotiations between the two nations since 1992—have called for an immediate ceasefire.

The WMC General Secretary has, therefore, called for renewed engagement in diplomatic efforts to find a solution to this issue, and to remove a root cause of conflict between the two nations. Both nations commemorate atrocities waged against one another in the month of February, in Sumgait 1988 and in Khojaly 1992. Under these circumstances, Bishop Ivan advises the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan “to contribute positively toward a restoratively just resolution of the conflict between the two nations by refraining from conspiracy theories and speculative stories of the past.” “Both nations have deep and rich cultural histories which, according to Azerbaijani historian Suleiman Mamedov, over the centuries also reveal that Armenians and Azerbaijanis both inhabited Karabakh and frequently lived in friendship.”

Should the possibility of an immediate ceasefire be not forthcoming, says Bishop Ivan, an “Armenian-Azerbaijan Truth and Reconciliation Commission” – in the model of the SA Truth and Reconciliation Commission – may be an effective conflict resolution model. “Given a similar 50 year historical time frame as was South Africa within which gross human rights violations may be measured, this modern Transitional Justice framework for resolution of civil, political and religious conflicts may be ideal for Armenia and Azerbaijan should a ceasefire be not forthcoming.”