

# Blood memory

## 20 January – National Mourning Day

The events that led to the tragedy of 1990 date back to 1987 when a new wave of expulsion of the Azerbaijanis from their historical homelands in Armenia and attempts to annex the Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia were gathering pace. But instead of preventing the growing tension, the Soviet leadership committed a terrible crime against the Azerbaijani people.

On the night of January 19-20, under direct instructions of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, military units of the USSR Ministry of Defense, State Security Committee and Ministry of Internal Affairs entered Baku and several regions, massacring civilian population using military hardware and different weapons. The Soviet army deployed a large contingent of special and internal troops in Baku who displayed unprecedented cruelty against peaceful population. The army had brutally killed 82 civilians and wounded 20 others until the announcement of curfew. 21 civilians were murdered in Baku in several days after the imposition of curfew. Eight more civilians were killed in Neftchala on January 25 and in Lankaran on January 26 where curfew was not declared.

The January tragedy resulted in the killing of 131 and wounding of 744 civilians in Baku and adjacent regions. Those killed included women, children and the elderly, medical employees and policemen.

The illegal deployment of the troops was accompanied by mass arrests of civilians. A total of 841 civilians were arrested in Baku and other cities and regions of the republic in the military operations. Of them 112 were sent to prisons in different cities of the USSR. The Soviet troops fired on 200 homes, 80 cars, including ambulances, a large number of public and private properties were set on fire.

The atrocities committed by the Soviet troops bore signs of Nazi actions which were deployed by the international military tribunal known as Nuremberg trials.

Those who were killed in the tragic events of 1990 are symbolically named “20 January martyrs”. In total, there are 150 “20 January martyrs” in Azerbaijan (full list).

Immediately after the tragedy, on January 21, 1990, national leader Heydar Aliyev accompanied by his family members visited Azerbaijan’s permanent representative office in Moscow. He expressed his sympathy with his people, sharply condemned the Soviet leadership for committing the bloody tragedy and exposed the executors of the operation: “I consider the events that took place in Azerbaijan as contrary to law, democracy, humanity...principles of constitutional state building... Had there been taken necessary measures by the top party leadership at the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh events, we would not have had the escalation of the tension and losses on both sides and that military assault undertaken over the night from 19 to 20 January 1990 that brought heavy losses. All perpetrators of the crime must be appropriately punished.” At a session of the Milli Majlis of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic on November 20, 1990, national leader Heydar Aliyev described the January tragedy as an assault on the Azerbaijani people’s sovereign rights: “I think this tragedy, which took place on January 19-20, is the outcome of the great fault of the political leadership of the Soviet Union, personally Gorbachev, which stemmed from his dictator ambitions and at the same time, it is the result of the Azerbaijani leaders’ treachery and crime towards their people. As I know, since the end of the Great Patriotic war there has never been such mass killings in the Soviet Union, within the country – nowhere, not even in the territory of any region. And it is the Soviet army that committed this. The scale of this crime is evidenced by the fact that the military operations were commanded by the Minister of Defense of USSR Yazov and Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR Bakatin who came to Baku in advance. During the war, the defense minister was rarely seen on the forefront, but look how much importance they attach to these operations, how large the scale of these operations was that marshal Yazov came to Baku and led those operations personally. All these facts confirm that this was a military aggression, insult, as well a crime against the Azerbaijani people.”



Apart from being nationwide mourning, the January tragedy also demonstrated the firmness of the Azerbaijani people's will, their determination. Despite the Soviet army's cruelty and imposition of curfew in Baku, the people of Azerbaijan staged a huge rally in the city's "Azadlig" square on January 22 to pay tribute to January 20 martyrs. The funeral ceremony at the Alley of Martyrs was attended by nearly two million people. By popular demand, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR convened an extraordinary session and adopted a decision on the abolishment of curfew in the city of Baku. Fearing people's anger, many of the republic's the then leaders did not attend the session.

This epoch-making event made a decisive effect on the formation of Azerbaijani national identity and marked a turning point in restoration of independence. It was the January tragedy that turned the national liberation movement into a political reality and gave a strong impetus to the Azerbaijani people's struggle for independence. On the initiative of national leader Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan gave its first political and legal assessment to the January 20 tragedy at the level of parliament on March 29, 1994, when the Milli Majlis adopted a relevant resolution. The resolution said: "The deployment of the Soviet troops in the city of Baku and several other regions of Azerbaijan and the brutal killing of civilians, who took to the streets to demand justice, on January 20, 1990, in order to suppress the national liberation movement in Azerbaijan, break confidence and will of the nation that rose to establish a new democratic and sovereign state, humiliate their national identity and show off the Soviet army's power to other republics must be regarded as a military aggression and crime of the totalitarian communist regime against the people of Azerbaijan."

The people of Azerbaijan pay their respect to martyrs. On January 20 each year, thousands of people visit the Alley of Martyrs to pay floral tributes, say prayers for the victims and curse the perpetrators of the tragedy.

At 12.00 on January 20 each year a nationwide moment of silence is observed to commemorate January 20 martyrs. Ships, cars, and trains sound sirens throughout the country, commemorative events are held in all cities and towns, the national flag is lowered on all buildings.

## The Khojaly genocide

The Khojaly genocide is the gravest crime of genocide committed against peaceful Azerbaijani people in the course of Armenia's aggressive war against Azerbaijan. Prior to this, part of peaceful population of Baghanis Ayrim village in Azerbaijan's Gazakh region bordering with Armenia, as well as the villages of Imarat-Garvand, Tug, Salakatin, Akhullu, Khojavand, Jamilly, Nabilar, Meshali, Hasanabad, Karkijahan, Gaybaly, Malibayli, Yukhari and Ashaghi Gushchular, Garadaghli villages in Nagorno-Karabakh where the Azerbaijanis lived, was murdered with special cruelty on the basis of a previously prepared plan. Suffice it to note that more than 80 Azerbaijanis were massacred in Garadaghli village in Khojavand region on February 17, 1992, just a few days before the Khojaly genocide.

The town of Khojaly was located in the strategically important part of the Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan. It was situated 10 km south-east from Khankandi, between Aghdam-Shusha and Asgaran-Khankandi highways. What added to the town's strategic importance was the fact that the only airport in the Nagorno-Karabakh region was located here. Khojaly was completely placed under the siege by the Armenian military units in the second half of February. All the attempts by local civilians to break the siege were prevented.

On the night of 25-26 February 1992, in violation of all international legal norms, the Armenian armed forces attacked the civilian population of the sieged town of Khojaly with military hardware, killing them with unprecedented brutality and razing the town to the ground. As a result of the horrible crime against not only the people of Azerbaijan, but against the entire humanity, 613 civilian Azerbaijanis, including 63 children, 106 women and 70 elders were brutally murdered on the ground of national identity.



National leader Heydar Aliyev sharply protested against the country's leadership at that time for the absolute defenseless position of Khojaly: "The then authorities' treacherous position against the national independence of Azerbaijan and our people, their criminal indifference to their constitutional duties, continuous political power games, the anarchy and arbitrariness reigning in the republic, personal ambitions of certain politicians encouraged the Khojaly tragedy. Our citizens' cry for help was ignored, despite real possibilities for Khojaly to be rescued the innocent population was purposely subjected to this massacre. The Khojaly genocide, which once again exposed the face of the Armenian fascism, is a historical crime against not only the people of Azerbaijan, but also against the entire humanity. It must be condemned by the civilized world in compliance with international law."

The nature and scale of the crimes committed in the town of Khojaly proves that the act of genocide fully complies with the definition indicated in the Convention "On Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" adopted under Resolution 260 (III) of the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1948. This ruthless pre-planned massacre was committed with the aim of annihilating the people living in that territory just for the fact that they were Azerbaijanis. Khojaly villagers were beheaded, had their eyes gouged out, skinned, and burned alive. Those trying to flee were killed with a particular brutality by the Armenian troops who ambushed them on roads and forests.

Khojaly does not differ from horrific tragedies of Katyn, Lidice, Oradour-sur-Glane, Holocaust, Songmy, Rwanda and Srebrenica, which are etched on the minds of people forever.

The Khojaly genocide was organized by the political and state leadership of the Republic of Armenia and directly executed by the Armenian armed forces, Armenian terrorist groups in Nagorno-Karabakh and the infantry units of the 366th motor rifle regiment of the former USSR army deployed in Khankandi.

The Khojaly genocide is one of a series of acts of mass slaughter aiming to shake the people who rose up for the defense of their lands from the Armenian armed forces' aggression, break their will to fight and annihilate part of the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is also evidenced by a massacre committed during the occupation of Aghdaban village in Kalbajar region on April 8, about a month and a half after the Khojaly tragedy. That massacre saw the brutal killing of 67 civilians, including children, women and elderly, dozens of people were taken hostages and went missing. As a continuation of these events, on August 28, 1992, another ruthless crime – Balligaya massacre – was committed in the village of Balligaya in Goranboy region. 24 Azerbaijani civilians were killed with special cruelty, including 6 kids and a 6-month-old baby, a 93-year-old woman, while 3 kids lost both parents. Corpses of some civilians were burned.

According to the Resolution of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated February 24, 1994, February 26 was declared as the Day of the Khojaly genocide.

On February 24, 2017, the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan reaffirmed its recognition as genocide – under its resolutions dated February 24, 1994, February 24, 1995, February 27, 2007, and February 24, 2012 – of a mass slaughter of the Azerbaijanis in the town of Khojaly over the night of February 25-26, 1992, carried out by the military units of the Republic of Armenia, Armenian armed formations in Nagorno-Karabakh and 366th motor-rifle regiment of the former Soviet army.

The law-enforcement bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan continue to take appropriate steps to identify and prosecute the persons responsible for committing genocide in the town of Khojaly.

National leader Heydar Aliyev said about the Khojaly genocide: "We have a duty for the people and the government of Azerbaijan to convey the truths, based on real facts and evidence, about the Khojaly genocide as well as the atrocities committed against our people in the Nagorno-Karabakh region to the world community, parliaments, public organizations in order to achieve recognition of these events as a real act of genocide. This is a sacred duty of us as citizens and humans for the victims of the genocide. On the other hand, ensuring proper international legal and political recognition of the tragedy and punishment of its ideologists, organizers and perpetrators is a crucial precondition for prevention of a repetition of such brutal acts against humanity in general."



The promotional activities carried out under “Justice for Khojaly” campaign organized by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation is widely spreading every year. As a result of systematic work to increase the international community’s awareness of the Khojaly genocide, the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as the parliaments of Mexico, Pakistan, Czech Republic, Peru, Columbia, Panama, Honduras, Sudan, Guatemala, Djibouti recognized the mass killings committed in the town of Khojaly as a genocidal crime. The parliaments of Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Jordan, Slovenia, Scotland, as well as executive and legislative bodies of more than 20 American states strongly condemned and recognized the Khojaly events as a massacre.

Large-scale events are organized on a yearly basis to remember the Khojaly genocide under orders of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. A nationwide march was held in Baku to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide. “The world must recognize the Khojaly genocide”, “Justice for Khojaly”, “Do not forget Khojaly”, “No to Armenian fascism”, “Khojaly – genocide of 20th century”, “The criminals won’t go unpunished’ and other slogans were displayed on huge monitors along the streets during the rally.

## 31 March – Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis

The Gulustan and Turkmenchay treaties, signed in 1813 and 1828 respectively, laid the foundation of the split of the Azerbaijani people and division of their historical lands, subsequently leading to expropriation of those lands. In a very short span of time, the mass resettlement of the Armenians in the Azerbaijani lands began.

Although the Armenians, who were resettled in the territories of Iravan, Nakhchivan and Karabakh khanates, were less in number than the Azerbaijanis living there, and managed, sponsored by their patrons, to establish an administrative unit called “Armenian province”. The artificial division of the state territories encouraged the displacement of the indigenous people of Azerbaijan from their lands as well as execution of the genocide policy against the Azerbaijani people. In order to realize the idea of “great Armenia” on the Azerbaijani lands, the Armenians started the process of falsification of their own history and the history of Azerbaijan and the entire Caucasus.

Inspired by the idea of creating “Greate Armenia”, the Armenians carried out a series of bloody massacres against Azerbaijanis in 1905-1907. The massacres committed by the Armenians covered the territories of Azerbaijan as well as the Azerbaijani villages located in the territory of present Armenia. Hundreds of Azerbaijani settlements were destroyed and razed to the ground, and thousands of civilians were brutally killed.

The Armenians, seizing the opportunity of the First World War as well as the February and October revolutions, which took place in 1917 in Russia, attempted to realize their heinous intentions under the banner of the Bolsheviks. From March 1918, the Baku Soviet, under the pretext of combating counter-revolutionary elements, developed a plan to exterminate the Azerbaijanis in Baku Province.



During those tragic events, tens of thousands of peaceful civilians in Shamakhi, Guba and other cities, as well as in Baku province were killed on ethnic and religious grounds, settlements were destroyed, cultural monuments, mosques and cemeteries were razed to the ground. In the later stages, the Armenian nationalists continued their barbaric acts, carrying out mass killings, looting and ethnic cleansing in Karabakh, Zangazur, Nakhchivan, Shirvan, Irevan and other regions.

The March 1918 events became the focus of attention following the proclamation of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) and in order to investigate violence against the Azerbaijani population the Council of Ministers adopted a decision on the establishment of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission (EIC) on 15 July 1918.

At the first stage, the commission was involved in investigation of the March genocide, the Armenian brutalities and grave crimes committed by the Armenians in the provinces of Shamakhi and Irevan.

A special authority was established at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to increase the world community's awareness of the truth about these tragedies. In 1919 and 1920, Azerbaijan Democratic Republic commemorated 31 March as a national day of mourning. In fact, it was the first attempt to give a political assessment to the genocide perpetrated against the Azerbaijanis and the occupation of our lands, which lasted for more than one century. However, after the collapse of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the process was halted and the investigation of the incidents and the attempts to give a political and legal assessment to these events failed. Only 80 years later, on March 26, 1998, those horrific events received a proper political assessment when President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev signed the Decree "On the genocide of Azerbaijanis". March 31 was declared the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis. The Decree said: "All tragedies, which occurred in the 19th-20th centuries in Azerbaijan and were accompanied by the invasion of lands, constituted stages of the systematic genocide carried out by the Armenians against Azerbaijanis. Attempts were made to give a political assessment to only one of these tragedies – the March 1918 massacre. As a political successor of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Republic of Azerbaijan recognizes its historical duty to achieve a political assessment of the events of genocide, which Azerbaijan Democratic Republic failed to complete."

On the occasion of March 31-the Day of genocide of Azerbaijanis, national leader Heydar Aliyev said: "We must continue raising the world community's and influential international organizations' awareness of the truths – based on real facts and evidence – about the genocide committed against our people in order to change the distorted perception created as a result of false information provided by the Armenian propaganda machine as well as to give a proper legal and political assessment to these realities. It is the current generation's sacred duty for the victims of the genocide."

Numerous new facts and documents have been collected in the past years thanks to researches in this direction. The mass grave unearthed in Guba region reveals one of the bloody pages of this tragedy. In April-May 1918, in Guba region alone 167 villages were razed to the ground. The mass graveyard in Guba region was unearthed on April 1, 2007, during the landscaping works on the site. In 2009, under the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers, "Plan of action to perpetuate the memory of mass murder victims in Guba region" was approved and a decision was made to construct a memorial complex and carry out renovation works in the site where mass graves were discovered. In 2007, employees of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences launched a large-scale research in the mass grave, which was completed in September 2008. The research revealed that the mass grave was an evidence of the genocide committed by the Armenians against the local citizens in 1918. More than 400 human corpses of different age were found, including 50 children, 100 women, and the elderly. The research also found that along with the Azerbaijanis there were members of the Lezgi, Jewish, Tat, and other ethnic groups living in Guba region among those brutally killed and buried in the graveyard.

The official opening ceremony of the Guba Genocide Memorial Complex in the site of the graveyard was held on September 18, 2013. Addressing the ceremony, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said: "Of course, due to the fact that history was falsified in Soviet times, this was concealed from us. For many years, the thugs who shed the blood of the Azerbaijani people – their cursed names are indicated there, e.g. Shaumyan and others like him, were portrayed to us as heroes. I think this is a great tragedy. For many years, those who unleashed atrocities against our people were described in Soviet history as heroes and statues of them were erected in many places. Only in the years of independence we restored justice. We cleared our beautiful city, our Baku from these statues, and today there are beautiful parks, including the Sahil Park, in their place. In other words, history and justice prevailed. Today we go back to our history. We know and should know all aspects of our history. The younger generation also needs to know what disasters our nation was faced with in the past."



On January 18, 2018, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev signed an Order on commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the 1918 genocide of the Azerbaijanis. The Order said: "The historical evidence revealed that the geography of bloody acts committed by the Armenian nationalists in March-April and in the late 1918s is much more widespread and the number of victims of tragedy is much bigger than expected."

The people and the government of Azerbaijan always pay tribute to the victims of the genocide, and urge the world community to take lesson of these historical events and to expose the true nature of the Armenian fascism.

## Mass expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical lands in the territory of today's Armenia

Mass resettlement of the Armenians from the Ottoman and Iranian territories by Tsarist Russia in the 19th century marked the beginning of oppression of the Azerbaijanis in their own historical lands. A deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide conducted against the Azerbaijanis in the early 20th century brought our people face to face with many hardships and tragedies. As a result of this plan, the Azerbaijanis were displaced from their historical lands in the territory which is today called Armenia where they lived for thousands of years and were subjected to massacres and genocides, thousands of their historical and cultural monuments and settlements were destroyed.

In 1918-1920, hundreds of thousands of the Azerbaijanis were killed and expelled from their homelands to become refugees, hundreds of Azerbaijani villages were wiped off the face of the earth.

Having taken the advantage of Sovietization of Transcaucasia, the Armenians managed to annex Zangazur and a number of other Azerbaijani lands in Armenian SSR in 1920. They later resorted to new means in order to extend the policy of expulsion of the Azerbaijanis from these areas.

The Armenians achieved the adoption by the USSR Council of Ministers of the Decree "On the resettlement of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian SSR in the Kur-Araz lowland of Azerbaijan SSR" dated December 23, 1947 and mass expulsion – at the state level – of the Azerbaijanis from their historical lands in 1948-1953. These decisions of the USSR Council of Ministers became another crime against the Azerbaijani people. Under these decisions, more than 150,000 Azerbaijanis were forcibly displaced from their historical lands in Armenian SSR from 1948 to 1953. At the beginning of the century, our fellow countrymen were expelled or exiled from Iravan, which was predominantly populated by the Azerbaijanis, and other regions of Armenian SSR. Their rights were grossly violated and they were harshly repressed.

On December 18, 1997, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev signed the Decree "On mass expulsion of the Azerbaijanis from their historical and ethnic lands in Armenian SSR in 1948-1953". The Decree said: "The existing repression rules of the authoritarian-totalitarian regime were widely applied in the course of execution of these decisions, which run contrary to regular legal norms, thousands of peoples, including children and the elderly, died unable to endure extremely difficult resettlement, sharp climate changes, physical shock and moral genocide. The then Azerbaijani leadership's anti-national position, their involvement in the organization and implementation of crimes against our fellow countrymen played a role in this process as much as the criminal policy of the Armenian chauvinistic circles and the USSR leadership."

Starting from the 1950s, the Armenian nationalists, helped by their patrons, kicked off a moral aggression campaign against the Azerbaijani people. The Armenians changed historical names of Azerbaijani villages and ancient historical toponyms, an unprecedented event in the history of toponymy.



The Armenian nationalists' vicious slander campaign against the Azerbaijani people's moral values, national pride and consciousness encouraged political and military aggression against the Azerbaijanis. Helped by the Soviet regime, the Armenians reinforced their anti-Azerbaijani campaign in the mid-1980s.

Despite restrictions and expulsion, the areas populated by the Azerbaijanis in Armenia had occupied 25 per cent or a 7,500 sq km area of the entire territory (29,800 sq km) of the Armenian Republic until 1988.

The next wave of expulsion of the Azerbaijanis from their historical and ethnic lands in Armenia took place in 1988-1989 and saw 250,000 people become refugees.

The Azerbaijani people's protest against this expulsion and against attempts to annex the Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia led to the deployment of the Soviet troops in Baku and mass killings of innocent people in other cities and regions of Azerbaijan in January 1990.

Upon completion of expulsion of the Azerbaijanis from Armenia, the Armenian nationalists embarked on the next stage of genocide and occupied 20 per cent of the Azerbaijani lands.

In his speeches, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly said that today's Armenia was created in Azerbaijan's historical lands. "Unfortunately, in 1918 the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic practically presented Iravan to Armenia. All documents are available. One of the first resolutions of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was to transfer Iravan to Armenia as a capital even though Azerbaijanis formed the majority of the Iravan population at that time. It was a huge mistake. This did not protect the young Azerbaijani state from Armenian provocations. Perhaps this was the hope. We could say that we actually lost Iravan then. But we see today that Armenian claims are not becoming any less. They occasionally proclaim various absurd slogans at the highest level, the idea that they have claims to the lands of neighboring countries."

The head of state said that the Azerbaijanis should not forget their historical lands. "This should be a guide for our future activities, just as we are working in this direction today. Our historical lands are the Iravan Khanate, Zangazur and Goycha. The younger generation and the whole world must know this. I am glad that fundamental research papers are being developed, films produced and exhibitions organized in connection with this issue, the history of our ancestral lands. In the coming years, we should be more active in this direction, exhibitions and presentations should be held in different parts of the world because Iravan is our historical land and we, the Azerbaijanis, must return to these historical lands. This is our political and strategic goal, and we must gradually approach it".

