

Bloody Memory

20 January – National Mourning Day

The events that led to the tragedy of 1990 date back to 1987, when attempts to annex the Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and another wave of the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical villages in Armenia were gaining momentum. But the Soviet leadership committed a terrible crime against the Azerbaijani people, instead of preventing these growing tensions.

On the night of January 19-20, under direct instructions from Mikhail Gorbachev, the then General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, military units from the USSR Ministry of Defense, State Security Committee and Ministry of Internal Affairs entered Baku and nearby regions, massacring the civilian population using heavy military equipment and other various forms of weaponry. The Soviet army deployed a large contingent of special and internal troops in Baku who displayed unprecedented cruelty against the peaceful population. The army had brutally killed 82 civilians and severely wounded 20 others until a curfew was announced. Several days after the curfew was announced, 21 more civilians were murdered in Baku. 8 more civilians were killed in areas where a curfew had not been imposed, on January 25 in Neftchala and on January 26 in Lankaran.

As a result of the January tragedy, 131 civilians were killed and 744 more were wounded in Baku and nearby regions. Among those killed were women, children and the elderly, medical employees and policemen.

Mass arrests accompanied the illegal deployment of troops and the subsequent military intervention. A total of 841 civilians were arrested in Baku and other cities and regions of the republic, 112 of whom were sent to prisons in different cities of the USSR. The Soviet troops fired on 200 homes, 80 cars and set fire to a large number of public and private property, including ambulances.

The atrocities committed by Soviet troops were reminiscent of those actions condemned in the 1945-1946 international tribunal known as the Nuremberg trials.

The victims of 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 visited with his family members the office of Azerbaijan’s permanent representation in Moscow. He expressed solidarity with his people, sharply condemned the Soviet leadership for committing the bloody tragedy and exposed those who led the operation: “I consider the events that took place in Azerbaijan as a violation of law, democracy, and of humanity... and the principles of constitutional state building... Had necessary measures been taken by the top party leadership at the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh events, we would not have faced escalated tensions that led to the deadly military assault launched on civilians on the night of 19 - 20 January 1990. Everyone involved in this crime must be appropriately punished.” At a session of the Milli Majlis of the 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 a result of the great fault of the political leadership of the Soviet Union, namely Gorbachev and his dictatorial ambitions, as well as of the then Azerbaijani leadership’s betrayal and crimes against their own people. As I know, since the end of the Great Patriotic war there have never been internal mass killings of this gravity in the Soviet Union – nowhere, not in any territory of any region. And it is the Soviet army that committed this. The gravity of this crime is evidenced by the fact that the Minister of Defense of USSR Yazov and Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR Bakatin came to Baku in advance and commanded these military operations. The defense minister was rarely seen on the forefront during the war, but look just how important these operations were deemed, how large-scale they were considered, that marshal Yazov came to Baku and personally led the operations. All of these facts confirm that this was military aggression, an insult, as well a crime against the Azerbaijani people”.



Being a basis for nationwide mourning, the January tragedy also demonstrated the firmness of the Azerbaijani people's will, and determination. Unmoved by the Soviet army's cruelty and the consequent imposition of a curfew in Baku, the people of Azerbaijan staged a massive rally in the city's "Azadlig" square on January 22 to pay tribute to the martyrs of January 20. The burial ceremony at the Alley of Martyrs was attended by nearly two million people. By demand of the people, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR even convened an extraordinary session and adopted a decision on the abolishment of the curfew in the city of Baku. Fearing people's anger, members of the republic's leadership at the time did not attend the session.

This epochal event was the deciding factor in forming Azerbaijani national identity and marked a turning point in restoring national independence. It was the January tragedy that turned a national liberation movement into a political reality and gave strong impetus to the Azerbaijani people's struggle for independence.

The first political-legal recognition of the January 20 tragedy came on March 29, 1994, when Azerbaijan's legislative body Milli Majlis adopted a relevant resolution on national leader Heydar Aliyev's initiative. The resolution read: "The deployment of the Soviet troops in the city of Baku and several other regions and the brutal killing of civilians, with the intent to suppress, to break the confidence and will of a people who by peaceful means demanded a new democratic and sovereign state and to humiliate their national identity as a show of Soviet army power must be regarded as a military aggression and crime of the totalitarian communist regime against the people of Azerbaijan."

The people of Azerbaijan continue to hold the memories of the martyrs dear to their hearts. On January 20 of each year, thousands of people visit the Alley of Martyrs to pay their tributes by laying flowers, say prayers for the victims and express their condemnation of the perpetrators of the tragedy.

Each year at midday on January 20, 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, and 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, as part of a planned occupation, the peaceful population of the Baghanis Ayrim village in Azerbaijan's Gazakh region bordering with Armenia and the Azerbaijani-populated villages of Imarat-Garvand, Tug, Salakatin, Akhullu, Khojavand, Jamilly, Nabilar, Meshali, Hasanabad, Karkijahan, Gaybaly, Malibayli, Yukhari and Ashaghi Gushchular, Garadaghli villages in Nagorno-Karabakh, were murdered with particular cruelty. It is sufficient to note that just a few days before the Khojaly genocide, on February 17 1992, 80 Azerbaijanis were massacred in the Garadaghli village in Khojavand.

The town of Khojaly was located in the strategically important part of the Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan. It is situated 10 km south-east from Khankandi, between Aghdam-Shusha and Asgaran-Khankandi highways. The strategic importance lies in the fact that the only airport in the Nagorno-Karabakh region was located here. In the second half of February 1992, Khojaly was under total siege by Armenian military units and any 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, Armenian armed forces attacked the civilian population of the sieged town of Khojaly with heavy military equipment, killing them with unprecedented brutality and razing the town to the ground. As a result of crime against not only the people of Azerbaijan, but against humanity, 613 civilian Azerbaijanis, including 63 children, 106 women and 70 elders were brutally murdered on grounds 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' betrayal against the national independence of Azerbaijan and our people, their indifference to their constitutional duties, the continuous political power games, anarchy and arbitrariness reigning in the republic, personal ambitions of some politicians encouraged the Khojaly tragedy. Our citizens' cry for help was ignored, and despite possessing real capabilities to rescue Khojaly, the innocent population was knowingly subjected to this massacre. The Khojaly genocide, which once again exposed the face of Armenian fascism, is a historical crime against not only the people of Azerbaijan, but also against humanity. It must be condemned by the civilized world in compliance with international law."

The nature and gravity of the crimes committed in the town of Khojaly fully suits the definition of the word genocide as indicated in the Convention "On Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" adopted on December 9, 1948 under Resolution 260 (III) of the UN General Assembly. The premeditated massacre on this territory was committed with intent to annihilate residents solely on grounds 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 Armenian troops who ambushed them on roads and forests.

Khojaly does not differ from other horrifying tragedies of Katyn, Lidice, Oradour-sur-Glane, Holocaust, Songmy, Rwanda and Srebrenica, which remain in history as deep and shameful scars.

The Khojaly genocide was organized by the political and state leadership of the Republic of Armenia and was carried out by 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 crush those who rose up for the defense of their lands from Armenian armed forces' aggression, to break their will to fight and annihilate the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh. This was witnessed once again 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. 67 civilians, including children, women and elderly were brutally killed, dozens of people were taken hostage and many others went missing. As a continuation of these events, on August 28, 1992, another ruthless crime – the 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, and 3 children lost both parents. The corpses of some civilians were burned.

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

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

Law enforcement bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan continue to take measures to identify and prosecute the persons responsible for committing genocide in the town of Khojaly.



Speaking about the Khojaly genocide, national leader Heydar Aliyev said: “We have a duty to the people and the government of Azerbaijan to convey to the world community, to parliaments and to public organizations the truths, facts and evidence about the Khojaly genocide as well as the atrocities committed against our people in the Nagorno-Karabakh region in order to achieve proper legal and political recognition of these events as a real act of genocide. This is a sacred duty we share as citizens and fellow humans for the victims of the genocide. On the other hand, ensuring that idolizers, organizers and perpetrators of genocides are brought to justice is a crucial step for preventing a repeat of such brutal acts against humanity in general.”

Promotional activities carried out under “Justice for Khojaly” campaign organized by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation is widening its scope every year. As a result of systematic efforts 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, Indonesia, Sudan, Guatemala, Paraguay and Djibouti recognized the mass killings committed in the town of Khojaly as a genocidal crime. The parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 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.

Annual events are organized to remember the Khojaly genocide under orders of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. In 2017, a nationwide march was held in Baku to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide. Slogans reading “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 others were displayed on large 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 Armenians to Azerbaijani lands began.

Although Armenians, who were resettled in the territories of Iravan, Nakhchivan and Karabakh khanates, were less in numbers than the Azerbaijanis living there, they managed, with support from their patrons, to establish an administrative unit called the “Armenian oblast”. This artificial division of state territories encouraged the displacement of the indigenous people of Azerbaijan from their lands as well as the execution of genocidal policies against the Azerbaijani people. In order to realize the idea of “greater Armenia” on Azerbaijani lands, Armenians began to falsify their own history and the history of Azerbaijan and the entire Caucasus.

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

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

31 March – Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis 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, 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 on 15 July 1918 adopted a decision on the establishment of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission (EIC).

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

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 political recognition to the genocide perpetrated against Azerbaijanis and to the occupation of our lands, which lasted for more than one century. However, this process was halted after the collapse of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and the investigation and recognition attempts failed. Only 80 years later, on March 26, 1998, when President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev signed the Decree "On the genocide of Azerbaijanis" did those horrific events receive proper political recognition. 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 Armenians against Azerbaijanis. Attempts were made to give political recognition 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 get political recognition of the events of genocide, which the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic failed to complete during its tenure."

On the occasion of March 31-the Day of genocide of Azerbaijanis, national leader Heydar Aliyev said: "With the facts and evidence we have, we must continue to work with the world community and influential international organizations to bring awareness to the truth and to receive proper legal and political recognition of the genocide committed against our people and to change the distorted perception that prevails as a result of false information provided by the Armenian propaganda machine. It is the current generation's sacred duty to 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 grave was discovered on April 1, 2007, during 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 the mass grave as evidence of the genocide committed by Armenians against the local citizens in 1918. More than 400 corpses of people of different ages were found, including 50 children, 100 women, and the elderly. The research also found that among those brutally killed and buried in the grave were members of the Lezgi, Jewish, Tat, and other ethnic groups also living in Guba at the time.

The official opening ceremony of the Guba Genocide Memorial Complex which was erected at the site was held on September 18, 2013. Addressing the ceremony, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said: "History was falsified during Soviet times, so clearly this occurrence was also concealed from us. For many years, criminals like Shaumyan and others, who shed the blood of the Azerbaijani people were portrayed as heroes. I think this is a great tragedy. For many years, those who committed atrocities against our people were presented in Soviet history as heroes and were remembered by statues erected in many cities of the USSR. Only after independence did we restore justice. We cleared our beautiful city, our Baku from these statues, and in their place today there are beautiful parks, including the Sahil Park. In other words, history and justice prevailed. Today we reflect on 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 read: "The historical evidence revealed that the geography of bloody acts committed by March-April of 1918 and in later years was much more widespread and the victims of this tragedy were far more numbered than previously estimated."

The people and the government of Azerbaijan continue to pay tribute to the victims of the genocide and urge the world community to learn from these historical events and to expose the true nature of Armenian fascism.

Mass expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical lands in the territory of present-day 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 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 who had for thousands of years lived in the territory of present-day Armenia were displaced from their historical lands, subjected to massacres and genocides and thousands of their historical and cultural monuments and settlements were destroyed.

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

Having taken advantage of the Sovietization of Transcaucasia, Armenians managed to annex Zangazur and a number of other Azerbaijani territories into Armenian SSR in 1920. To further extend the policy of expelling Azerbaijanis from these areas, they later resorted to new means.

Armenians were able to get the USSR Council of Ministers to adopt December 23, 1947 a decree "On the resettlement of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian SSR in the Kur-Araz lowland of Azerbaijan SSR" and consequently secured at a state level the mass expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical lands between 1948 and 1953. These decisions of the USSR Council of Ministers became yet another crime against the Azerbaijani people and as a result, 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, Azerbaijanis were expelled or exiled from predominantly-Azerbaijani populated Iravan, and from other regions of Armenian SSR. They were repressed and had their rights grossly violated.

On December 18, 1997, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev signed the Decree "On mass expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical and ethnic lands in Armenian SSR in 1948-1953". The Decree read: "These decisions violated customary law, had been carried out within authoritarian-totalitarian regime's policies of repression and resulted in the loss of thousands of people, including children and the elderly, who died unable to endure extremely difficult conditions of resettlement, sharp climate changes, physical shock and moral genocide. The then Azerbaijani leadership's anti-national position and their involvement in the organization and implementation of crimes against our fellow countrymen played a role in this process just as much as the criminal policy of Armenian chauvinistic circles and the USSR leadership."



With help from their patrons, Armenian nationalists launched a moral aggression campaign against the Azerbaijani people in the 1950s. They changed historical names of Azerbaijani villages and ancient historical toponyms - An unprecedented event in the history of toponymy.

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

Despite restrictions and expulsion, Azerbaijani-populated areas constituted 25 per cent or 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 Azerbaijanis from their historical and ethnic lands in Armenia took place in 1988-1989 and saw 250,000 people become refugees.

In January 1990, Azerbaijani people's protest against expulsion and attempts to annex the Nagorno-Karabakh region 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.

Once Azerbaijanis were fully expelled from Armenia, Armenians followed on to the next stage of genocide against Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh with further military occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory.

In his speeches, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly stated that modern-day Armenia was established on historically Azerbaijani territory. "Unfortunately, in 1918 the young Azerbaijan Democratic Republic practically gifted Iravan to Armenia and all documents relating to this are available. One of the first resolutions of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was to transfer Iravan to Armenia as its capital even though Azerbaijanis made up the majority of the city's population at that time. This was a big mistake. This did not protect the young Azerbaijani state from Armenian provocations as it was hoped by its leadership. We could say that we lost Iravan but we see today that Armenian claims have not been diminishing. Absurd statements are being made at the highest levels, claiming territories of neighboring countries."

The head of state emphasized that Azerbaijanis should not forget their historical lands. "The Iravan Khanate, Zangazur and Goycha regions are our historical lands. The younger generation and the whole world must know this. I am glad that fundamental research papers are being developed, films are being produced and exhibitions are organized in respect to 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, Azerbaijanis, must return to these historical lands. This is a political and strategic goal that we must strive to gradually reach."

