



MISSION OF AZERBAIJAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS

PRESS RELEASE- Special issue

26 February 2007

PEOPLE OF AZERBAIJAN COMMEMORATE THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE KHOJALY GENOCIDE

26 February 2007 marks the 15th anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide – a bloody crime against humanity committed by Armenian nationalists, the monstrous slaughter of the peaceful inhabitants of the town of Khojaly.

On the night of 25/26 February 1992 Armenian forces committed an unthinkable, brutal crime. They mercilessly massacred hundreds of helpless, innocent people. They did not spare even children, women or the elderly. As a result of the atrocities, 613 civilians, including old people, women and children, were murdered, 1000 were disabled, and 1,275 persons were taken prisoner and subjected to unprecedented torture and humiliation. To this day, the fate of 150 persons is not known.

Various witnesses reported horrifying details of the massacre. The late Azerbaijani journalist Chingiz Mustafayev, wrote: “Some children were found with severed ears; the skin had been cut from the left side of an elderly woman's face; and men had been scalped.”

The Independent reported: “Elif Kaban, a Reuters correspondent in Aghdam, reported that after a massacre, Azeris were burying scores of people who died when Armenians overran the town of Khojaly, the second-biggest Azeri settlement in the area. ‘The world is turning its back on what’s happening here. We are dying and you are just watching’, one mourner shouted at a group of journalists (The Independent, 29 February 1992).

Pascal Privat and Steve Le Vine of Newsweek in the article “The face of massacre” reported: “Azerbaijan was a charnel house again last week: a place of mourning refugees and dozens of mangled corpses dragged to a makeshift morgue behind the mosque. They were ordinary Azerbaijani men, women and children of Khojaly, a small village in war-torn Nagorno-Karabakh overrun by Armenian forces on 25-26 February. Many were killed at close range while trying to flee; some had their faces mutilated, others were scalped” (Newsweek, 16 March 1992)

“Hundreds, possibly thousands were slaughtered in a turkey shoot of civilians and their handful of defenders”, according to accounts of a free-lance journalist Thomas Goltz (Thomas Goltz. Azerbaijan diary, p.150).

As despicable as it may sound, the reason behind this unseen savagery is revealed by Defence minister of Armenia Serge Sarkissian in his interview to British journalist Tomas De Waal: “Before Khojaly the Azerbaijanis thought that... the Armenians were people who could not raise their hands against the civilian population. We were able to break that [stereotype]” (Tomas de Waal. Black Garden, NYU Press. 2003, p.85).

Each year since the massacre the residents of Khojaly that managed to survive, issue send an appeal to the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe, patiently expecting them to finally take appropriate steps to hold the perpetrators of this crime responsible.

The date of 26 February was proclaimed as Day of Khojaly Genocide and National Mourning by a decision of the Milli Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Azerbaijan. A minute of silence is kept every year on 26 February at 5:00 pm to honour the memory of the victims of the Khojaly genocide.

In connection with the 15th Anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide, peaceful rallies and protests have been held in front of Armenian diplomatic and consular offices in many cities of the world, including New York and Washington D.C.

Thousands of Baku residents gathered today at the monument “The Cry of Motherland” to commemorate the victims of the Khojaly genocide. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attended the commemoration ceremony and laid a wreath at the monument. In his address to the nation, President Aliyev called the events of Khojaly “a sorrowful and tragic page in the history of our nation, one of the cruelest and monstrous mass terrors against humanity” and pointed out the significance of raising the international community's awareness of the crimes committed by Armenian nationalists against Azerbaijanis:

“Today, along with the state's official bodies, all our citizens and compatriots must work continuously and consistently to inform the world's parliaments and international community about the truth and facts on the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and the policy of genocide against Azerbaijanis”.

* * * * *