

## KHOJALY GENOCIDE

Historical facts demonstrate that mass resettlement of the Armenian population from Iran and Turkey in the mountainous part of the strategically-important Karabakh region of Azerbaijan started in the early 19th century. An artificial increase in the number of the Armenians in this region encouraged them to lay territorial claims and pursue a policy of invasion against Azerbaijan beginning from the early 20th century.

Over the past 200 years the Azerbaijani people have been continuously subjected to ethnic cleansing and genocide committed by the Armenian nationalists, were driven out of their native lands and became refugees and internally displaced persons. In the early 20th century, the Armenian nationalists expanded their activities towards realizing the idea of a "Great Armenia", which was put forward by the Dashnaktsutyun Party. They embarked on a policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide, expelling the Azerbaijanis – in a planned manner – from their historical lands.

In 1905-1906, the Armenians committed massacres against Azerbaijani civilians in Baku, Ganja, Karabakh, Erivan, Nakhchivan, Ordubad, Sharur-Daralayaz, Tbilisi, Zangazur, Gazakh and other places, murdering them with special brutality, burning and destroying cities and villages.

The Armenian armed groups destroyed more than 200 Azerbaijani villages in Shusha, Zangazur and Jabrayil districts, Erivan and Ganja governorates, tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis were expelled from their homes and became refugees and IDPs. In order to create the tsarist Russia-promised "Armenian state" in these lands, the Armenians conducted ethnic cleansing here, indiscriminately killing more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis (children, women and the elderly).

In continuation of this policy, from the early 1917 to March 1918, the Armenian armed forces destroyed 197 villages in Erivan governorate, 109 villages in Zangazur district and 157 villages in Karabakh, and annihilated, burned and razed to the ground 60 settlements in other regions.

On 31 March and the first days of April 1918, the Armenian-Bolshevik units killed 12,000 peaceful Azerbaijanis in Baku. During those bloody events people were burned alive in their homes, and tortured to death with unprecedented brutality. As a result of the armed attack by the Armenians, more than 16,000 people were slaughtered in Guba district in the first five months of 1918, a total of 167 villages were destroyed, of which 35 have never existed again.

Overall, tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis were slaughtered and more than a million people were expelled from their native lands in Baku, Guba, Shamakhi, Kurdamir, Lankaran, Shusha, Erivan governorate, Zangazur, Nakhchivan, Sharur, Ordubad, Kars and other regions in the massacres committed by the Armenians in 1918-1920. The massacres in historical Azerbaijani lands were accompanied by the burning down of schools, mosques and destruction of cultural monuments.

Having taken the advantage of Sovietization of the South Caucasus, the Armenians managed to include Zangazur and a number of other Azerbaijani lands in the Armenian SSR in 1920. They later extended the policy

of deportation of the Azerbaijanis, who had historically lived in these areas. This resulted in the separation of Nakhchivan from Azerbaijan, with land communication between them cut off. In the ensuing years, the Armenians further extended the policy of deportation of Azerbaijanis, who had historically lived in Zangazur and other areas. In continuation of this policy, the Armenians, who were resettled in the mountainous part of Azerbaijan's Karabakh district in the 19th century, were given the status of an autonomous region on 7 July 1923.

This was done under the aegis and with participation of the Soviet Russia. But there were much more Armenians in other republics of the former Soviet Union than in Karabakh.

And despite the fact that the number of the Azerbaijanis historically living in Armenia exceeded the number of Karabakh Armenians, Azerbaijan never demanded the establishment of any national or state entity for them. An integral part of Azerbaijan, Karabakh was artificially divided in lowland and mountainous parts, and the Azerbaijani government was forced to grant autonomy to the Armenians, who were resettled in the mountainous Karabakh. This autonomy status was given without taking into consideration the opinion of the Azerbaijanis, who historically lived in Nagorno-Karabakh, and in violation of their rights.

This represented not only a flagrant violation of the administrative and territorial division of Azerbaijan, but also paved the way for future Armenian territorial claims to our country. It was then that the term "Nagorno-Karabakh" was coined. Although the decree on autonomy stated that Khankandi was the regional center, it was renamed Stepanakert after S. Shaumyan by the regional committee of Nagorno-Karabakh on 18 September 1923.

Although in Soviet times the Armenian community of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan enjoyed autonomy, which embraced all political, economic, social and cultural advantages, Armenia repeatedly put forward territorial claims, but failed to achieve its goal.

Instead, as a result of the mass deportation of Azerbaijanis in 1948-1953 from their historical lands, particularly from Yerevan and the surrounding areas, about 150,000 of Azerbaijanis were forcibly resettled in low-lying areas of Azerbaijan in accordance with 23 December 1947 decree of the USSR Council of Ministers "On the resettlement of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian SSR in the Kur-Araz lowland of Azerbaijan SSR".

In the late 1980s, with the help of their patrons in the near and far abroad, the Armenians again took advantage of the situation to realize their "Great Armenia" idea and laid territorial claims to the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Each time territorial claims to Nagorno-Karabakh were put forward from the outside, incited by the Armenian propaganda and pressure.

When the events of 1988 just started, in an attempt to aggravate the situation and mislead the public opinion, the Armenian politicians and their patrons started to organize strikes and rallies and halted the activity of enterprises in Khankandi and Yerevan in accordance with a long-term deliberate plan to annex Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia under the pretext of economic backwardness of the region.

However, the ensuing events proved that this false claim about the socio-economic backwardness of Nagorno-Karabakh laid down by the Armenian politicians and their patrons in the center was just a pretext, and that the primary goal behind this campaign was Armenia's territorial claims against Azerbaijan.

The Armenia-Azerbaijan ethnic hostilities escalated in the second half of the year when the Azerbaijani community of Nagorno-Karabakh was brutally attacked. So, in late August and early September, the Armenians attacked Khojaly and Karkijahan. On 18 September, nearly 15,000 Azerbaijanis were forcibly expelled from Khankandi by the Armenians. Their homes were burned down.

In such a tense situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, on 1 December 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR made an unconstitutional decision to annex Nagorno-Karabakh, grossly violating sovereignty of Azerbaijan. Very serious and inexcusable mistakes and pro-Armenian policy of the Soviet leadership led to the aggravation of the situation in late 1990 – early 1991 when Armenian aggression gathered pace in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan's regions bordering with Armenia.

Hundreds of Azerbaijanis were killed in terrorist attacks on Baku-Moscow trains and Tbilisi-Baku, Tbilisi-Agdam, Agdam-Shusha, Agdam-Khojaly buses. Thousands of Azerbaijanis fell victims to the Armenian policy of aggression, which was patronized by the USSR leadership.

Unfortunately, the fact that the Armenian separatists were not stopped at the beginning escalated the situation. As a result, with the help of armed groups and military hardware that came from Armenia, the Armenians committed mass killings of the Azerbaijani civilians, provoking the conflict's degradation into a full-fledged war.

In 1991, the tension in the mountainous part of Karabakh started to gradually deepen. In June and December, the Armenian armed forces killed 12 and wounded 15 Azerbaijanis in the village of Garadagli in Khojavand district and in the village of Meshali in Asgaran district. In August and September of the same year, 17 Azerbaijanis were killed and around 90 others were injured when the Armenian armed detachments shelled buses on Shusha-Jamilli, Agdam-Khojavand and Agdam-Garadagli routes. At the end of October and in November 1991, the Armenians burned, destroyed and looted more than 30 settlements in the mountainous part of Karabakh, including Tug, Imarat-Garvand, Syrkhavand, Meshali, Jamilli, Umudlu, Garadagli, Karkijahan and other villages of strategic importance.

Starting from the early 1992, the Armenian army one by one occupied last residential areas of the Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. On 12 February, the Armenian armed forces occupied Malibayli and Gushchular villages in Shusha. From 13 to 17 February, the Armenians attacked Garadali village in Khojavand district and captured 118 people (children, women, elders), shot down 33 people, and buried the murdered and wounded local residents in wells. Sixty-eight of the hostages were killed with extreme cruelty, while 50 were rescued, with 18 of them later dying because of injuries.

Torture of captives, extremely cruel, barbarous treatment of them, beheading, burial alive, forcible tooth extraction, forced famine – are serious crimes against humanity. In Garadagli village, four members of each of two families were killed, 42 families lost their breadwinner, about 140 children became orphans. Every 10th villager was killed in this village (a total of 91 people), which suffered genocide in the true sense of the word.

Located in the strategically important part of the Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan, the town of Khojaly was impeding the Armenians' occupation plans.

The town was situated 12 km north-east from Khankandi, between Agdam-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. That is why the main goal of the Armenian armed forces was to seize control of the Asgaran-Khankandi highway, which passed through Khojaly, and to occupy the airport in the town.

By committing genocide in Khojaly with extreme cruelty and torture, the Armenians wanted to wipe out the ancient settlements of the Azerbaijanis because being an ancient land, Khojaly differed from other areas with its historic and cultural monuments. With the population of more than 7,000 Azerbaijanis, Khojaly was the largest and ancient residential area (926 square km) surrounded by villages inhabited by the Armenians (5, p10). The ancient monuments in the town had survived to modern time.

Four months before the tragedy took place – in the late October 1991 – all roads to the town were closed, and Khojaly was, in fact, placed under the siege. On 2 January, supply of electricity to Khojaly was halted. Khojaly's connections with other regions of Azerbaijan were cut, and the only way to get to the town was by helicopter. But a few months later helicopter connection was also cut. On 28 January 1992, a MI-8 helicopter heading from Agdam to Shusha was shot down over Khalfali village by a rocket fired from Khankandi, killing 41 Azerbaijani passengers and three crew members aboard. Later the Armenian army occupied the last residential areas of the Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In the late 1991, more than 30 residential areas in the mountainous part of Karabakh, including Tug, Imarat-Garvand, Sirkhavand, Meshali, Jamilli, Umudlu, Karkijahan and other Azerbaijani villages of strategic importance were burned, destroyed and looted by the Armenians.

On the night of 25-26 February 1992, the Armenian armed forces surrounded Khojaly with 10 tanks, 16 armored carriers, nine infantry fighting vehicles, 180 military experts and infantry units of the 366th motor rifle regiment, which was part of the 23rd division of the 4th USSR army deployed in Khankandi. Armed with state-of-the-art weapons, the Armenians razed Khojaly to the ground. The town was destroyed and burned by military hardware, and its civilians were killed with extreme cruelty. Most of them were beheaded, had their eyes gouged out, skinned, and burned alive.

Official figures prove that as a result of the genocidal act in Khojaly 613 people were killed, including 106 women, 63 children and 70 elderly.

- 8 families were completely annihilated;
- 56 people were tortured to death;
- 27 families had only one surviving member;
- 25 children lost both parents;
- 130 children lost one parent;
- 230 families lost the breadwinner;
- 487 people became disabled, including 76 minors;
- 1,275 people were taken hostage;

- 1,165 people were released from captivity;
- fate of 150 people is still unknown.

The self-defense forces in Khojaly fought to the end, resisting the enemy very seriously following the battles, in which the balance of power was not equal. And this was the greatest example of heroism and courage shown by the people who were defending the town. When Khojaly was attacked, 3,000 unarmed civilians in the town, which was encircled by Armenian villages, left it in an attempt to escape the enemy. Unfortunately, almost the vast majority of these people failed to escape from the Armenian atrocities because there was no help to Khojaly at that time.

According to the investigation materials, more than 50 Armenian officers and ensigns were part of the units commanded by incumbent Armenian minister of defense Seyran Ohanyan and commander of the 3rd battalion of the 366th regiment Yevgeni Nabokikh.

In addition, during the withdrawal of the 366th motor rifle regiment of the former USSR from Khankandi, 25 tanks, 87 armored vehicles, 28 infantry fighting vehicles, 45 artillery gun systems were illegally given to Armenians. According to the investigation, the participation of dozens of Armenian officers and warrant officers in the 3rd battalion of the 366th motor rifle regiment during the armed attack on Khojaly was proved. In order to conceal evidence of Khojaly tragedy, the 366th motor rifle regiment was withdrawn from Khankandi to the Georgian city of Vaziani on 2 March 1992. On 10 March the same year the regiment was dissolved, its personnel and military equipment were dispatched distributed to other military units.

Those armed units massacred 111 people in Khojaly. They tortured and killed 16 people, who fled the town, in Ketik forest, 130 on Nakhchivanik road, 23 in Garagaya, 23 near Dehraz village, 8 in the direction of Shelli, 6 in Asgaran and other places. Eighteen of those who were taken hostages were tortured to death in Asgaran Interior Affairs Department. The examination of the bodies, forensic medical examination, testimonies of Khojaly residents, who escaped the siege, revealed evidence that servicemen of the 366th regiment tortured, massacred Azerbaijanis with unprecedented brutality.

Azerbaijani captives detained in Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied regions of Azerbaijan as well as in Armenia faced unbearable tortures, some of them were murdered or became disabled.

Genocide, which was committed by the Armenians in the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly in the late 20th century, is considered one of the gravest crimes against humanity.

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.

This horrific genocide, which occurred before the eyes of the international community, was fully disclosed only after national leader Heydar Aliyev once again assumed leadership of the country in 1993. In February 1994, the Milli Majlis (National Assembly) of the Republic of Azerbaijan conducted a political and legal assessment of the genocide in Khojaly. Today, exposing those responsible for this genocide and ensuring the international community is informed about the events have been identified as key directions of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

Enhanced measures have been taken to convey the truth about Khojaly to the global community, ensure its dissemination at the international level, and achieve an objective evaluation of this genocide.

In this context, the efforts made by Mehriban Aliyeva, the First Vice-President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, deserve special attention. Under her leadership, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation has carried out consistent and systematic work to inform the world public about the Khojaly genocide, which stands as one of the most tragic chapters in human history. Furthermore, on May 8, 2008, marking the anniversary of the capture of the city of Shusha by Armenian armed forces, Leyla Aliyeva, Vice-President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, initiated the "Justice for Khojaly!" campaign, which began in February 2009.

Initiatives aimed at recognizing the genocide and politically assessing this mass tragedy have led to significant results. Thus, the act of genocide in Khojaly and crimes against humanity have been recognized in official documents adopted by the legislative bodies of more than 25 US states, more than 15 countries, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The recognition process continues, affirming international condemnation of this crime and the pursuit of justice.

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