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THE BLACK JANUARY: 16TH ANNIVERSARY OF SOVIET INVASION OF BAKY

On 20 January 1990 the Central Soviet Authorities perpetrated an atrocious crime against the people of Azerbaijan. On that day the Soviet Army stormed Baky – capital of Azerbaijan to punish people rallied on the streets protesting against violations of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the policy of the Communist authorities. Special Soviet troops using heavy offensive weapons, including tanks and armored vehicles, occupied the city. The invasion was launched at the midnight and committed with ferocity and no mercy for children, women and elderly.

As a result of punitive actions more than 130 civilians were killed and 700 wounded, hundreds of people were arrested and subjected to various forms of physical pressure. Among victims were a 7-year old boy, a 16-year old girl, an 80-year old man, a young doctor shot in ambulance while helping another victim, and many other civilians. The Human Rights Watch reported that *“among the most heinous violations of human rights during the Baky incursion were the numerous attacks on medical personnel, ambulances and even hospitals”*. This massacre entered the history of Azerbaijan as the ‘Black January’.

In the winter of 1989-1990, the Azerbaijani National Movement reached a high peak with hundreds of thousands of people struggling for the ideals of independence, territorial integrity and democracy. The purpose of the invasion was to prevent the collapse of the Communist regime and to crush Azerbaijan’s bid for independence. The massacre of 20 January was one of the outrageous manifestations of the totalitarian regime against its own citizens.

The tragedy strengthened the people’s determination for freedom. Year and a half later, on October 18, 1991 Azerbaijan adopted the Constitutional Act on Independence.

This January marks the 16th year anniversary of the tragedy. As it was previously, thousands of people will go to the Alley of Martyrs to pay tribute to the memory of the compatriots who gave their lives for the country's independence.