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31 MARCH – DAY OF GENOCIDE OF AZERBAIJANIS

In 1998 the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan issued the Decree on Declaring March 31 as the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis. The day commemorates a series of violent killings that started in Azerbaijan on March 30, 1918 and continued until April 1.

Taking advantage of the situation following the end of the First World War and the February and October 1917 revolutions in Russia, the Armenian nationalists began to pursue the implementation of their plans under the banner of Bolshevism. Under the watchword of combating counter-revolutionary elements, in March 1918 the Armenian Bolshevik and nationalist groups set fire to homes and burned people alive. They destroyed national architectural treasures, schools, hospitals, mosques and other facilities, and left the greater part of Baku in ruins. In Baku alone, between 8,000 and 12,000 people were killed and about 30,000 perished in Azerbaijan as a whole. The British consul in Baku, Mac Dowell, wrote, "*There weren't any Moslems in the town except corpses.*"

Unfortunately, the sufferings of Azerbaijanis do not only belong to the history. This is today's tragic reality as twenty percent of Azerbaijan's territory is occupied by Armenia and about one million refugees and internally displaced persons are scattered across the country.

The act of genocide in Khojaly in 1992 and other murders in the course of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan makes it necessary to properly assess the history of Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus as a whole since territorial claims and historical falsifications overwhelms vocabulary of local policy makers in Armenia.

Commemoration of 31 March is the demonstration of the national memory about the tragic events in the history of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani people. During Soviet domination, Azerbaijan was unable to commemorate this tragedy but after the restoration of independence, the people of Azerbaijan take serious steps on the path of researching and preventing genocide as well as education about its history.