



Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan

**PRESS-RELEASE**

**January 19, 2011**

**No. 1**

**21<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY of THE BLACK JANUARY**

On January 20, the people of Azerbaijan commemorates a tragedy, which became a turning point in the nation's struggle for independence from the former Soviet Union and one of the most tragic events in its recent history.

Many political analysts today believe that the Soviet Union sealed its own fate in Baku on January 20, 1990. The Soviet leadership was afraid that the independence movement in Azerbaijan will gain momentum. As, a few months earlier the domino effect took place in Central Europe, with the fall of Berlin wall, and freedom of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The leadership sought not only to punish Azerbaijanis for their increasingly independent stance, but also to send a message to them and to all the other republics that their Moscow rulers were prepared to do anything, including murder, to hold on to their power.

Hundreds of innocent people were killed and wounded as a result of the massive terror, and peaceful population, who stood up for national liberation and territorial integrity of its country, was massacred. This once again demonstrated to the whole world the criminal nature of the totalitarian Soviet regime on the threshold of its collapse. The large contingent of the Soviet Army, commandos and interior troops entered Baku on the night of January 19 and 20, 1990 committing special cruelty and unprecedented murderous deeds.

As a result of state terror act, more than 130 civilians were killed and 700 wounded, hundreds of people were arrested and subjected to various forms of physical pressure. Soviet tanks were running over the cars carrying senior people, shooting at random the civilians in the streets and the people looking out of the windows of their apartments, as well as ambulances carrying the victims. The purpose of the invasion, as it was acknowledged by then - USSR Defence Minister Dmitriy Yazov, was to prevent the collapse of the Communist regime and to crush Azerbaijan's bid for independence.

The Black January event demonstrated the will and courage of people no longer fearing the terror deployed by the Soviet Union to provide loyalty among its subjects and preferring freedom to the stability maintained under the Soviet system's violence and stranglehold.

In 2007, The Honourable Peter Mackay, then Foreign Minister of Canada sent a letter to the Federation of Azerbaijani Societies of Canada on the occasion of the commemoration of January 20 tragedy. He said historical notes on the January 20 show that armless civilians were massacred by security forces of former Soviet Union. "These events are one of the black pages of Azerbaijani history. The victims of the January 20 event, who demonstrated heroism for the independence of the country, should not be forgotten," he said.

Twenty months after Black January, Azerbaijan declared its independence. Today, Azerbaijan is an independent country with a rapidly growing GDP and an important player in regional energy and security issues.