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KHOJALY MASSACRE

In February 1992, an unprecedented massacre was committed against the Azerbaijani population in Khojaly, a small town in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. This bloody tragedy, which became known as Khojaly massacre, involved the extermination or capture of the thousands of Azerbaijanis; the town was razed to the ground. Over the night from 25 to 26 February 1992, the Armenian armed forces with the help of the infantry guards regiment № 366 of the former USSR implemented the seizure of Khojaly, killed hundreds of innocent civilians, while committing atrocities against them.

As a result of Khojaly massacre, 613 persons were murdered, including 106 women, 83 small children, and 70 elderly persons and 1,275 peaceful inhabitants were taken hostage. Of those who perished, 56 persons were killed with especial cruelty: by burning alive, scalping, beheading, gouging out of eyes, and bayoneting of pregnant women in the abdomen. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its relevant report described the event in Khojaly as **“the largest massacre to date in the conflict.”**

The Khojaly massacre was not an accidental outbreak of violence in the course of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan initiated by Armenian nationalists in 1988 to annex the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, but rather a deliberate act of mass murder, with excessive use of force aimed at intimidating the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The current president of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sarkissian (the then chair of NK region Self-Defense Forces Committee), quoted in *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* by Thomas de Waal, admits to the reason behind Khojaly massacre: *“Before Khojaly, Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that stereotype. And that’s what happened.”* The Khojaly tragedy was also a follow-up and bloody page of the policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide pursued by the Armenian nationalists against Azerbaijani people over a hundred year.

Although Armenian officials by airily falsifying facts and sharing own interpretations of them, deny their responsibility for the crimes committed during the conflict, including Khojaly massacre, their responsibility is documented by numerous independent sources and eyewitnesses of this tragedy.

Considering that the Armenian aggression still continues and Azerbaijani territories are under occupation, this aggression, as well as the crimes committed by Armenia towards civilian Azerbaijanis should be condemned and politically-legally assessed by the international community. As, unpunished crimes pave the way for new crimes.

Commemoration event organized by Azerbaijani community of Ottawa and the Embassy of Azerbaijan will be held **on March 2, at 7PM, at National Library and Archives** of Canada.

Armenian Allegations

The Armenian government, media and some diaspora organizations blame the events in Khojaly on Azerbaijanis themselves. According to the Armenian version, the Khojaly event was conspired by Azerbaijani opposition, namely the Popular Front, and implemented by Azerbaijani armed groups controlled by the Popular Front. To prove this version of the event the Armenian side present several “evidences” – all are forged.

Allegation # 1:

The Armenian side argues that the killings occurred as a result of wartime military operations, and were in part caused by the prevention of the evacuation of the town’s inhabitants by Azerbaijani forces.

Answer:

In response to such allegations the executive director of Human Rights Watch stated in her letter: “*we place direct responsibility for the civilian deaths with Karabakh Armenian forces. Indeed, neither our report nor that of Memorial includes any evidence to support the argument that Azerbaijani forces obstructed the flight of, or fired on Azeri civilians.*”¹

Allegation # 2

Armenians argue that so-called armed forces of Nagorno-Karabakh left a “humanitarian corridor” so as civilians would escape from Khojaly.

Answer:

The report of Memorial, a Moscow-based human rights group, on the massive violations of human rights committed during the massacre of Khojaly, says of the civilians fleeing the town: “*Fell into ambushes set by the Armenians and came under fire. Some of them nonetheless managed to get into Agdam [city nearby Khojaly]; others, mostly women and children, froze to death while lost in the mountains; others still, according to testimony from those who reached Agdam, were taken prisoner...*”²

Allegation # 3

The Armenian side points out that the attack on Khojaly was necessary action due to the strategic location of the town, and was done in the course of war.

Answer:

HRW and Memorail stated in their reports that the mass killing of civilians in Khojaly could not be justified under any circumstances and that action of Armenian militants were in gross violation of a number of basic international human rights conventions. HRW noted that “*the attacking party [i.e., Karabakh Armenian forces] is still obliged to take precautionary measures to avoid or minimize civilian casualties. In particular, the party must suspend an attack if it becomes apparent that the attack may be*

¹ Letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia from the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch dated March 24, 1997, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/1997/03/24/azerba16933.htm>

² Report of Memorial Human Rights Center (In Russian), <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/karabah/Hojaly/>

*expected to cause civilian casualties that are excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.”*³

Allegation # 4

Armenians say that Khojaly was solely the result of political intrigue and a struggle for power in Azerbaijan. They refer to then president of Azerbaijan Ayaz Mutallibov who allegedly confessed that Khojaly was designed by opposition forces within Azerbaijan.

Answer:

Ayaz Mutallibov in an interview to Armenian News Agency regnum said that: “*Any reference to me stating that the Popular Front facilitated to the fall of Khojaly is blatant lie. I said only that the Popular Front took advantage of the situation to come to power.*”⁴

³ Letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia from the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch dated March 24, 1997, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/1997/03/24/azerba16933.htm>

⁴ Interview of Ayaz Mutalibov to Regnum News Agency, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/223355.html>