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THE BLACK JANUARY: 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF SOVIET INVASION OF BAKY

On 20 January 1990 the Central Soviet Authorities perpetrated an atrocious crime against Azerbaijani people. 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. Special Soviet troops using heavy offensive weapons, including tanks and armored vehicles, occupied a city. 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. 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 only purpose of invasion was to prevent the collapse of the Communist regime and to crush Azerbaijan’s bid for independence.

The invasion of Baky was a very calculated and deliberate move. The inspired clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Baky were used for the pretext of imposing curfew. At the same time the Soviet authorities did not announce a curfew timely before to order a military operation against civilians. It was nothing but proved their intention to punish people.

The invasion was launched at the midnight and committed with ferocity and no mercy for children, women and elderly. 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”.

Unfortunately, the perpetrators of the 20 January tragedy went unpunished. While the punitive actions against public in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1989 and Vilnius, Lithuania in 1991 were strongly condemned by the Soviet and world public, the truth of the Black January received less public attention through the efforts of the Soviet authorities. The Soviet authorities removed all files and evidences related to this massacre from Azerbaijan. The massacre of 20 January was one of the outrageous manifestations of the totalitarian regime against its own citizen.

This January marks the 15th 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.

Contact: Jeyhun Shahverdiyev
(613)2880497 ext.244
jeyhun.shahverdiyev@azembassy.ca