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GENOCIDE IN KHOJALY

On the night of February 26, 1992 Armenian armed forces, directly supported by the 366th regiment of the former USSR, stationed at that time in the town of Khankendi in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan attacked, from five directions, the town of Khojaly. By that time, Khojaly had already been under siege by Armenian armed forces for more than four months. With the support of numerous heavy combat weapons the town was completely destroyed and burned down.

As a result of the Khojaly genocide, 613 persons were murdered, including 106 women, 83 small children, and 70 elderly persons and 1,275 peaceful inhabitants were taken hostage. The Human Rights Watch in its relevant report described the event in Khojaly as "the largest massacre to date in the conflict". 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 flee in 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..."

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 defence minister of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sarkissian, 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 slaughter in Khojaly is not known to many though the awareness of the international community is increasing. US Congressman Dan Burton of Indiana raised the issue of Khojaly in the House of Representative last week, on February 18, pointing out that "for years a number of distinguished Members of this House have come to the Floor of this Chamber every April to commemorate the so-called Armenian Genocide - the exact details of which are still very much under debate today almost 90 years after the events. Ironically and tragically, none of these Members has ever once mentioned the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Armenians during the Armenia-Azerbaijan war which ended a mere decade ago... The level of brutality and the unprecedented atrocities committed at Khojaly set a pattern of destruction and ethnic cleansing that Armenian troops would adhere to for the remainder of the war... I hope my colleagues will join me in standing with Azerbaijanis as they commemorate the tragedy of Khojaly. The world should know and remember."

The tragedy of Khojaly stands as the most vivid reminder of the consequences of Armenian aggression and policy of ethnic cleansing. Its survivors are still scattered among one million refugees and displaced persons in camps around Azerbaijan, and Armenia still occupies 20% of Azerbaijan's territory.

Additional information can be found at: www.human.gov.az, <http://www.come.to/khojaly>, <http://www.armenianterror.net/>
<http://www.khojaly.org.az:8101/>

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