



Promoting a Lasting Partnership Between Azerbaijan and America

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Azerbaijan commemorates 20 January tragedy

Khojaly is a small village within the Nagorno Karabakh region which, in 1992, had a population of about 6,300 people. In one night, nearly 10% of the population was wiped out in a massacre

Baku, Azerbaijan — January 20, 2014 — Today marks the 24th anniversary of the massacre of civilians on the streets of Baku by Soviet armed forces. It is a National Day of Mourning in Azerbaijan and is also marked by Azerbaijanis in many countries around the world, AzerNews reports.

Government officials, foreign diplomats and members of the public visit Martyrs' Avenue, where the victims of the 20 January tragedy are buried. A variety of events – conferences, round tables, photo exhibitions and documentary screenings - are being held in many countries.

Overnight on 19 to 20 January 1990, Soviet armed forces were sent onto the streets of Baku to quell Azerbaijan's burgeoning independence movement. The soldiers killed at least 134 civilians, wounded over 600 and arrested more than 800.

Mass demonstrations had been held in the city to protest at Soviet Armenia's decision to annex the Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and at the Soviet leadership's acquiescence in this.

Mikhail Gorbachev broke Article 119 of the USSR Constitution and Article 71 of the Constitution of Soviet Azerbaijan when he signed the order introducing a state of emergency in Baku from 20 January 1990.

The fully armed troops were sent onto the streets of Baku to enforce the state of emergency, which was ostensibly designed to protect the families of servicemen and prevent "national extremists" taking over Azerbaijan.

The killing of unarmed civilians gave the lie to these claims. Tanks and armored personnel carriers rolled onto the streets, crushing all before them, while servicemen from the Soviet Defense Ministry, Interior Ministry and KGB fired indiscriminately. They shot at people trying to run away, at passengers on buses, people in their homes and ambulance staff trying to help the wounded.

The dead included men, women and children from five ethnic groups. Azerbaijan was in shock and the tragedy marked the beginning of the end of Soviet power in the republic. The loss of life only strengthened the desire for independence.

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