

## **Khojaly genocide, bloody and painful memory in hearts**

**By Mushvig Mehdiyev**

Another February has come with the bloody memories of Khojaly, the city that witnessed the most violent ever Armenian vandalism against Azerbaijanis.

On February 26, Azerbaijanis all over the world will pay homage to the memories of the massacred people in Khojaly twenty-three years ago. The genocide in Azerbaijan's occupied city is one of the most terrible massacres against innocent people in the history of mankind.

This crime was the next stage of Armenia's aggressive policy of genocide against Azerbaijanis. Khojaly event is not the first example of Armenia's anti-Azerbaijan vandalism, as the massacre of Azerbaijanis in Baku, Guba, Shamakhi and other cities in 1918 proved Armenian's barbarism based on ethnic hatred.

The tragedy in Khojaly was part of Armenia's ethnic cleansing and genocide policy against Azerbaijani people for over 200 years. Defying all norms of the international law, the Armenian government decided to annex Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region into its territory and spared no effort to commit all possible types of crime and barbarism to realize its baseless ideology.

Armenia's bloodthirstiness put behind all limits when the country's troops launched a furious attack on the Khojaly city late into night from February 25 to 26, killing 613 civilian Azerbaijanis with an unforeseen brutality.

Besides claiming 613 innocent lives, Armenian barbarism also disabled some 1,000 people, eradicating eight families completely. About 25 children lost one of their parents and 130 others were completely deprived of their parents in the wake of an ethnic cleansing by Armenian troops in Khojaly.

It was genocide against pure tiny hearts which were filled with beautiful and happy dreams that were lingering in the city's air before the bloody invasion of Armenians.

The violent Armenian soldiers took 1,275 innocent people hostages, 150 of them are still missing. Armenian vandalism resorted to the most inhuman ways of realizing the genocide against Azerbaijanis in Khojaly. They shot the civilians at close range, scalped and decapitated them, burned them alive and gouged out their eyes.

Even pregnant women fell victim to Armenian butchery, as their babies were inhumanly taken out of their abdomen and nailed to the walls.

The Khojaly massacre was one of the most serious crimes not only against the people of Azerbaijan, but also the humanity as a whole. The Khojaly genocide is comparable to the genocides in Khatin, and Serebrenitsa.

Escaping from the Armenian torture and vandalism, some of the Khojaly residents fled to forests. Having got weakened in the snowy passages and forests, they were brutally killed by the Armenian armed forces.

Some children managed to survive the cold winter, carrying their horrible memories and horror with themselves. Those children, who've lost their childhood along with their spotless dreams of future are now suffering from recalling the terrible night of being subjected to the worst ever events twenty-three years ago.

It is impossible for them to remember that bloody night with a calm heart and steady pulse. Suffering, pain, and torture knock on their hearts whenever they imagine the Armenian vandalism in Khojaly.

No one can describe the horrors of that night better than the eye witnesses of that heinous massacre.

Turkan Turan was just 12 years old when the white winter was covered with the red color of the bloody massacre. She lost her happy memories just in few hours when an Armenian vandal raped her.

"It is twenty-three years now that I cannot escape the nightmare of Khojaly and the smell of blood. My memories bother me whenever I stand in front of the mirror. I experienced the most brutal ever winter in my life in Khojaly in 1992. Armenian soldiers invaded our home. They forced us to leave and took us to a place where the deafening cries of tens of women and children were heard. The soldiers were raping the women and girls, beating brutally all men. About 20 men were killed just in few minutes.

"We will exterminate you Azerbaijanis, you are doomed to death" was the most heard words. We were kept in a dark room. One of the soldiers suddenly reached me and took me away from my mother's embrace. He dragged me to a room where I met an older Armenian serviceman. He first beat and then raped me. I feel an unbearable pain when he put out a cigarette on my body. It was so painful that I started to dream of death," she remembers with a deep grief in her eyes.

Taleh, the then six-year old survivor of the genocide feels his heartbeats slowing down when he recalls the events he witnessed in Khojaly.

"On that bloody night, my father had just returned from work. He said that the situation was getting worse in the city. My mother laid the table to have supper as we did every night. Suddenly fire was opened from all sides and Khojaly consistently went under fire. There was blood everywhere. Me, my younger sister, my mother, my aunt, and other relatives tried to hide, but we failed when Armenians kept all of us. Everywhere in the city was filled with corpses. Bodies of infants were hung over the fences," he enlivened that tragic night with saddened eyes.

Mehdi Aliyev, the then 4-year-old witness of the genocide said he lost his father Firdovsi, mother Heyran, brothers Elchin, Eldaniz and other relatives during the Khojaly genocide.

"I am the only member of our family who survived that tragic night. Now, I am alone," he said.

Modern Azerbaijan is well aware of the genocide against its people by Armenians twenty-three years ago. The Azerbaijani government has been taking various measures to raise public awareness about the realities of the Khojaly genocide worldwide.

The "Justice for Khojaly" International Awareness Campaign was initiated in 2008 by Leyla Aliyeva, General Coordinator of the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation.

The campaign is aimed at raising international awareness about the genocide by creative photos and images depicting people who fell victim to the violence during the Karabakh conflict, particularly the Khojaly massacre. They also try to reach out throughout the world via media, Internet, and live events.

Several international organizations including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have passed resolutions recognizing the Khojaly genocide. The parliaments of Pakistan, Mexico, Colombia, Romania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Jordan, as well as legislative bodies of about 20 states of the United States, including Texas, New-Mexico, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Western Virginia, New-Jersey and Tennessee have adopted relevant documents.

The Khojaly tragedy will remain in Azerbaijan's history as an example of Armenia's awful brutality with its inconceivable atrocity and inhuman massacre methods.

Twenty-three years have passed since the Khojaly tragedy, but the pain of Khojaly will never be forgotten along with the tears and bloods of the Khojaly inhabitants.

Time could not erase this memory from the hearts and minds of Azerbaijanis, as millions of people in and out of Azerbaijan pay tribute to the genocide victims' memories annually on February 26.

The bloody page of Azerbaijan's history will also be delivered to the future generations, making them know Azerbaijan's enemy, Armenia.