

Azerbaijan marks 95th anniversary of March 31 genocide

By Sara Rajabova

The Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis is commemorated in Azerbaijan on March 31. The date reflects the memory of the bloody and tragic events of Azerbaijan's history that occurred in the early 20th century.

The commissioner for human rights (ombudsman) of Azerbaijan Elmira Suleymanova issued a statement in connection with March 31. The statement said that as a result of a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing, genocide and deportation of Azerbaijanis pursued in the last two centuries by Armenian nationalists and their supporters, the Azerbaijani people faced serious challenges.

"We reiterate that this genocide was accompanied by gross and massive violations of human rights," Suleymanova said in the statement. "We hope that the world community, international organizations will support the just demands of Azerbaijan that it is a brutal crime against humanity, it will get the international legal assessment as an act of genocide and the perpetrators will not go unpunished."

Suleymanova called on international organizations to support the just position of Azerbaijan, refraining from double standards, saying "we believe that justice will triumph soon, the international organizations will impose sanctions against Armenia which committed genocide, the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the massively violated right of refugees and internally displaced persons will be restored and the hostages will be freed."

The massacre of Azerbaijanis and repressions committed against them should be considered as the bloodiest page of the world history of the 20th century. On March 31, 1918 the Baku Commune and the Armenian nationalists committed unprecedented violence in the history of mankind by perpetrating massacres and executions.

Members of the Armenian Dashnak party in concert with Soviet Bolsheviks massacred about 20,000 innocent Azerbaijani people, including the elderly, women and children, starting on the night of March 30, 1918.

During March-April 1918, hundreds of Azerbaijanis were executed by Armenians in Baku, Shamakhy, Guba, Mughan and tens of thousands of people were expelled from their lands.

Armenian Bolshevik troops led by Stepan Shaumyan massacred thousands of people, burnt Islamic shrines and confiscated the 400-million-manat estate of Baku residents. Tezepir Mosque was bombed, and one of the magnificent architectural buildings, Ismailiyyeh, was burnt down.

The genocide policy pursued against Azerbaijanis was not limited to Baku. Armenian dashnaks killed 8,027 Azerbaijanis, including 2,560 women and 1,277 children, in 53 villages of Shamakhy, 110 km west of Baku, on March 31. Also, 16,000 Azerbaijanis were murdered in 122 villages of Guba, northern Azerbaijan.

The evidence of the Armenian vandalism in Guba is the burial of remains of the genocide victims. The burial was discovered during the construction of a stadium in Guba in 2007.

It was proven that people, whose remains were found in a mass grave in Guba region, were killed by Armenians in 1918.

Along with Azerbaijanis killed with extreme cruelty, thousands of Lezgis, Jews and people of other nationalities living in Guba at the time were also exposed to violence.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on the establishment of the Guba memorial complex to the victims of genocide in Guba region on December 30 last year. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation developed a project of the memorial complex to the victims of the genocide.

The Armenian dashnaks also burnt thousands of villages in Lenkeran, Mughan and Nagorno-Karabakh and killed thousands of people there.

About 150 villages in the mountainous part of Karabakh, 115 in Zangazur, 211 in Iravan province and 92 in Kars region were razed to the ground; people were executed with brutality.

The Special Investigation Commission set up by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on July 15, 1918 collected a great number of documents and submitted them to the government. In 1919, the Azerbaijani parliament made a decision on marking March 31 as the day of Azerbaijanis' genocide.

Though this date was essentially forgotten during the Soviet times, relevant investigations on the tragedy were carried out and books were published after Azerbaijan gained independence from the USSR in 1991.

President Heydar Aliyev issued a decree on March 26, 1998 to commemorate March 31 as the Day of Azerbaijanis' Genocide.

Recognition of the genocide

Representatives of Azerbaijani and Turkish diasporas in the U.S. sent an appeal to the Congress in connection with the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis, which was asked to inform the worldwide community in this regard.

The US New Jersey state's Assembly last Friday issued a commemorative resolution that recognizes March 31 as Azerbaijani Remembrance Day marking the 95th anniversary of the Azerbaijani Genocide.

The resolution highlighted that the genocide of March 1918, in which more than 20,000 innocent Azerbaijani people lost their lives, was an event that represents one of the most condemnable atrocities in world history.

The New York State Senate after the adoption of Resolution 3784 in March 2012 became the first state ever to recognize the Genocide of Azerbaijanis in law. The resolution also recognized March 31 as Azerbaijani Remembrance Day.

Besides, US State of Nevada has twice issued a proclamation - in 2009 and 2011- on observing March 31 as a Day of Remembrance, honoring the victims resulting from the fighting that began in March 1918.

Also, US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Richard Morningstar condemned the 1918 genocide of Azerbaijanis.

Morningstar visited the Guba burial, which is proof of the genocide committed by Armenians against Azerbaijanis in 1918.

According to the ambassador, all the actions that caused the killing of civilians are unacceptable. He said such events, which have brought so much pain to the Azerbaijani people, prove the importance of a solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in a short period of time.

Earlier, the Azerbaijani youth association operating in Germany appealed to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon over March 31, the Day of Genocide. The association called on the UN and other international organizations to acknowledge the fact of genocide against Azerbaijani civilians that occurred in the early 20th century and support the fair position of Azerbaijan by rejecting the policy of double standards.

1905-1907 massacres

The March 31 genocide wasn't the first and the last massacre committed by Armenian vandals.

From the second half of the 19th century Armenians have committed genocide against Azerbaijanis as an organized and planned policy. Inspired by the idea of establishing "Great Armenia", Armenian invaders started to openly implement on a wide scale their evil actions against the Azerbaijani people during 1905-1907.

Armenians embarked on their brutal acts in Baku and further spread them through the rest of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani villages in the current territory of Armenia. Hundreds of villages were burnt in the provinces of Zangezur, Iravan, Nakhchivan, Ordubad, Gazakh and Karabakh of Azerbaijan, and all -- from children to the elderly -- were cruelly killed.

Khojaly Massacre

The Khojaly genocide was one of the most brutal massacres committed in the late 20th century.

The town of Khojaly was situated within the administrative borders of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Its population constituted over 7,000 people.

Late into the night of February 25, 1992, Khojaly came under intensive fire from the towns of Khankendi and Askeran already occupied by Armenian armed forces. The Armenian forces, supported by the ex-Soviet 366th regiment, completed the surrounding of the town already isolated due to ethnic cleansing of the Azerbaijani population of the neighboring regions. The joint forces occupied the town, which was ruined by heavy artillery shelling.

Thousands of fleeing civilians were ambushed by the Armenian forces. Punitive teams of the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh defense army reached the unprotected civilians to slaughter them, mutilating and scalping some of the bodies. 613 civilians, including 106 women, 70 elderly and 83 children, were killed in the massacre. A total of 1,000 civilians were disabled. Eight families were exterminated, and 25 children lost both parents, while 130 children lost one parent. Moreover, 1,275 innocent people were taken hostage, while the fate of 150 remains unknown.

Garadagly tragedy

Armenian aggressors used every chance, every reason to slaughter the innocent Azerbaijani people.

Another massacre was committed by Armenian invaders in February 1992 in the Garadagly village of the Khojavand region.

Situated between Khankandi and Khojavand region centre, Garadagly had been continuously attacked by gangs of Armenian bandits from the very beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict because of its being encircled by Armenian villages. Garadagly had been attacked 305 times from February 1988 until February 1992. In all these combats the village had suffered casualties. One of the favourable conditions for Armenians to commit atrocities in Garadagly was that the village had been cut off from land communications with other Azerbaijani settlements and it had no air communications.

As a result of the occupation of the village every resident above ten was killed by the Armenians. A total 117 residents of the village lost their lives in Garadagly and dozens of people were taken hostage.

This massacre was called the 'second Khojaly'.

The Armenian invaders continue their aggressive policy. Although the time has changed, but the atrocious nature of the Armenians has not changed.

The tragedies which took place in Azerbaijan in the XIX-XX centuries and resulted in the occupation of Azerbaijani lands formed the consecutive stages of Armenia's purposeful hostile policy against the Azerbaijani people.

The two South Caucasus countries for over two decades have been locked in conflict, which emerged over Armenian territorial claims. Since a lengthy war in the early 1990s, Armenian armed forces have occupied over 20 percent of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory, including Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent regions. The UN Security Council has adopted four resolutions on Armenia's withdrawal from the Azerbaijani territory, but they have not been enforced to this day.

A precarious cease-fire was signed in 1994. However, units of the Armenian armed forces commit armistice breaches on the frontline almost every day.

Despite the vandalism committed by Armenian invaders against the Azerbaijani people, these acts haven't received due condemnation by the world community to date.

The Azerbaijani people are still having to tolerate the Armenian vandalism and the unjust position and double standards of the world community.