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Press release

29th anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide

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At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, Armenia unleashed a full-scale war against Azerbaijan. As a result, part of the territory of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven surrounding districts, was occupied by Armenia. The war claimed lives of tens of thousands of people while thousands more are still missing; cities, towns and villages were left in ruins and their Azerbaijani population was subjected to ethnic cleansing. Some of these acts, which constitute war crimes, also amount to the crime of genocide, as Azerbaijanis have been intentionally targeted to be murdered on the basis of their nationality and/or ethnicity.

Twenty-nine years ago, the largest massacre of the conflict was committed against civilians and defenders of the town of Khojaly in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

Before the conflict the town has a population of 7,000. Starting in October 1991 the town was besieged and entirely surrounded by Armenian forces. Throughout the winter of 1991–1992 the town was bombarded by artillery directly targeting civilian infrastructure on an almost daily basis. During the night of 25–26 February 1992, following heavy shelling, the town was overrun from several directions. The assault was carried out by the Armenian armed forces, with assistance from elements of the 366th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment of the former Soviet Armed Forces. As a result of the attack and capture of the town, hundreds of Azerbaijanis, including women, children and elderly, were killed, wounded or taken hostage, while the town was razed to the ground.

There are abundant sources, consisting, *inter alia*, of documents of international organizations and findings of independent investigations by foreign journalists, human rights activists and international non-governmental organizations, which contribute to corroborating the facts on the ground.

International media, such as The Washington Post, The Washington Times, The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Los Angeles Times, The Times, The Sunday Times, Newsweek, The Irish Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Age (Australia), Milliyet (Turkey), Komsomolskaya Pravda (Russia), Pravda (Russia), Trud (Russia), as well as human rights organizations, such as the Human Rights Watch and Memorial, widely reported horrors of killings of residents and defenders of Khojaly by direct attacks, indiscriminate gunfire and other brutal acts.

International organizations and the European Court of Human Rights have recognized the gravity of atrocities committed in Khojaly. In its Declaration dated 11 March 1992, just weeks after the massacre, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe expressed deep concern “about recent reports of indiscriminate killings and outrages” in Azerbaijan and firmly condemned “the violence and attacks directed against the civilian populations in the Nagorno Karabakh area of the Azerbaijan Republic”. The European Court of Human Rights has concluded that the massacre in Khojaly involved “acts of particular gravity which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity”. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation has called for international and national recognition of the “mass massacre of Azerbaijani

civilians perpetrated by the Armenian armed forces in the town of Khojaly” as a “genocidal act” and a “crime against humanity”.

At the present time, national legislative bodies of 17 countries, as well as 23 States of the USA have adopted resolutions and decisions condemning the massacre of civilians in Khojaly and assessing it as a crime against humanity. At the same time, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States have adopted resolutions and statements strongly condemning the Khojaly genocide.

The crimes committed in Khojaly were not an isolated or sporadic act, but an integral part of Armenia’s widespread and systematic policy and practice. Azerbaijani civilians in many other villages and cities were subjected to similar atrocities by Armenian forces. Recently published comprehensive report on war crimes committed in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides convincing evidence of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law for which Armenia bears clear responsibility under international law, including individual criminal responsibility.

In a cynical admission of culpability, Armenia’s then Defense Minister and President from 2008 to 2018 Serzh Sargsyan was quoted by the British journalist Thomas de Waal, as saying, “before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that ... the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that stereotype” (Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York and London, New York University Press, 2003), p. 172)).

On 8 May 2008, “Justice for Khojaly” international awareness campaign was launched to increase public knowledge about Khojaly, especially among young people, express solidarity with victims and support survivors, as well as to mobilize the public in condemning massacres, ethnic cleansing and discrimination on racial, ethnic or religious grounds. To date, hundreds of thousands of people and hundreds of organizations from various countries have joined the campaign. Social networks, exhibitions, rallies, contests, conferences, seminars, publications and other public and academic activities are among tools used by the campaign to promote its objectives (for more information about the campaign, see www.justiceforkhojaly.org).

On the occasion of the 29th anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide, the following documents and films are made available:

- Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the occasion of the 29th anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/7224/view>
- Letter from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary General of the UN (A/75/745-S/2021/156): <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/045/07/pdf/N2104507.pdf?OpenElement>
- STATEMENT of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the 29th anniversary of Khojaly Genocide: <https://ombudsman.az/en/view/news/2395/statement-of-the-commissioner-for-human-rights-ombudsman-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-on-the-29th-anniversary-of-khojaly-genocide>
- APPEAL of Religious Leaders in Azerbaijan to the World Community on the 29th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide: <https://coe.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3422/appeal-of-religious-leaders-in-azerbaijan-to-the-world-community-on-the-29th-anniversary-of-the-khojaly-genocide>
- Short film on the Khojaly massacre: <https://youtu.be/XFVbgwLR1Bs>