

THE AZERBAIJANI PERSPECTIVE:

News from the Heart of the Silk Road

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Remembering the Tragedy of Khojaly

On February 26, 1992, Armenian troops backed by Russian forces brutally annihilated the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Human Rights Watch called Khojaly “the largest massacre” in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. 17 years ago in Khojaly, 613 people, including 106 women and 63 children, were tortured to death, with hundreds more missing. Over 1,000 people received permanent health damage, 1,275 people were taken hostage, 8 families were fully destroyed.

International media and observers have documented multiple cases of scalping and other forms of mutilation as an integral part of thorough ethnic cleansing of the occupied Azerbaijani territories by Armenian forces. Armenia’s current President Serj Sarkissian, who at the time was a field commander, admitted to the British journalist Thomas DeWaal that “before Khojali, the 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]. (Thomas De Waal. Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War, NYU Press, 2004).

Khojaly stands as a symbol of brutality and suffering of civilians on both sides of this war. Bringing its perpetrators to justice is important for achieving peace in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijani authorities, encouraged by increased international pressure on war criminals following the arrest of Radovan Karadzic, have submitted the names of 248 suspected perpetrators of Khojaly to Interpol.

Khojaly Week in the United States

The Azerbaijani-American community joined Azerbaijanis around the world in commemorating the tragedy of Khojaly. Events took place in Houston, New York and Washington, DC. In California, on Feb.20, the Azerbaijani- American Council, the Turkic Student Association and the North California Azerbaijan Society organized a panel at UC Berkeley featuring Azerbaijani MPs Asim Mollazade and Havva Mammadova as well as Montana State University professor Thomas Goltz, journalist Shafaq Mehraliyeva and military expert Reshad Karimov. The message of the event was best summarized by Mr. Mollazade, who said that “Azerbaijan seeks justice, but not revenge for Khojaly.”

The Consulate General in Los Angeles also hosted a discussion with MP Havva Mammadova on Feb 23. More information is available at <http://justiceforkhojaly.org/>

In other news:

*On Feb.23, MP Asim Mollazde met with his counterparts at the California Assembly in Sacramento to discuss expanding Azerbaijan-California ties. He was officially recognized at the Assembly floor.

*Azerbaijan announced that it will double its peacekeeping presence in Afghanistan within the NATO-led coalition.

*Consul General Suleymanov visited Oregon on Feb. 10-13, where he met with officials, including Portland Mayor Adams, spoke at a World Affairs Council/Consular Corp event and two Jewish community meetings. Articles from the Oregonian and the Eugene Register-Guard about the visit are available at www.azconsulatela.org

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