



AZƏRBAYCAN RESPUBLİKASININ BAŞ KONSULLUĞU
CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Shusha: A Community Devastated and Displaced

May 8, 2007 - Members of the Azerbaijani and Turkish communities in Southern California gathered at the Consulate General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles to mark the 15th anniversary of the occupation of the historic Azerbaijani town of Shusha by Armenian armed forces. On May 8, the people of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis throughout the world pause to remember this sad day and the devastation of Karabakh's once most picturesque and vibrant towns.

Shusha stands as uniquely important for the history and culture of Azerbaijan. An Israeli author Brenda Shaffer compared Shusha to Jerusalem - an appropriate parallel in the South Caucasus regional context. This mountainous community gave Azerbaijan the overwhelming majority of its poets and composers, including the medieval princess-poet Natavan and the author of the first ever Muslim opera Uzeyir Hajibayov.

The importance of Shusha's musical tradition, including Mugham, was recognized, among others, by the world-renowned native of Azerbaijan Mstislav Rostropovich. Maestro Rostropovich, who died last month, included refugee children from Shusha in his annual master classes for Azerbaijani students.

Armenia celebrates the barbaric destruction of this ancient community and the accomplished total ethnic cleansing as a victory. Sadly, a celebration of aggression and intolerance by Armenia coincides with the date when the rest of the world marks the victory over Nazi Germany in WWII.

The future of Shusha is crucial for any settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It has been the heart of Karabakh for centuries, and for 15 years this heart has been broken. The soul of Shusha is not in the present-day Armenian-controlled ghost town; it lives among the refugee communities scattered around Azerbaijan. Therefore, restoring Shusha is not an architectural makeover project, it can only be an initiative that includes a peace agreement and brings its Azerbaijani natives back home.