

# Khojaly Genocide

Located on one of the most strategic points of Southern Caucasia, Nagorno Karabagh was invaded by Tsarist Russia in 1826. Tsarist administration pursuing the policy of settling Christian population, notably Armenians, in this region, also removed the Azerbaijani Turks from the territory by the decrees issued. In the Soviet Union era, Nagorno Karabagh was recognized as an autonomous region subordinated to Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

As the Armenian population became the majority in Nagorno Karabagh as a result of the settlement policy which Russia pursued for years, Armenia Soviet Socialist Republic began to claim rights over Nakhchivan and Karabagh from the 1960's on. In 1988, conflicts emerged in the region and, the tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which declared their independence after the collapse of USSR, turned into a war.

The first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, with the support of Russia, sent local Azerbaijani Turks into exile and invaded the autonomous region of Nagorno Karabagh. Armenia continues to violate the international law by not withdrawing from the lands it occupied although it's been more than a quarter-century. The war causing the death of more than 20,000 people has obliged millions of people to migrate. However, none of the cases in this period is more dramatic than the Khojaly genocide.

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Hosting Meskhetian Turks besides the Azerbaijani Turks, Khojaly occupies a strategic place in the Nagorno Karabagh region. Providing the connection between Karabagh and Armenia, Khojaly was also a central location for the only airport in the region. Hence, Khojaly was regarded by the Armenians as a military target throughout the war. In October 1991, land transport to Khojaly was blocked, and the whole region was blockaded by the Armenians. The air transport was also closed after the death of 20 people when a helicopter was hit in Khojaly in November 1991. By cutting off the gas and electricity of the town, the region completely entered the Armenian blockade.

On 26 February 1992, Khojaly witnessed a terrible massacre carried out by Armenian military forces supported by Russian motorized units. During the massacre, Khojaly was not defended by a professional army but by over 100 volunteers only with light weapons. In 1990, in accordance with an enactment by Michail Gorbachev, all the weapons including shotguns in all regions of the USSR had been collected. But while the Armenians didn't comply with it, Azerbaijani Turks were demilitarized.

Armenian soldiers supported by Russia got into the village of Khojaly, slaughtering hundreds of civilians including the children. The attacks of 366th Russian motorized unit caused the destruction of Khojaly airport. The civilians who attempted to escape from Khojaly were soon captured by the Armenian soldiers on the way to Agdam, near the village some of whom were massacred by various tortures. In these most savage days of recent history, people were beheaded, their heads skinned, pregnant women's bellies split, their arms and legs severed and people were burned alive. According to formal figures of Republic of Azerbaijan, 613 people, of whom 106 were women and 83 children, were killed, and thousands of people were heavily wounded as a result of the tortures. But according to informal sources and witnesses, the number of people killed reaches up to thousands.

Although it has been over 27 years now since Khojaly genocide, this region is still under the occupation of Armenia. Those who made this brutality were left unpunished, and have not paid a price. The international community that does not hesitate to put forward baseless claims remained silent against the brutality that Azerbaijani Turks went through. Our most important duty is to remember and live down the Khojaly genocide and the fact that the lands of Azerbaijan are still under occupation.