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AZERBAIJAN CONTINUES TO MANIPULATE WITH THE KHOJALY EVENTS

*Based on information from Azerbaijani sources*

Decades after February 1992 events, often referred to as Khojaly events near Akna, Eastern Artsakh, president of Azerbaijan Aliyev and his government have been obstinately fanning anti-Armenian propaganda with the aim of falsifying the events and discrediting the Armenian people in the eyes of own people and the international community.

In 1991, in response to peaceful and democratic rallies in the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) Azerbaijan launched full-scale military aggression against the young democracy. The Khojaly rural area was turned into a military stronghold of the Azeri army, and used for indiscriminate shelling of the capital and other Armenian-populated communities. Suppressing firing positions became an issue of life and death for tens of thousands of war-affected civilians. Numerous records, including acknowledgements by Azeri then-acting and current officials reiterate that the tragedy of the events near Khojaly have been a results of political intrigues and struggle for power in Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, authorities in Azerbaijan continue to manipulate with the course and issue of responsibility for the events in 1992.

Here are a few of the corresponding testimonies by Azerbaijani officials and journalists:

- Then-president of Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutalibov, admitted that "*...the assault on Khojaly was not a surprise attack*"<sup>1</sup>, and has confirmed that "*a corridor was left available by the Armenians for (Khojaly) people to leave*"<sup>2</sup>;
- This fact was later reiterated by president Mutalibov, who *linked this crime with, eventually successful, attempts by the opposition to remove him from presidency*<sup>2</sup>. In his more recent interview to another daily, Mutalibov has confirmed his earlier statement: "*The shooting of the Khojaly residents was obviously organized by someone to take control in Azerbaijan*"<sup>3</sup>;
- Previous president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, father of the current president Ilham Aliyev, recognized that Azerbaijan's "*former leadership was also guilty*" of the events in Khojaly. In April 1992, according to Bilik-Dunyasy Azeri news service, Aliyev said: "*The bloodshed will be to our advantage. We should not interfere in the course of events*";
- *Tamerlan Karayev, former Chairman of Azerbaijan's Supreme Council, said: "The tragedy was committed by the (current) authorities of Azerbaijan"; specifically by "someone very high-ranking"*<sup>4</sup>;

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- Czech journalist Jana Mazalova, who twice was taken by Azeri military authorities (*who controlled the territory where the bodies were found*) to witness what Azerbaijanis alleged as "bodies mutilated by the Armenians", noted a substantial difference between the two visits. Mazalova said she *had not seen any traces of mistreatment of the bodies during her first mission, while a couple of days later she was shocked by seeing the same bodies disfigured*. This happened near town of Akna, on a territory controlled by Azeri armed forces;
- Independent Azeri cameraman Chingiz Mustafayev, who worked in Khojaly in those days, *began to question the official version of the events. Mustafayev was murdered* under unknown circumstances soon after he openly declared through the "D-press" news-agency his intention to investigate the degree of Azerbaijan's responsibility for the Khojaly events;
- In 2005, independent Azeri journalist Ejnulla Fatullayev stated in an interview to the "Monitor" Azeri news agency that he had *met with Khojaly inhabitants, who confirmed that Armenians were using loudspeakers to warn about the forthcoming operation, and offered them to leave the settlement through a corridor along the river*". Fatullayev supported the opinion that no one would have survived without the Armenians leaving a corridor. Several days after his interview, Monitor's editor-in-chief Elmar Huseynov was murdered near his apartment, and Fatullayev was imprisoned and accused of treason, drug smuggling and terrorism.

Civilians who were allowed by the Armenians to escape from the battlefield through a safe corridor towards Akna were attacked seven miles inside the Azeri-controlled territory by then-opposition Popular Front.

*Questions that shed light on the tragedy:*

1. *Who prevented civilian villagers from escaping from the war zone in Azerbaijani-controlled territory?*
2. *Who killed Khojaly villagers, and maimed their bodies on territory controlled by Azerbaijani army?*
3. *Why everyone in Azerbaijan, who tried to find the truth about Khojaly was either murdered, or imprisoned?*

The current autocratic and corrupt regime in Azerbaijan eventually seized power after the February 1992 events near Akna. President Aliyev and his government have been criticized by virtually all human rights organizations and democratic governments, including the United States, for continued strengthening of authoritarian power and suppressing public dissent. The regime continues to reject responsibility for military aggressions against the Artsakh, and the events of February, 1992.

The regime continues to use *Khojaly* for domestic and international political purposes: to instigate hatred among its own society against everything Armenian, as well as to manipulate international opinion. Such strategy contradicts the US-mediated efforts to strengthen regional stability and confidence between the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples, and postpones positive settlement of the existing regional challenges.

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1. "Ogonek" Magazine, Nov. 14-15, 1992
  2. "Nezavisimaya gazeta" (Independent Newspaper), April 2, 1992
  3. "Novoye vremya" (New Time) Magazine, March 6, 2001
  4. "Mukhalifat" Newspaper, April 28, 1992

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