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PRESS RELEASE

28th Commemoration Anniversary of the 20 January Tragedy

Twenty eight years have passed since January 20, 1990 events, which went down the history of Azerbaijani people as Bloody January tragedy. The atrocious act of terrorism committed in that day by military machine of the former Soviet state against the people of Azerbaijan, will always remain as a black page in history of civilization, and as one of the worst crimes against humanity.

Acting upon the orders of the USSR Communist Party leadership, 26 000 Soviet troops, heavily armed and equipped with military combat vehicles, attacked Baku to punish people rallying on the streets, protesting against violations of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and demanding freedom. As a result of punitive actions more than 130 civilians were killed and 700 wounded, hundreds of people were arrested and subjected to various forms of physical pressure. Among victims were children, women, young and old men and civilians of different nationalities in Baku.

The strong indignation and protest of the people of Azerbaijan was caused by the prejudiced and biased policy of the Communist Party and the Government of the Soviet Union towards the people of Azerbaijan. Soviet authorities' connivance at the Armenian expansionists, who claimed Nagorno-Karabakh, an integral part of Azerbaijan, had already allowed Armenia to forcibly expel more than 250.000 Azerbaijanis from Armenia in 1988-1989.

Human Rights Watch documented how the Soviet army intentionally ran down and crashed unarmed peaceful civilians under their tanks or how they attacked hospitals and clearly marked ambulances and medical personnel assisting the wounded.

The next day, on January 21, 1990, Heydar Aliyev, national leader of Azerbaijan, at the press conference for the representatives of foreign mass media, organized in the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan in Moscow, condemned the aggression of Soviet leadership against Azerbaijan and its people. His statement became the first political assessment of Black January of 1990.

Black January has become the turning point in the history of modern Azerbaijan. The Soviet invasion failed to achieve its aim. The Azerbaijani people confronted the tragedy with strength and dignity. Every bullet that was fired splattered blood across the face of the Soviet regime, undermining the ideals of communism and totalitarianism. The heroism of the people of Azerbaijan on January 20, 1990, made the final collapse of the Soviet Union inevitable. On October 18, 1991 Azerbaijan regained its independence.

Unfortunately, the perpetrators of the tragedy of January 20 went unpunished. While the punitive actions against public in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1989 and Vilnius, Lithuania in 1991 were strongly condemned by the Soviet and world public, the truth of the Black January received less public attention due to the efforts of the Soviet authorities.

Today the victims of the Black January repose in Martyr's Alley in the capital city of Baku. They were among the first to sacrifice their lives for freedom that Azerbaijan nowadays enjoy and those heroes will never be forgotten!

May their souls rest in peace! Allah rehmet elesin!

