

# Khojaly: The Moment of Truth

by TATUL HAKOBYAN

Excerpts from Tatul Hakobyan's book

*Green and Black: Artsakh Diary,*

regarding the events of February 25-26, 1992 in Khojaly

## Evidence from Azerbaijani Sources

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As military operations between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan continued, several countries and organizations offered their mediation in settling the conflict, and in working out a truce first of all. Iran was especially active. The OSCE and Russia began showing a serious interest as well.

On February 25, 1992 Yerevan launched a political initiative. President Levon Ter-Petrossian appealed to the heads of 14 states asking to prevent further escalation of the situation which would only lead to a full-scale war. *"The heads of states and international organizations should restrain Azerbaijan by consistently condemning the militarization of that country and any actions that might upset the relative balance of powers in the region... as well as influence the leaders of Russia and the CIS to hinder Azerbaijan by all means from obtaining and using CIS armaments."* The Armenian leader stressed that *"we view the Nagorno Karabakh issue as an internal political conflict which should be solved exclusively through negotiations between the Azerbaijani government and the newly-elected leadership of Nagorno Karabakh, bearing in mind that Armenia has no territorial claims on Azerbaijan."*

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Journalist Tatul Hakobyan currently is an analyst at the Yerevan based Civilitas Foundation. He is a specialist on conflicts in the Caucasus. In 2008 he published a comprehensive study on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, *"Green and Black: Karabakh Diary"*. He is currently working on his next book, *"Looking from Ararat: Armenians and Turks"*.

Ter-Petrossian urged the CIS, the OSCE, the UN, the European Union, and other organizations interested in establishing stable peace in the region to expedite the steps aimed at creating an efficient mediation mechanism for the Nagorno Karabakh conflict that would result in designing a comprehensive peace plan supported by all the interested parties. The Armenian leader emphasized that *"Turkey should continue to maintain its neutrality and try to alter Azerbaijan's discrepant stance toward Armenia by using its good offices with the Azerbaijani government and political forces."* In exchange *"Armenia will use its influence on Nagorno Karabakh to persuade its leadership into unilaterally ceasing military operations for 24 hours effective the moment the Azerbaijani government assumes the obligation to halt military operations in the region for the same period of time."*

Armenian special envoy at the time David Shahnazaryan says that at first the West, and the United States in particular, didn't show serious interest in mediation. *"Their policy at the time differed substantially from their present policy. They were not ready or even didn't want to assume any independent or active role. Their mission limited itself to the activity within the Minsk Group. At the time Russia was more active than the OSCE format in two ways – through the ministry of defense and the ministry of foreign affairs,"* Shahnazaryan says.

However, the high-level Armenian-Azerbaijani meetings and numerous intermediary missions and visits were unable to prevent bloodshed between the two neighbouring peoples. Moreover,

strange as it may sound, the most tragic events would usually take place at times of active international mediation. One such instance was Khojaly; another was Maragha.

### **“THE MOMENT OF TRUTH”**

“The first casualty when war comes is truth.” These words uttered by a US senator following World War I might be also applied to the Karabakh war and, in particular, to Khojaly. What really happened in the second-largest Azerbaijani settlement in Nagorno Karabakh, Khojaly, and the adjacent territories on February 25-26, 1992 when the civilian population fled to Aghdam through the corridor provided by the Karabakh forces remains one of the most debatable and unclarified issues of the Karabakh war. At least two things are clear – the Karabakh forces left a corridor, and the civilian population suffered and a tragedy occurred.

When in 1994 Russian journalist Andrey Karaulov, the host of the TV program The Moment of Truth asked then-Chairman of the State Defence Committee of Nagorno Karabakh Robert Kocharyan about the Khojaly tragedy, he responded, *“I would put next to this tragedy a series of other tragedies that would perhaps surpass the Khojaly tragedy in scale. These are the Sumgait and the Baku massacres, the depopulation of 28 Armenian villages, and the tragedy of the village of Maragha.”*

*“But, apparently, Khojaly requires a separate explanation. That is to say, this was the village that found itself in the thick of military operations. As I see it, the warring parties should be very careful in using human settlements for military purposes and this is exactly what had happened in Khojaly. There were four GRAD flamethrowers stationed inside the village which were systematically firing upon Stepanakert. And when a place turns into a position for firing GRAD missiles then, naturally, it draws enemy fire. For that reason a situation emerged in Khojaly where heavy battles for the settlement took place and, the fact was, during these battles the civilian population suffered,”* Kocharyan said.

When British journalist Thomas de Vaal asked Serge Sargsyan to tell him about the seizure of Khojaly the Armenian minister of defense responded, “We prefer not to talk about that out-

loud.” As for the number of losses, Sargsyan insisted that many things had been exaggerated and the retreating Azerbaijanis had manifested strong military resistance. “But I think that the principal issue was completely different. Before Khojaly, Azerbaijanis thought that they could trifle with us; they thought Armenians were incapable of raising a hand against a civilian population. We were able to break this stereotype. This is what happened. And also we must take into consideration that among these men there were those who had escaped from the Baku and the Sumgait massacres,” Sargsyan said.

***“I would put next to this tragedy a series of other tragedies that would perhaps surpass the Khojaly tragedy in scale. These are the Sumgait and the Baku massacres, the depopulation of 28 Armenian villages, and the tragedy of the village of Maragha.”***

In order to lend credence to assertions that the Karabakh forces had opened frontal fire on the fleeing civilian population and the Azerbaijani special platoon accompanying them from the Armenian village of Nakhichevanik, Thomas de Vaal quoted what Police Major Valery Babayan had told American reporter Paul Quin-Judge. Babayan had expressed the view that the main motive for these events was personal vengeance and that many of the participants of the attack on Khojaly “were from Sumgait and other places like that.”

Samvel Babayan, who was at the center of the events, has a completely different interpretation. “During the Khojaly operation I was in charge of holding the Aghdam front and providing for a secure corridor along the river current so that the civilians could exit, and I accomplished that mission. The corridor was provided, but a strange thing happened. We were attacked from the direction of Aghdam. The population was supposed to pass through our positions and enter Aghdam. Among the Azerbaijani forces in Aghdam, the impression emerged that the Armenians were making a sally. The violence was committed by the Azerbaijani forces, whether wittingly or not, I don’t know. We did not attempt at

*the destruction of the population. Generally, during the war we had always allowed the civilian population to leave. We were in a position to block the roads and annihilate 60,000 people in Kelbajar, but we purposefully postponed military operations and provided free passage. It was the same road that we had taken under our control in one stroke in 1994.”*

The assertions that for several successive days the Karabakh forces had warned the civilian population of Khojaly to leave and had provided a corridor to this end have been confirmed by Azerbaijani sources as well.

*Khojaly resident Salman Abbasov consequently complained, “A few days before those tragic events the Armenians had warned us many times over the radio that they were planning to seize the city and urged us to leave it. For a long time helicopters had been flying into Khojaly and it was not clear if anyone was concerned about our fate. Virtually, we had not received any help. Moreover, when there was a chance to evacuate the women, children, and the elderly, we were being persuaded not to leave.”*

In the early spring of 2005 Azerbaijani reporter Eynulla Fatulayev visited Khojaly. After returning to Baku he wrote in an article entitled “*They had time to help the cattle but not the humans.*” “*A few years ago I met with refugees from Khojaly temporarily sheltered in Naftalan. They openly acknowledged that for a few days before the attack Armenians had continuously warned the population over loudspeakers about the imminent operation and asked civilians to leave the encircled city through a humanitarian corridor along the Karkar River. According to refugees from Khojaly, they used the corridor and the Armenian soldiers on the far bank didn’t open fire on them. Some soldiers from the detachments of the Popular Front had for unknown reasons evacuated some of the Khojaly residents toward Nakhichevanik, which was under control of the Askeran Armenian regiment.*”

With the help of the local administration of Askeran, the reporter familiarized himself with the locality, walking through the areas that Khojaly residents had passed through. “*After familiarizing myself with the geography of the area I can say for sure that the assumptions about the absence of a corridor are groundless. There was, in fact, a cor-*

*ridor, otherwise the residents of Khojaly, completely encircled and cut from the outside world, could not have broken through the circle and gotten out. For unknown reasons some of the Khojaly residents were directed toward Nakhichevanik. It looks like the detachments of the Popular Front aimed not at rescuing the residents of Khojaly but at bloodshed on the path to dethroning Mutalibov,”* Fatulayev wrote.

During an interview with Azerbaijani president Ayaz Mutalibov one month after the Khojaly tragedy, Czech reporter Dana Mazalova put the following question to him: “*What would you say about the Khojaly events, after which you resigned? At the time, corpses of people from Khojaly were discovered not far from Aghdam. Some one had shot them in the legs beforehand to prevent them from running away. Afterwards they were axed. On February 29th my colleagues filmed them. When we next filmed on March 2nd these corpses had been scalped. What kind of strange game was that?*” Mutalibov then said, “*As the rescued residents of Khojaly say, all that was organized to create grounds for my resignation. I don’t think that the Armenians, who had manifested a clear and knowledgeable approach to such situations, would have allowed Azerbaijanis to obtain evidence that tied them to fascist acts.*”

***“It looks like the detachments of the Popular Front aimed not at rescuing the residents of Khojaly but at bloodshed on the path to dethroning Mutalibov.”***

“*If I declare that it was the fault of the Azerbaijani opposition I could be blamed for slander. But the overall picture of the conclusions is as follows: the Armenians had, in any case, provided a corridor to let the civilians escape. Why then would they shoot? Moreover, in the vicinity of Aghdam where at the time there was sufficient force present to assist people? Or they could have just agreed that the civilians leave... The Aghdam detachment was located nearby and was obliged to seriously follow the development of events. As soon as Khojaly was surrounded by tanks it was necessary to immediately lead the civilians out. Earlier I had given similar orders regarding Shushi – to evacuate women and children*

*and to leave only men in the city. It's one of the laws of war – civilians must be rescued. My conduct was appropriate and unambiguous – I gave such orders, but why they weren't followed in Khojaly is not clear to me,”* Mutalibov said.

In succeeding years as well Mutalibov continued to insist, with some corrections, that Armenians had left a corridor for the civilian population to leave.

*“In the evening of February 25 th the late Minister of the Interior Tofik Kerimov reported to me on what had happened, but without details. He said that several hundred people had been shot in Khojaly itself. The first thing I did at the time was to telephone the leader of Nagorno Karabakh, a certain Mkrtchyan. I didn't know him, had never seen him but I knew his name. I asked him angrily how it was possible to shoot nearly a thousand civilians in Khojaly. He responded word-for-word as follows: ‘It's nonsense! We didn't shoot anyone in Khojaly. When we took Khojaly, the residents had already left, since we had opened a corridor for them. Some of the residents are still there; they are staying in the building of the vocational school. We feed them, though we too have a shortage of food.’ I didn't believe him and asked him to call Armen Isagulov, who was the head of the police department at the time, to the phone. He too told me that they had provided a corridor for the residents. That is why when I gave an interview then I said that I was told that a corridor had been opened for the civilian population. But I didn't assert whether the corridor had in fact been provided or not. I just appealed to the fact of the telephone conversation... By the way, it is written in black and white in the report by the Memorial Human Rights Center that Elman Mamedov had been personally informed of the provision of the corridor,”* Mutalibov said later on.

***A few days after the tragedy, Khojaly Mayor Elman Mamedov acknowledged, “We knew that the corridor had been provided for the civilian population to leave.”***

A few days after the tragedy, Khojaly Mayor Elman Mamedov acknowledged, *“We knew that the corridor had been provided for the civilian population to leave.”*

News of the Khojaly tragedy reached Baku in the evening of February 25, 1992 – that is, before the Karabakh forces started the military operations. Neither Minister of the Interior Kerimov nor Minister of National Security Huseinov was able to identify the source of that disinformation. And on the morning of February 26, Ayaz Mutalibov telephoned the Speaker of the Nagorno Karabakh parliament, Artur Mkrtchyan, and the head of the police department, Armen Isagulov, to find out what had really happened.

On the evening of February 26, realizing that the loss of Khojaly would mean the defeat of Mutalibov, the Ministry of the Interior of Azerbaijan released a statement saying that *“the attack by the Armenian guerilla in the direction of Khojaly has been repulsed and the Azerbaijani forces have regained the control of the city.”* But this information was immediately refuted by the information center of the Popular Front, which announced that *“two trucks full of bodies of slain residents of Khojaly have arrived to Aghdam.”*

British journalist Thomas de Vaal believes that the Khojaly attack began on the night of February 26 – in commemoration of the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait that had taken place four years earlier in February 1988. *“The 366th regiment of the Soviet Army supported the Armenians with armoured equipment. They surrounded Khojaly on three sides, after which the Armenian soldiers entered the city and suppressed the resistance of the local defenders,”* de Vaal wrote.

There seem to be some inaccuracies here. First, would it have been logical for the Karabakh forces to seize Khojaly in the days of remembrance of the Sumgait massacre? Besides, the Sumgait events took place on February 27 and 28, so according to the logic of “taking revenge” the Karabakh forces should have started the attack on Khojaly on the night of February 27. The capture of Khojaly was of invaluable significance for the Karabakh forces and today, years after the cessation of military operations, assumptions regarding the approximate coincidence of certain dates are beside the point. After all, Khojaly and the whole Karabakh conflict was a ruthless war in the harshest sense, and who would have been thinking about historical parallels?

Furthermore, both Azerbaijani and Armenian sources insist that the Karabakh forces had been planning the Khojaly attack for an earlier date but for some reasons had postponed it.

In mid-February on the eve of his visit to Iran, Ayaz Mutalibov ordered the Shushi commandant, Rahim Ghaziyev, to maintain a truce in his absence and not to fire in the direction of Stepanakert. But within hours after his departure to Iran, a fierce bombardment of Stepanakert and, in particular, the 366 th motorized regiment began. In response, the Karabakh forces attacked Khojaly. The exchange of fire lasted for a few days – from February 14 to February 16.

*“Shells rained down on us from Stepanakert. It was a nightmare. I gave the order to open fire on Stepanakert from the GRAD missile system. Our soldiers could not fire accurately using the coordinates. Four of the GRAD barrels were out of order. One of our soldiers climbed up the [Shushi] tower and was telling us whether the shells had fallen on the military camp or not. Suddenly he shouted that several shells had hit the camp. Five of the regiment’s armored vehicles were destroyed,”* Ghaziyev recalled.

According to Ghaziyev, there was only one GRAD system in Shushi at the time that could be used during positional battles. *“On February 16 we received information about preparations for an attack on Khojaly. Our forces stationed in Shushi successfully prevented the attack with the help of this very Grad system, which we used to bombard the enemy positions. On February 25 we again received information about another attempt to attack Khojaly. I assure you we didn’t have enough ammunition to assist the Khojaly residents and to stop the Armenian attack. We didn’t use the GRAD system at that time since a thick fog had floated over Shushi... On one of those days I telephoned Mutalibov and informed him of the danger threatening Khojaly. The president said that the minister of the interior, Tofik Kerimov, had assured him that the situation was stable. I realize that a trap was set for Mutalibov in Khojaly. But it’s not true that I opened fire on Stepanakert contrary to the president’s orders.”*

Before Khojaly the Karabakh forces had already had the experience of successful military operations in several other locations. The head of the stand-

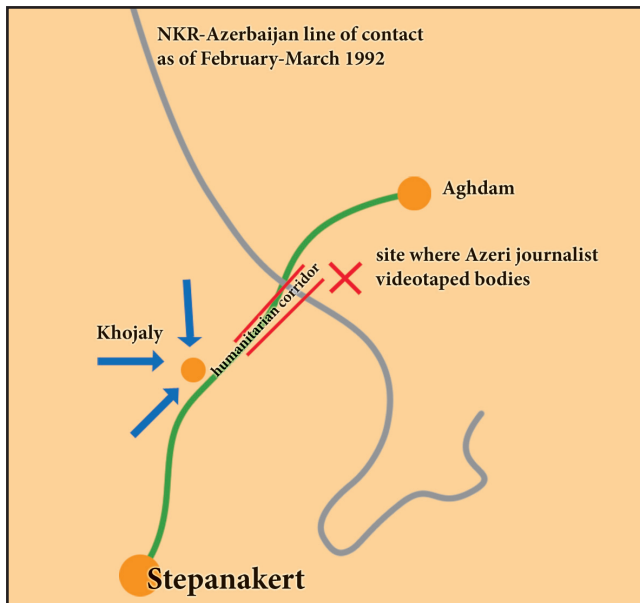
ing committee on foreign relations of the Nagorno Karabakh parliament, Levon Melik-Shahnazarov, wrote that military successes in Togh and Sarinshen had been followed by victories in Lesnui (Meshali), Malibeylii, and Ashaghi Ghushchular (these operations were planned by Arkady Ter-Tadevosyan; the commander in charge was Valery Babayan) and that heavy fighting had resulted in the liberation of the Stepanakert suburb of Krkzhan.

***“When there was a chance to evacuate the women, children, and the elderly, we were being persuaded not to leave.”***

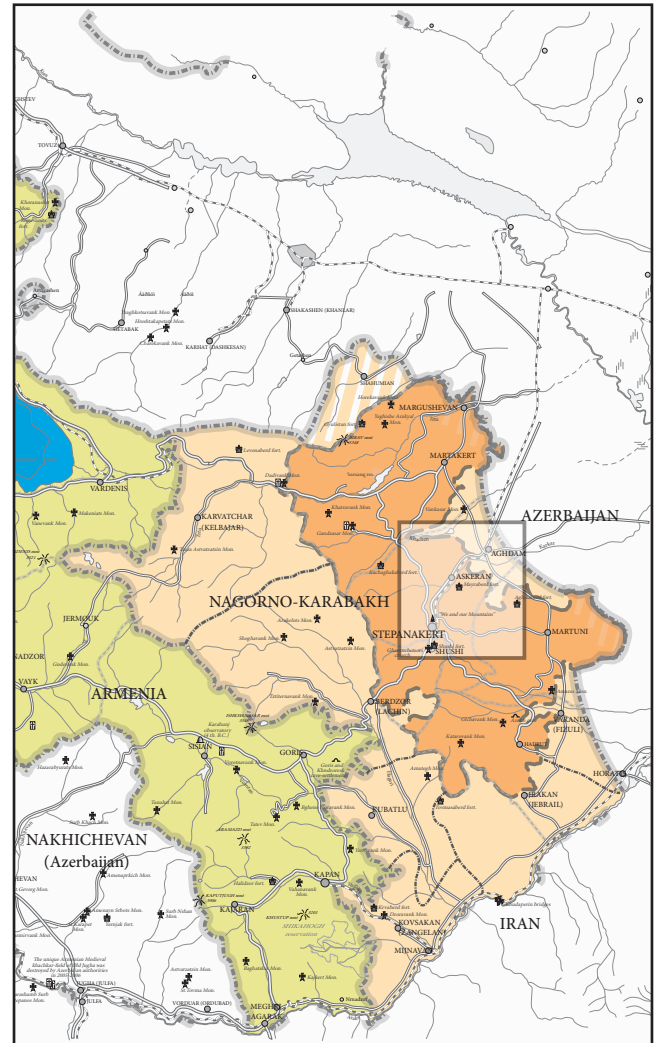
*“It’s hard to overestimate the significance of Khojaly for both the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis. Khojaly separated the south of Karabakh from the north. Nagorno Karabakh’s only airport was located in Khojaly and for the blockaded Artsakh Armenians, it was the sole link to the outside world. And finally, Khojaly was also used for bombarding Stepanakert and other Armenian settlements,”* Melik-Shahnazarov wrote.

The Khojaly operation was planned and headed by the commander of the Karabakh Forces, Arkady Ter-Tadevosyan, known as Commandos. The Karabakh military units were supposed to enter Khojaly from four directions: first from Mehtishen, second from Noragyugh, third from Katuk and fourth from the vicinity of the airport. A corridor for the civilians and the retreating Azerbaijani soldiers was left along the Karkar River.

*“Besides, some weeks before the attack the Karabakh side had repeatedly warned Baku and the residents of Khojaly that the city would be attacked. The Karabakh forces employed such tactics throughout the course of the entire war. This had a dual purpose. First, to spread panic among the residents and to make the civilians leave before the military operations began and, second, the absence of the civilian population demoralizes the army, its desire to fight withers and the soldiers think above all about not getting killed and, if possible, running away. Under such circumstances, as the subsequent military operations showed, the Karabakh side suffered unbelievably fewer losses,”* Melik-Shahnazarov wrote.



Azerbaijani cameraman Chingiz Mustafayev shot footage in the vicinity of Aghdam first on February 29th and then on March 2nd. It was his footage that was shown at the extraordinary session of the Azerbaijani parliament. The locality where Mustafayev had filmed the corpses was under Azerbaijani control, or more precisely, under the control of armed units of the Popular Front – this can be clearly seen from the footage. It is a fact that the corpses had been mutilated before the second time Mustafayev filmed on March 2nd. Maps prepared with Grigor Hakobyan © 2010 Armenian Reporter.



The Khojaly operation began at 11:00 p.m. on February 25, that is, a few hours after Mutalibov was informed about the massacre of the civilian population of Khojaly. Some two and a half hours later it had become clear from the exchange of radio messages by Azerbaijani radio operators that the military were abandoning the city along with the civilians. Only one unit fortified its position in a five-story building and put up resistance, but by 4:00 a.m. on February 26 some of them had been destroyed and others had surrendered.

Was it possible that reinforcements could have been brought up to Khojaly from Aghdam, which was, at the time, controlled by military units of the Popular Front? In fact, Khojaly was surrounded on four sides and from the military standpoint its defense was vulnerable. The contacts between Khojaly and other settlements in Azerbaijan and Aghdam, in particular, were maintained by means

of helicopters. The last flight to Khojaly before the Karabakh forces captured the city took place on February 13. According to various estimates, about 3,000 residents remained in Khojaly as of February 25 and the commander of the airport emergency platoon with its 160 soldiers, Arif Hajiyev, was in charge of the defense of the city.

On the other hand, it is impossible to understand why the civilian population was not withdrawn when the downfall of Khojaly was all too obvious to the Azerbaijani side. One of the reasons for this was, perhaps, the internal troubled situation in Azerbaijan. There was no unified military command, although the Azerbaijani forces concentrated in Aghdam could have rendered assistance to the Khojaly defenders. The following is an extract from an interview with Rahim Ghaziyev:

*“Why was no assistance rendered to Khojaly residents in time?”*



*“As of February 25, there were 12 T-72 tanks, 12 armored vehicles, 4 GRAD missile launchers, 40 cannons and 2,500 soldiers in Aghdam. All this could have been directed at the Khojaly defense but no assistance was rendered.”*

*“Why not?”*

*“I don’t know. It was enough to open fire from the GRAD system. There was a sniper – Private Inchipirenko. He could have hit any target. Can you imagine that? But it turned out that the GRAD system disappeared.”*

*“If I’m not mistaken, Tamerlan Garayev and Fahmin Hajiyev were in Aghdam at the time...”*

*“Yes. And Tair Aliyev was the commander in charge of the entire Karabakh front. You say that I was appointed the Shushi military commandant. But I learned about that decree from a TV program. I had no documents, not a stamp, nor any normative act.”*

During the Khojaly operation the minister of defense of Azerbaijan was Tair Aliyev, who had held this position for a very short period of time. In fact, over the course of six months in 1991-1992 there were four ministers of defense in Azerbaijan, which, in itself, is nonsense for a warring state. The first defense minister was Soviet Army General Valeh Barshadly. Soon after he was replaced by Tajeddin Mehtiyev, who was forced to resign after the defeat in Karintak. Mehtiyev was replaced by Tair Aliyev. On March 17, after the Khojaly operation and the resignation of President Mutalibov, Rasim Ghaziyev was appointed defense minister.

*“After the capture of Khojaly, our troops found 11 bodies of civilian residents, not counting, of course, the losses among the Azerbaijani military. Another several hundred civilians – more precisely 734 people – some of whom were Meskheti Turks, were brought to Stepanakert. By February 28 all the captive Khojaly residents had been handed over to the Azerbaijani side,” Melik-Shahnazaryan wrote.*

The Meskheti Turks had been resettled in Khojaly since 1989. Azerbaijan had gradually resettled about one thousand Meskheti Turks expelled from Uzbekistan in Khojaly, thus artificially increasing the population of the town. If in 1989 there were about 1,600 residents in Khojaly, in 1991 this

number had reached 6,300, and that year Khojaly was given a status of a town. Political analyst David Babayan says that according to the 1926 census Khojaly was a completely Armenian village with 888 residents.

*“In the 1950s Azerbaijanis began settling in Khojaly and by the early 1960s an Azerbaijani village of Khojaly had emerged next to the Armenian one. By 1977, no one talked about the Armenian Khojaly anymore. By 1989 Khojaly was already a completely Azerbaijani village with 1,661 Azerbaijani residents,”* Babayan said.

The greatest human tragedy in the days of the Karabakh war was undoubtedly Khojaly. During no other military operation did so many civilians, including women and children, suffer as in Khojaly. The actual number of the people killed is still debated today—differing figures are put forth and official Baku continues to use the Khojaly tragedy for its own political ends.

How many people were killed in Khojaly? Different numbers have been put forward at different times – from 200 to more than 600. Thomas de Vaal considers the number made public following the investigation conducted by the Azerbaijani parliament, 485 people, to be most realistic. This number includes all the people killed during the Khojaly operation, including those who froze to death during the escape.

A member of the parliamentary commission, Namik Aliyev, told the visiting Helsinki Watch team in April 1992 that 213 residents of Khojaly had been buried in Aghdam. Another official, Aydin Rasulov, assured the same team members that the number of civilians killed exceeded 300 – not counting those who had frozen to death on the way to Aghdam. On February 27, 1992 the imam of the Aghdam mosque showed American journalist Thomas Goltz a list of 477 names of people killed. The same year Azerbaijani newspaper Ordu printed a list of 636 people killed in Khojaly.

On March 4, 1992 the Nagorno Karabakh parliament made the following statement: *“The neutralization of weapon installations of the Azerbaijani armed units and the unblocking of Nagorno Karabakh’s only airport near the village of Khojaly*

... have prompted wide reaction from Azerbaijani and foreign mass media. The armed units of the National Army of Azerbaijan stationed in Khojaly had completely blocked the roads connecting the Askeran region of NKR with the capital of the republic, and had periodically bombarded Stepanakert and other Armenian settlements with heavy artillery. It was possible to overcome the famine that had originated as a result of the blockade only by putting the airport into operation. Although the NKR self-defense forces had left a corridor for the residents of Khojaly to leave the zone of military operations, a portion of the civilian population of the village didn't avail itself of this opportunity. All of them – some 200 people – by their own wish and without any precondition were accompanied to the other side of the border. The Presidium of the Supreme Council of NKR once again declares its readiness to settle all the problems between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan exclusively by peaceful means, at a negotiating table.”

### **WHAT CHINGIZ MUSTAFAYEV FILMED**

Azerbaijani cameraman Chingiz Mustafayev shot footage in the vicinity of Aghdam first on February 29th and then on March 2nd. It was his footage that was shown at the extraordinary session of the Azerbaijani parliament. The locality where Mustafayev had filmed the corpses was under Azerbaijani control, or more precisely, under the control of armed units of the Popular Front – this can be clearly seen from the footage. It is a fact that the corpses had been mutilated before the second time Mustafayev filmed on March 2nd. Mustafayev informed Mutalibov of this. It was President Mutalibov, incidentally, who had sent him to film the scene. According to certain information, Mutalibov warned: “Chingiz, don't say a word to anyone that something is wrong, or they will kill you.” The area where the corpses were mutilated was at a distance of a few hundred meters from the positions of the Popular Front and was easily controlled by snipers. Mustafayev simply would not have been able to film in those areas if they had been under the control of the Karabakh forces.

A few months later Mustafayev was killed while doing routine filming inside a sector of military operations controlled by the military units of the Popular Front. Why he was killed is still debated. The Karabakh side insists that Mustafayev was a victim of Khojaly. Both Mutalibov and Mustafayev firmly believed that the Popular Front had tried to come to power by taking advantage of the Khojaly tragedy. This is what happened immediately after Khojaly, and what is more, it was Mustafayev's footage that was used to accuse Mutalibov.

Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in front of the Azerbaijani parliament building to demand Ayaz Mutalibov's resignation. During the March 5, 1992 extraordinary session of the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan, Elmira Kafarova submitted her resignation and the Dean of the Medical Department at Baku University, Yaghub Mamedov, was elected speaker of parliament. The demonstrators kept the parliament building under siege, holding parliament members inside. Mutalibov called the unfolding events a “coup d'état”. On March 6th he resigned and Mamedov became the acting president until the presidential election was held.

This is how Mutalibov commented on these events: “*My resignation was forced. I had no intention of leaving but when I realized that everything had been scrupulously planned and the left and the right had united against the president I decided not to provoke confrontation.*” The retired president believed that following his resignation the Karabakh issue would be speculated on within the internal political struggle and the further spread of war would become irreversible. “*The Popular Front blamed us for not being able to solve the Karabakh problem. And now they have to give the people assurances that they are able to solve it. There are two ways: either more resolute actions, since I was blamed for indecision, or a compromise... Suppose, they succeed in uniting all our forces. In that case all this could turn into a large-scale war without any clarity regarding who is going to win, though no one in Azerbaijan wants to fight anymore.*”

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<http://hetq.am/en/politics/xojalu/>  
March 05, 2007

## ANNEX I

## Events in Khojaly and Near Agdam on February 25-27, 1992

KHOJALY IS ALSO OFTEN SPELLED AS XOCALI, KHODZHALLY,  
KHOJALU, KHOCALU, KHOCALI, KHOCALY

### AZERBAIJAN TURNED KHOJALY INTO A LAUNCH PAD FOR INDISCRIMINATE BOMBARDMENT OF KARABAKH

In 1991 and early 1992, Azerbaijan used an Azeri inhabited village of Khojaly in Nagorno Karabakh as a launching pad for indiscriminate artillery and rocket fire on Stepanakert, the capital of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR), located only a short 15-minute drive from Khojaly. By the end of February 1992, intensive fire from Khojaly and other Azeri military strongholds in Karabakh had killed 243 people, including 14 children and 37 women, and wounded 491, including 53 children and 70 women. In addition, systematic and intense artillery and rocket fire against civilian targets in Stepanakert paralyzed the city, destroying hospitals, administrative buildings, schools, and homes. By controlling Khojaly, Azerbaijan also prohibited access to Karabakh's airport, the only link with the outside world, which was used to bring food and medical aid. Furthermore, Khojaly was also used as a staging area for military offensives on Stepanakert and nearby Armenian-populated villages. Thus, Khojaly became a legitimate military target for Self-Defense Forces of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic.

### LEGITIMATE TARGET FOR NKR SELF-DEFENSE UNITS

In early January 1992, Nagorno Karabakh authorities decided to neutralize this military target and informed the Azeris. The NKR authorities also transmitted this information by radio, TV, loudspeakers, leaflets and other methods to warn the Khojaly civilian population of the upcoming oper-

ation, giving the civilian population an opportunity to exit the area through a safe corridor. Azerbaijan's leadership in Baku, as well as local authorities, and military commanders in Khojaly knew about the corridor, its width and direction. Both Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov and Khojaly Mayor Elman Mamedov in their 1992 interviews confirmed this fact. During two weeks leading to the Khojaly operation, NKR Self-Defense Forces observed a mass exodus of the civilian population from Khojaly through the provided corridor (see on the map).

The operation to neutralize the Khojaly base of the Azeri armed forces began at 11:00 PM on February 25 and was successfully completed within five hours. Nagorno Karabakh forces took full control of the area, killing dozens of military personnel during the operation. Unfortunately, 11 civilians became unintended victims. About 700 civilians and military surrendered to NKR Self-Defense Forces. The captured civilians were returned to Azerbaijan in the following days, while the military personnel was later exchanged for the Armenian military prisoners and civilian hostages held by Azerbaijan.

### EVENTS ON THE TERRITORY CONTROLLED BY AZERBAIJAN, 7 MILES FROM KHOJALY, AFTER THE KHOJALY OPERATION WAS OVER

When the military operation began in Khojaly, a large group of civilians and armed military personnel from Khojaly used the provided humanitarian corridor to exit the battlefield and began moving in the direction of the Azeri-controlled Agdam. Near Nakhichevanik village of Karabakh (outside of the provided corridor), the group provoked a gun battle with the defenders of Nakh-

ichevanik, which resulted in numerous death on both sides. On February 28 and early March 1992, in the area then fully controlled by Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani and Turkish journalists videotaped images of the hundreds of killed and, during the second video shooting session, also mutilated bodies.

Since then, official Baku has falsified the events and used the human tragedy to persistently fan anti-Armenian hysteria to demonize the Armenian people in the eyes of the Azeris and the international community. It used the images to incite anti-Armenian sentiment and intolerance, which resulted in murders and calls from Azeris to wipe out Armenians as an ethnic group.

### **CONCLUSION**

Responsibility for the tragic loss of civilian life on February 26-27, 1992 on the outskirts of Agdam, territory fully controlled by Azeri forces, lies with the political and military leadership of Azerbaijan.

First, the Azeri leadership used the territory of Khojaly for indiscriminate artillery attacks on civilian targets, thus turning the town into a legitimate military target for NKR Self-Defense Forces.

Second, the Azeri leadership intentionally prevented the civilian population from leaving the militarized village.

Third, the Azeri leadership failed to safely relocate civilians from Khojaly after public warnings of upcoming military operation, although it had many opportunities to do so.

Fourth, retreating Azeri forces provoked an exchange of fire with NKR Self-Defense Forces some five miles from Khojaly, which resulted in losses on both sides.

Fifth, those who had continued, full access to the site of reported close-range, mass killing are responsible for it. The reported killing of hundreds of civilians with incidences of barbaric mutilation of bodies took place near Agdam (some seven miles from Khojaly), on the territory controlled by Azeri forces. Free access to the site by Azeri and Turkish journalists is clear evidence to that end.

In addition, Azerbaijan continues to create ground for a prolonged human tragedy by inciting anti-Armenian sentiments and intolerance in Azeri society. Such a policy stalls efforts to build bridges between Armenian and Azeri people and achieve eventual, long-lasting peace between Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh.

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*Background data, journalistic investigation and academic research materials to support the above information are available at the NKR Office in Washington, DC, and can be provided on-demand.*  
<http://www.nkrusa.org>

## ANNEX II

**Letter dated 8 March 2005  
from the Permanent Representative of Armenia  
to the United Nations  
addressed to the Secretary-General**

I am writing in response to the letter dated 24 February 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations regarding the tragedy in Khojaly, circulated as a document of the General Assembly and the Security Council (A/59/713-S/2005/125). In a pattern that is as familiar as it is abhorrent, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan has once again engaged in disseminating fabricated and totally misleading information about the tragedy in Khojaly aimed only at concealing the truth and the policy of massacres of Armenians meticulously planned and carried out by its leadership from 1988 to 1990 in Sumgait, Kirovabad (Ganja) and Baku.

In an effort that has become the trademark of the Azerbaijani leadership and has been elevated to State policy, the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan puts forward distorted and groundless accusations against my country, conveniently forgetting that the events of those years were clearly documented through eyewitness testimonies, and the Azerbaijani ones among them (see annex).

As Armenia has stated on multiple occasions, and as I would like to reiterate here, the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia have never participated in the conflict in and around Nagorno Karabagh. Moreover, no armed forces of the newly independent Armenia could have participated at the events in Khojaly as those forces had not been formed yet in February of 1992.

As despicable as it may seem, and immoral as it may sound, the manipulation of the memory of the victims and the suffering of those who survived has become the main tool of the Azerbaijani machinery in a vain effort to disguise its ineptitude and unpreparedness to seriously negotiate a

peace agreement that would end the conflict. As for the truth in Khojaly, it is clearly demonstrated in the accounts of Azerbaijanis covering the event and dealing with it. In an interview with the Czech journalist Jana Mazalova in March of 1992, the then President of Azerbaijan stated: “The massacres were staged”.

With regard to the unsubstantiated allegation of “ethnic cleansing” against Armenia and Armenians, I would like to present only one example, which speaks for itself. According to the Soviet census of 1926, Khojaly was an entirely Armenian village with 888 inhabitants. In the 1960s, the first Azerbaijani inhabitants appeared in the Armenian Khojaly. In 1988, the last Armenians were brutally killed and driven out of Khojaly. According to the 1989 census, Khojaly was an entirely Azerbaijani village with 1,661 inhabitants. As stated by Arif Yunusov in *Tragediya Khodjaly (The Tragedy of Khojaly)* in *Zerkalo*, from 13 to 19 June 1992, Khojaly was the focus of a large Azerbaijani resettlement programme (Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden, Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*, New York University Press, 2003, p. 170). The policy and ideology behind it was revealed by Heydar Aliyev, the late President of Azerbaijan, in his meeting with Azerbaijani journalists on 22 July 2002: “I was changing the demographic situation in Nagorno Karabagh”.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 163, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Armen Martirosyan  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative

## The Truth About the Events in Khojaly

### Evidence From Azerbaijani Sources

Annex to the letter dated 8 March 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia  
addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations

For nine years after the events in Khojaly official Baku has been obstinately fanning anti-Armenian hysteria with the aim of falsifying real events and discrediting the Armenian people in the eyes of the international community.

The events in Khojaly, which led to the death of civilians, were the results solely of political intrigues and a struggle for power in Azerbaijan.

The real reasons are most convincingly reflected in the accounts of Azerbaijanis themselves - as participants in and eyewitnesses of what happened - as well as of those who know the whole inside story of the events in Baku.

According to Azerbaijani journalist M. Safarogly, "Khojaly occupied an important strategic position. The loss of Khojaly was a political fiasco for Mutalibov"<sup>1</sup>.

Khojaly, along with Shushi and Agdam, was one of the main strongholds from which Stepanakert, the capital of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, was shelled continuously and mercilessly for three winter months using artillery and missiles and launchers for targeting cities.

Knocking out the weapon emplacements in Khojaly and freeing the airport were the only way for the inhabitants of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic to ensure the physical survival of a population condemned by Azerbaijan to complete annihilation. The daily shelling of Stepanakert from nearby Khojaly took the lives of peaceful inhabitants - women, children and old people.

Former President of Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutalibov, has emphasized that "... the assault on Khojaly was not a surprise attack"<sup>2</sup>. In a "Nezavisimaya gazeta" newspaper interview he stated that "a corridor was kept open by the Armenians for people

to leave"<sup>3</sup>. However, a column of civilians was fired on by armed units of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan on the approaches to the Agdam district border, a fact later confirmed by Ayaz Mutalibov, who linked this criminal act to attempts by the opposition to remove him from power, and blamed it entirely for what happened.

In his recent interview with the "Novoye vremya" magazine, Mutalibov confirms his statement of nine year ago: "The shooting of the Khojaly residents was obviously organized by someone to take control in Azerbaijan"<sup>4</sup>.

Similar comments and views concerning the events in Khojaly are known to have been made by several other highly-placed Azerbaijani officials and journalists.

There is, moreover, the conclusion of Azerbaijani journalist Arif Yunusov, which differs somewhat from the previous statements: "The town and its inhabitants were deliberately sacrificed for a political purpose - to prevent the Popular Front of Azerbaijan from coming to power"<sup>5</sup>. In this case, though, the Azerbaijanis themselves are named as the perpetrators of the tragedy.

What resulted from the betrayal of the inhabitants of Khojaly by their own highly placed compatriots is well known. Azerbaijani propaganda has railed to the whole world about the "atrocities of the Armenians", supplying television stations with horrendous pictures of a field strewn with mutilated bodies. Khojaly is claimed to have been the "Armenians' revenge for Sumgait".

Tamerlan Karayev, at one time Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijan Republic, bears witness: "The tragedy was committed by

<sup>1</sup> "Nezavisimaya gazeta" newspaper, February 1993

<sup>2</sup> "Ogonek" magazine, Nos. 14-15, 1992

<sup>3</sup> "Nezavisimaya gazeta" newspaper, 2 April 1992

<sup>4</sup> "Novoye vremya" magazine, 6 March 2001

<sup>5</sup> "Zerkalo" newspaper, July 1992

the authorities of Azerbaijan”, and specifically by “someone highly placed”<sup>6</sup>.

The Czech journalist Jana Mazalova, who by an oversight of the Azerbaijanis was included in both of the groups of press representatives to be shown the “bodies mutilated by the Armenians”, noted a substantial difference in the two cases. When she went to the scene immediately after the events, Mazalova did not see any traces of barbarous treatment of the bodies. Yet a couple of days later the journalists were shown disfigured bodies already “prepared” for pictures.

Who killed the peaceful inhabitants of Khojaly and then mutilated their bodies, if the tragedy occurred not in a village taken by Armenians or on the route of the humanitarian corridor, but on the approaches to the town of Agdam – on territory fully controlled by the Popular Front of Azerbaijan?

The independent Azerbaijani cameraman Chingiz Mustafayev, who took pictures on 28 February and 2 March 1992, had doubts about the official Azerbaijani version and began his own inquiry. The journalist’s very first report to the Moscow news agency “D-press” on the possible complicity of the Azerbaijani side in the crimes cost Mustafayev his life: he was killed not far from Agdam, under circumstances that are still unexplained.

The current President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, himself recognized that Azerbaijan’s “former leadership was also guilty” of events in Khojaly. Already in April 1992, according to the agency Bilik-Dunyasy, he had commented as follows: “The bloodshed will be to our advantage. We should not interfere in the course of events”. To whose “advantage” was the bloodshed is clear to everyone. “Megapolis-Express” wrote: “It cannot

be denied that if the Popular Front of Azerbaijan actually set far-reaching objectives, they have been achieved. Mutalibov has been compromised and overthrown, public opinion worldwide has been shaken, and the Azerbaijanis and their Turkish brethren have believed in the so-called “genocide of the Azerbaijani people in Khojaly”<sup>7</sup>.

One other tragic detail. It has become clear since the events that 47 Armenian hostages were already being held on 26 February in “peaceful” Khojaly, a fact that the Azerbaijani mass media “covering” the tragedy have failed to mention. After the liberation of Khojaly only 13 hostages (including 6 woman and 1 child) were found there, the other 34 having been taken away by the Azerbaijanis to an unknown location. The only thing known about them is that they were led from the village on the night of the operation, but never reached Agdam. There is still no information concerning what eventually happened to them or confirming that they continued to be held captive by the Azerbaijanis.

Obviously, those who wanted to create the impression that bodies had been mutilated by the Armenians first of all disfigured the bodies of those same Armenian hostages, in order to make it impossible to identify them. Precisely for that purpose the outer clothing was removed from many of the bodies and precisely for that reason the bodies of the unfortunate victims were damaged so badly that they became unrecognizable.

In the light of the above facts it may confidently be said that the killing of peaceful inhabitants of the village of Khojaly and of the Armenian hostages being held there was the work of the Azerbaijani side, which committed this crime against its own people in the name of political intrigues and the struggle for power.

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<sup>6</sup> “Mukhalifat” newspaper, 28 April 1992

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<sup>7</sup> “Megapolis-Express”, No. 17, 1992

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## **REPRINTS** №2

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