



PRESS RELEASE

29th Anniversary of the Xocalı Genocide

Exactly 29 years ago this day, the name of Azerbaijani town of Xocalı in Dağlıq Qarabağ region of Azerbaijan entered into the history of Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict as a symbol of brutality and crime against humanity. Over the night to 26 February 1992, the Armed Forces of Armenia backed by the 366th infantry regiment of the former USSR stationed at that time in Xankəndi committed what the Human Rights Watch called the "largest massacre of the conflict to date." During that bloody night, Armenian militaries wiped Xocalı off the face of earth by brutally slaughtering 613 people, including 106 women, 63 children and 70 elderly people with some of them burned alive and annihilating the whole families. 1275 people were captured, 487 left maimed or crippled and another 150 people, including 68 women and 26 children accounted for.

While murdering hundreds of innocent civilians with the unprecedented cruelty reveals the true nature of Armenian fascism, Xocalı genocide was not accidental outbreak of violence in the course of the war unleashed by Armenia against Azerbaijan to annex the Dağlıq Qarabağ region of Azerbaijan, but rather a deliberate act of mass murder with excessive use of force aimed at intimidating Azerbaijani population residing in the region. The admission by one of the Armenian warlords of that time and former President of Armenia Serj Sarkissian leaves no doubt as to the question of the real perpetrators of the crime in Xocalı. S.Sarkissian quoted in *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* by Thomas de Waal: "Before Khojaly, Azerbaijanis thought... that Armenians could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that stereotype. And that's what happened". No matter how high was the blinding ethnic hatred towards Azerbaijanis, it could not excuse the clear targeting of hundreds of civilians in an open space and the shooting of defenseless people only because they were Azerbaijanis.

Armenia bears full responsibility for the Xocalı genocide which is explicitly confirmed by numerous facts, including investigative evidences and records, testimonies of the eyewitnesses, international media report and documents of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. In a declaration on 11 March 1992, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe expressed deep concern "about recent reports of indiscriminate killings and outrages" in Azerbaijan and firmly condemning "the violence and attacks directed against the civilian populations in the Nagorno-Karabakh area of the Azerbaijan Republic". In its judgment of 22 April 2010, the European Court of Human Rights arrived at an important conclusion with respect to the crime committed in Xocalı qualifying the behavior of those carrying out the incursion as "acts of particular gravity which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity". The Organization of Islamic Cooperation has called for international and national recognition of the "mass massacre of Azerbaijani civilians perpetrated by the Armenian armed forces in the town of Khojaly" as a "genocidal act" and a "crime against humanity".

Xocalı genocide and other crimes against humanity perpetrated by Armenia in the course of its military aggression against Azerbaijan constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, in particular 1949 Geneva Conventions, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights as well as on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Similar to its atrocity methods of warfare employed in early 1990s, Armenia, with direct participation of mercenaries and foreign terrorist fighters again mobilized all its skills to murder civilians and cause indiscriminate or disproportionate harm to the residential areas in Azerbaijan during the another act of aggression against Azerbaijan in September-November 2020. Ganja, the second largest city of Azerbaijan as well as city of Barda situated far beyond the active military scene came under the Armenian systematic, deliberate and indiscriminate attacks with the use of ballistic missiles and multiple launch rocket systems causing the death of 46 and injuring more than 150 civilians. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has characterized the consequences of the attack on Barda on 28 October 2020 as “the biggest single loss of life”, noting also that “the rockets, allegedly fired by the Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh reportedly carried cluster munitions”.

Armenia has repeatedly used the prohibited cluster munitions and white phosphorus projectiles in their attacks against the densely populated areas of Azerbaijan, employed child soldiers and used kindergartens and school buildings for military purposes. There have also been multiple instances of extrajudicial executions and mistreatment of Azerbaijani prisoners of war as well as desecration and mutilation of dead bodies by Armenian militaries. As a result of these attacks launched by the Armed Forces of Armenia between 27 September and 9 November 2020, 101 Azerbaijani civilians, including 12 children were killed, 423 civilians were wounded, almost 84 000 people were forced to leave their homes and over 4300 private houses and apartment buildings and 548 other civilian objects were either destroyed or damaged. Even hospitals, medical facilities, ambulances, schools, kindergartens, religious sites, cultural monuments and cemeteries were not spared. All the above-mentioned facts have been well and widely documented by the international human rights entities such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

Equally deplorable is that contrary to its imperative obligations under the customary international humanitarian law, Armenia has also deliberately heavily mined the de-occupied territories of Azerbaijan, in particular on the eve of the forced withdrawal of its military from Azerbaijan following the trilateral statement signed between leaders of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Armenia on 10 November 2020 on the cessation of hostilities with a view to inflict much damage as possible and create obstacles for the realization of the inalienable right of displaced Azerbaijani population to return to homes in safety and dignity. Refusal by Armenia to release maps of minefields in the de-occupied territories has already claimed the lives of 15 and led to injuries of 65 citizens of Azerbaijan.

The trilateral statement of the leaders of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Armenia signed on 10 November 2020 has put an end to almost three decades-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has effectively restored its territorial integrity and sovereignty over its internationally recognized territories by enforcing Armenia to peace. The end of aggression and occupation has become a triumph of justice and international law. The new realities on the ground offer a unique opportunity for consolidating peace and stability and pave the way for restoring peaceful coexistence and promoting development and mutually beneficial cooperation in the region.

Yet, it is obvious that impunity still enjoyed by the perpetrators of the war crimes and crimes against humanity during the bloody conflict continues to impede progress in achieving reconciliation between two nations. Therefore, the establishment of truth in respect to gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law committed during the conflict, the provision of adequate and effective reparations to victims are all necessary adjuncts to the genuine process of rapprochement and peaceful coexistence between peoples of Armenian and Azerbaijan.

Geneva, 26 February 2021