

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 20 January – National Mourning Day

20 January 2024

Today, it has been 34 years since the military assault against the people of Azerbaijan and an unprecedented massacre targeting civilians by the former Soviet regime in breach of international law.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the former Soviet Union's disregard for Armenia's illegal territorial claims against our country, deportation of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands in present-day Armenia, and inciting ethnic riots for backing separatist activities in Azerbaijan's Garabagh region, further stimulated the rise of the national independence movement against the Soviet regime in Azerbaijan.

On the night of 19-20 January 1990 as a result of military aggression by units and special forces of Soviet Army as well as contingents of internal troops against Azerbaijan, massacres intending forcibly suppressing national independence movement in Azerbaijan were carried out against civilians, including women, children, and the elderly in Baku and Sumgayit, Lankaran, and Neftchala. Military aggression of the occupying forces claimed the lives of 150 citizens, severely wounded 744 others, and 4 people went missing.

On 21 January 1990, immediately after the tragedy, at the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan in Moscow, National Leader Heydar Aliyev was able to break through the Soviet regime's information blockade revealing this heinous crime against our people, and convey the world community the truth about the massacres.

20 January tragedy had a decisive impact on shaping the Azerbaijani national identity and marked a historic turning point in the restoration of independence of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani people who were exposed to the military, political, and moral aggression of the Soviet regime 34 years ago, demonstrated devotion to their historical traditions of struggle. The sons and daughters of the motherland, who sacrificed their lives for justice on that tragic day, left a remarkable page in the heroic history of our people. On 20 January 1990, which was marked in our history as a day of tragedy, as well as of national pride, Azerbaijani people conveyed to the world that they deserve to live free, sovereign and independent.

Following the return of National Leader Heydar Aliyev to power in our country, at the special session of the Milli Majlis (Parliament) held in February 1994 the brutal killing of innocent people on 20 January 1990 was qualified as military aggression and a crime, and in March 1994 a decision "On the tragic events committed in Baku on 20 January 1990" was adopted.

Regardless of the terrible atrocities committed against our people, the attempts to undermine our territorial integrity and sovereignty, and military occupation of our lands by Armenia for almost 30 years, the 44-day Patriotic War resulted in the complete restoration of our territorial integrity, while local counter-terrorism measures on 19-20 September 2023 led to the complete restoration of our sovereignty. For the first time this year, the 34th anniversary of the January 20 tragedy, which backfired by becoming the peak of the national independence movement, coincides with the time of complete restoration of our sovereignty, for which our sons and daughters sacrificed their lives.

We remember with deep respect and gratitude the memory of our Martyrs who sacrificed their lives for our independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty.