

Remembering Black January and the Massacre of Baku's Armenians



By Asbarez Staff on Jan 19th, 2010 and filed under Armenia, News, Top Stories.

Print This |

Yerevan Conference Marks 20th Anniversary of Pogroms Against Armenians in Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Combined Sources)—A conference dedicated to the 1990 massacres of Armenians in Baku took place at the Armenian National Academy of Sciences on Tuesday. The symposium brought together journalists, scholars and politicians to explore the slaughter of Baku's Armenians that began on January 13 and continued for a week before Soviet troops were brought into the city to end the violence.

The conference featured presentations by a documentary screening of journalist Marina Grigoryan's film, titled "Baku January 1990: Ordinary Genocide."

Speaking at the event were: the director of the National Academy of Sciences History Institute, Ashot Melkonyan, the director of the Center for Caucasus Studies at MGIMO, Vladimir Zakharov, a member of Armenia's Public Council, Vladimir Movsisyan, and Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan.

"When commemorating the victims, we should highlight that the only thing they are to blame for was being Armenian," Sargsyan said in his remarks. "Armenians were killed just for being Armenian."

The pogroms resulted in the death of an estimated 300 Armenians. They came as a direct response from Soviet Azerbaijan to the hundreds of thousands of Armenian demonstrators urging the Kremlin to allow Karabakh to be part of Armenia in 1988.

To quash the movement, Azeri OMON (special forces) units had begun a systematic pogrom of Armenia's in Sumgait in 1988. Those massacres were followed by a series of similar assaults on Armenians in Kirovabad, Baku and later in the Shahumian district of Karabakh.

Movsisyan reiterated those points during his own presentation, describing the pogroms as the continuation of a policy begun during the 1905-1907 massacre of Armenians in Baku, Nakhichevan and Shushi.



Armenians were murdered in their homes during the weeklong massacres.

“We witnessed the most brutal expression of that policy in Sumgayit, Gandzak and Baku,” he said.

To this day the exact number of Armenian actually killed in Baku remains a mystery as no specific records were kept of the murders. The only solid statistics available are of the refugees. Baku was emptied of its entire 250,000 strong Armenian population within days. Leaving behind all their belongings to flee the carnage, most eventually found refuge in Georgia, Russia, Armenia and Karabakh.

Unfortunately the Armenian Authorities have failed to properly convey the truth about the Karabakh conflict to the international community, Zakharov noted in his presentation. “A policy needs to be formulated and carried out at the state level to counteract Azerbaijan’s misinformation campaign,” he stressed. “A special fund should be created to translate literature on the subject from Armenian into foreign languages.”

Zakharov explained that the root cause of the massacres was the advent and spread of Pan-Turkism. “Despite an official ban of all nationalist groups in the Soviet Union, xenophobic sentiment always existed in Azerbaijan.”

“Hatred against Armenians passed on from generation to generation and today the image of Armenians as an enemy to Azerbaijan is propagated at the national level,” he added.

That hatred gave birth to the massacres of 1988-1990 and eventually escalated the situation into a war when Azerbaijani forces invaded Nagorno-Karabakh to bring it under Baku’s control.

“Baku’s failure to win that war led it to present the events of 1988-1990 as a genocide against Azeris perpetrated by Armenians,” Melkonyan said, discussing the Karabakh liberation war’s impact on the historical interpretation of the events within Azerbaijan.

In his remarks, Sargsyan alluded to the possibility that Azerbaijan’s continued warmongering and threats for renewed war could bring about a new crisis in the region. He compelled Armenians to unite and be prepared for “the serious hazards and challenges ahead.”

“The need for this doesn’t stem only from the Baku Pogroms of 20 years ago but also from the present reality that Azerbaijan maintains an official policy of hatred toward the Armenians.”

The event coincided with an official memorial ceremony at the Tsitsernagapert Genocide Memorial to commemorate the victims of the 1990 pogroms.

Copyright © 2010 Asbarez