

STATEMENT by the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan regarding the 36th Anniversary of the Tragedy of 20 January 1990

It has been 36 years since the night of January 19–20, 1990, when the former USSR armed forces carried out a military intervention against the civilian population of Azerbaijan, aimed at violently suppressing the nation's expression of independence and national will.

As a result of this bloody event committed against humanity, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international instruments on human rights were seriously violated. The 20 January tragedy, which resulted in mass human losses, is one of the most horrific crimes in terms of its nature and scale in the 20th century.

During that night, the use of disproportionate military force against unarmed civilians in Baku city and other districts of the republic resulted in the deaths of 150 peaceful people, and 744 people were wounded, also leading to a serious breach of the relevant norms of the constitutions of the former USSR and Azerbaijan SSR, along with the international legal norms. Our multiethnic nation was subjected to a massacre as they sought to protect their homeland and national identity.

The use of military force against a peaceful population and the deliberate violation of people's right to life and physical integrity without prior warning and in the absence of any real threat are prohibited under international human rights law and constitute a violation of inalienable rights, which must be ensured even in states of emergency. These events of 20 January confirm a grave breach of international legal norms.

At that time, the most significant statement on behalf of the Azerbaijani people was made by our National Leader Heydar Aliyev, who was residing in Moscow. Despite pressures and personal security risks, on 21 January 1990, the National Leader Heydar Aliyev addressed the press at Azerbaijan's permanent mission in Moscow, openly condemning the grave crime committed against the civilian population and declaring the direct responsibility of the former USSR leadership. His statement held significant historical importance, as it provided the first political and legal assessment of the January 20 tragedy.

Moreover, the failure of the international community and relevant international organizations at the time to provide an appropriate political and legal assessment of these events resulted in a breach of the principles of international justice and created a climate of impunity. The lack of a timely and principled response within the framework of the UN human rights mechanisms to these mass and grave violations subsequently provided a favorable environment for other serious crimes against human rights in the region.

As the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, I would like to emphasize that an objective and comprehensive investigation of the 20 January tragedy from the perspective of international law, its recognition as a crime against humanity, and ensuring legal accountability not only of the perpetrators but of all officials involved in the decision-making process are necessary for the restoration of justice.

In this context, I call on international organizations, particularly the relevant mechanisms of the United Nations, to take a firm position and to cooperate in ensuring that those responsible for the 20 January events are held accountable and that this bloody action is given an appropriate assessment under international law.

The dearest memory of the 20 January martyrs will forever remain in the hearts of the people of Azerbaijan.

Sabina Aliyeva

**The Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman)
of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

19 January 2026

The statement has been sent to the UN Secretary-General (UNSG), UN Security Council (UNSC), UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the heads of the European Union (EU), Council of Europe (CoE), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) and European Ombudsman Institution (EOI), Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Association of Ombudsman of Member States of this Institution (OICOA), Association of Ombudsmen and National Human Rights Institutions of Turkic States (TURKOMB), OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (OIC-IPHRC), European Network of Ombudspersons of Children (ENOC), International Peace Bureau (IPB), ombudspersons and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) of different countries, diplomatic missions of Azerbaijan in foreign countries and the diplomatic missions of foreign countries in Azerbaijan, and diaspora organizations of Azerbaijan.