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Report- Seminar

“Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing - Khojaly 25”

**In collaboration, with
Embassy of Azerbaijan, Pakistan**

February 21, 2017



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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held a Seminar in collaboration with the Embassy of Azerbaijan titled, “*Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing - Khojaly 25*,” on February 21, 2017. The Chief Guest at the event was Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Chairman Senate Defence Committee. Other dignitaries at the event included H.E Ali Alizada, Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Member National Assembly and convener of Pakistan – Azerbaijan Parliamentary Friendship Group and Dr. Mohammed Khan, former HoD, Department of International Relations, National Defence University.

The Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, welcomed the distinguished speakers and thanked the esteemed guests for participating in the event. He started off by stating that the Khojaly Genocide was one of the tragic incidents of recent history. The catastrophic incident took place on the eve of February 25-26, 1992 when the armed forces of Armenia along with terrorist groups seized the town of Khojaly and carried out massive atrocities on the civilian population, and in one night 613 civilians were killed including women and children, thousands were taken hostages and many hundreds still remain missing. The enormity of the event can be seen from the fact that about 20 per cent of the Azeri territory was occupied by Armenia with one eighth of the population becoming refugees. This tragedy amounts to genocide according to the various world conventions and was recognised as such by many countries across the world including Pakistan, due to destruction of cultural and religious institutions by Armenian forces. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), passed resolutions upholding the position of Azerbaijan. He further added that Pakistan has provided its full support to Azerbaijan in the matter, especially during Pakistan’s membership of UNSC in 1993, four resolutions were passed on the matter. He also thanked Azerbaijan for its support to Pakistan on its principal stand on Kashmir, and acknowledged the strong bond which exists between the two countries based on religious and cultural ties, and the help provided to each other during times of need. He concluded by stating that the exchanges between leadership and parliamentarians has further helped to broaden the bilateral relationship and ties between the two states.

H.E Ali Alizada, was the Keynote speaker of the Seminar, and he began by thanking the institute for holding this event. He further added that the Khojaly incident is one of the most tragic event of Azerbaijan history and this year marks its 25th anniversary where the Armenian nationalists and chauvinists carried out ethnic cleansing and genocide. The people from the area were pushed out from their lands and forced to become refugees, even though historically, the land was part of Azerbaijan since the Soviet era. There is a lot of propaganda from Armenia and its supporting countries that about 1 million Armenians were killed during WWI by the Ottoman Empire, but historically this is not a fact. He further added that UNSC resolutions of 1946 and 1948 show that the Armenians were the first to carry out genocide of the Muslim population during the 20th century all along the current Azerbaijan territory. Due to the Nagorno-Karabakh War 1988-93 and the Armenian desire to extend its territory, many civilians were killed and forced to become refugees, and 20 per cent of Azerbaijan land was occupied. H.E. Alizada further added that the Khojaly genocide caused by Armenian aggression is comparable with other such incidents across the history of the world. Khojaly had a distinct history and culture as part of the Azeri social fabric, and also had the only airport in the Karabakh region which connected it to the rest of the country. During the incident, the Armenians blockaded the town of Khojaly and destroyed many historic religious and cultural artefacts and monuments along with indiscriminate killing of civilians. He further stated that this genocide was not against one nation,

but against humanity, and needs to be punished appropriately so that it does not take place again. At the end, he thanked Pakistan for its support on this matter and for recognising this genocide and passing a resolution in its Senate in 2012, and its National Assembly in 2017, and appreciated the solidarity shown between the two brotherly states and hoped for continuation and strengthening of these ties.

Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja, was the next speaker and she started off by saying that Pakistan and Azerbaijan have strong historic bilateral relations at multiple levels and also in international organisations. She added that Pakistan has been very vocal about its support to Azerbaijan on the Khojaly issue and the occupation of its territory by Armenia, as it was similar to the situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). She said Pakistan can feel the pain of the Azeri people, as many atrocities have been committed by the Indian forces on the Kashmiris as well. Both houses of Pakistani parliament have passed resolutions in support of Azerbaijan on various occasions and has condemned the genocide that took place. She also added that killing of innocent civilians cannot be justified in any situation, and world news agencies have also written against it. In conclusion, she acknowledged the strength of the Azeri nation for standing united and building a strong nation in face of strong adversary and hoped that as the convener of Pakistan – Azerbaijan Parliamentary Friendship Group, the ties between the two countries could be further strengthened.

Dr. Mohammed Khan, was the next speaker and he gave a presentation about the Khojaly Genocide and said that it was similar to the situation in IOK. He said that Azerbaijan, after gaining its independence in 1991, has had to struggle a lot and it was not an easy road in the beginning. Nagorno-Karabakh is a mountainous disputed region between Azerbaijan and Armenia and during the Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Armenians occupied this region. Khojaly was the only town with an airport in the region, but it was blockaded by the Armenian forces and it was completely cut off from the rest of the region. On February 25-26, 1992 with the support of the former Soviet Union, the Armenians carried out a mass genocide of the town, carrying out extreme atrocities. This led to mass casualties and displacement of the people and it was not an accidental incident. It was planned and the Human Rights Watch termed it as an act of extreme violence against civilians. In conclusion, he said that the Indian forces have also carried out indiscriminate violence against civilians in IOK, similar to what happened in Khojaly. It is a type of ethnic genocide and the international community needs to be alerted to such incidents and be forced to implement the UNSC resolutions on both issues.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, was the Chief Guest of the Seminar and he started off by saying that Khojaly massacre is a very important incident and it cannot be ignored. He added that Pakistan and Azerbaijan have strong brotherly links based on their mutual interests and the problems they face in the international arena. He said that the Nagorno-Karabakh and Kashmir issue also formed a basis of linkage between the two countries because of their similarities and both countries support each other principal standpoints. He also stated that the UNSC resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh should be implemented which gives legality to the Azerbaijan stance. The Azeri massacre needs to be highlighted especially in the west along with the plight of the Kashmiri people and should be not discriminated on religious grounds. He concluded by saying that historically, Azerbaijan has been a very strong region and Pakistan was the second country to recognize it after its independence. He also proposed better coordination between the two

parliaments to highlight the issues facing the two countries so as to present a strong case in the international forums. He also assured H.E. Alizada of Pakistan's complete support and stated that Pakistan does not have any diplomatic links with Armenia nor does it recognizes it.

Conclusion

The Chairman in his concluding remarks thanked the audience and the speakers for their participation in the seminar. He also added that there was a heavy account provided of the atrocities carried out in Khojaly, which rival those carried out in other parts of the world. He said this was a continuation of economic and cultural exploitation, invasion, occupation and the Azeri people continue to be aggrieved, displaced and dispossessed. Pakistan, however, has been a strong supporter of Azerbaijan, but unfortunately the international community has not been able to come up with a solution. He hoped that in the future the issue of Azerbaijan will be resolved according to the wishes of its people and UNSC resolutions, thus bringing an end to the Armenian aggression.