

APPEAL

**to world religious leaders, international organizations,
parliaments and the world community**

In the name of the Almighty Creator!

We, the leaders of religious confessions operating in Azerbaijan, on the eve of the 31st anniversary of the Khojaly genocide - one of the most terrible pages in the history of Azerbaijan, and one of the most heinous tragedies of the 20th century, bring to your attention the present appeal.

The Khojaly genocide is the worst war crime against the peaceful Azerbaijani civilian population committed during the military aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan. A few days before this massacre, on February 17, 1992, Armenian armed groups massacred the local Azerbaijani population in the village of Garadaghly, Khojavend region, Azerbaijan and then, on the night of February 25-26 with, continued their unprecedentedly cruel crimes, and committed with the complicity of the 366th motorized infantry division of the former Soviet Army, a genocide in the city of Khojaly. As a result of the armed attack using the heavy military equipment, the city of Khojaly was completely destroyed and wiped off, 613 Azerbaijanis, including 63 children, 106 women and 70 elders, were brutally killed because of their national identity. 8 families were totally killed with unimaginable cruelty, 25 children had lost both of their parents, while 130 children lost one of them. Frenzied extremists scalped people, cut off their limbs, gouged out eyes of babies, cut open bellies of pregnant women, buried people alive or burned them, and committed wild tortures of corpses, while mining some of them. The civilian population, fleeing barefoot in frosty weather, had met no mercy, when Armenian militants caught up with them on the roads and in the forests and killed them with particular cruelty. As a result of that inhuman crime, 487 civilians became disabled because of severe injuries, 1275 were taken hostage, while the fate of 150 people, including 68 women and 26 children, still remain unknown.

As a result of baseless territorial claims of Armenia and its long standing aggressive policy against Azerbaijan, 20% of the internationally recognized territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan was kept under occupation for almost 30 years; a policy of ethnic cleansing, physical and moral terror was carried out against the Azerbaijani people; more than one million people were expelled from their ancestral lands in Armenia and the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, being forced to live as refugees and internally displaced persons; their human rights were grossly violated. Hundreds of cities and villages, as well as the rich ancient cultural heritage of the Azerbaijani people, were looted and destroyed.

Starting from the summer of 2020, Armenia launched another military provocation against Azerbaijan under the slogan “new war for new lands” and attempted to expand the area of occupation, using heavy artillery fire against various regions of Azerbaijan, targeting the civilians and civil infrastructure. Continuing its war crimes and acts of vandalism, the aggressive Armenian regime targeted Azerbaijani settlements located on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and even far from the war zone, including major cities, including Ganja, Barda, Terter, Mingachevir, Gabala, and even outskirts of the capital city of Baku, using heavy artillery, ballistic missiles, phosphorus and cluster bombs. In response to another military provocation by Armenia, Azerbaijan rose up in the Holy Patriotic War and liberated its ancestral lands from 30-year occupation, restoring its territorial integrity within the borders recognized by the world community, which is in line with the norms of international

law, the requirements of UN Security Council resolutions No. 822, 853, 874 and 884 and brought the historical justice back.

We would like to bring to the attention of the world community that along with the policy of occupation, ethnic cleansing and genocide during the 30-year occupation, Armenia also committed war crimes and acts of vandalism against the religious, cultural and historical heritage of Azerbaijan. Mosques and other religious temples located in those territories, as well as cemeteries, were subjected to Armenian vandalism, a policy of changing the origin of the Russian Orthodox and ancient Albanian Christian churches was carried out. 65 mosques out of those 67 mosques officially registered before the Armenian occupation of the region, were completely destroyed; the mosques were turned into stalls for livestock, even including animals prohibited in Islam, which became a direct and obvious insult to the dignity of the entire Islamic world. The international visitors who arrive today to the liberated territories on observer missions call those places "Hiroshima of the Caucasus" or the "ghost cities".

While leaving the Azerbaijani lands, the invaders applied the tactics of "scorched land" in these territories, and installed thousands of land mines there. Armenia is demonstrating its obvious disregard for international law and humanitarian principles by refusing to provide maps of minefields, or by providing false maps that do not correspond to reality. After the war, Armenian religious leaders voice revanchist statements and call on their people for a new war, and not for peace, which is so dire need for the region. Applying to international structures and religious organizations, Armenian political and religious circles are spreading false and slanderous information about the alleged destruction of Christian monuments by Azerbaijan in the territories liberated from occupation, and they are trying to veil the real facts to keep focuses away from the facts of vandalism committed by Armenia in Karabakh.

We, the leaders of religious confessions, declare that in Azerbaijan, where we carry out our activities, the relations between Religions and the State are at a high level, and all the Religions are provided with equal rights by the State. At present, on the basis of the instructions of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, with the direct participation and under the patronage of the First Vice-President Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, the lands of Karabakh are being revived and rebuilt, including the restoration of Muslim mosques and Christian Churches, as well as the rich cultural and historical heritage, destroyed and plundered by Armenia. We invite international and religious-based organizations to get acquainted with the exemplary atmosphere of tolerance and multiculturalism in Azerbaijan on site, and to witness with their own eyes the real situation in the territories liberated from occupation, as well as the consequences of Armenian vandalism against our cultural and religious monuments, and to give an objective assessment of these inhuman actions.

We regretfully note behind the untimely receipt of a legal and political assessment of the cases of mass violence, extremist and terrorist crimes taking place in the world, dangerous manifestations of double standards, religious and racial discrimination in the activities of some policy makers, religious figures, states and organizations towards those issues. The people of Azerbaijan will never forget the Khojaly tragedy. Over the past years, purposeful activities have been carried out to bring our voice of truth to the whole world, to increase the awareness of the Khojaly genocide at the international level. Since 2008 this activity has gained wide scale with the international "Justice for Khojaly" campaign. The Khojaly massacre has been recognized as genocide by a number of countries and

international organizations, and the tragedy received an international political assessment. Addressing the entire progressive community, we urge not to stay indifferent to the Khojaly genocide and to raise the voices for condemning the perpetrators of this terrible tragedy.

It should be regretfully noted that the provisions of the tripartite Statement signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia upon the end of the Second Karabakh War in 2020 were ignored by the political circles of Armenia and certain countries that patronize it, as well as by the aggressive separatist forces allocated in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, that is in addition to the Churches of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia in particular, which are spreading the ideology of revanchism and conduct anti-Azerbaijani propaganda. Azerbaijan, having put an end to the occupation, restoring historical justice and territorial integrity recognized by the international community, is currently coming up with economic projects that can serve the well-being of the entire region, including Armenia. But it seems that those political and religious circles see the interests of Armenia and the Armenian people not in peace and economic welfare, but in a war of attrition. The world community should not turn a blind eye to the statements of religious figures calling for new wars, hatred, invasion, separatism, and voicing racist calls before the Azerbaijani and Armenian mothers' tears and cries for their children shot dead or went missing in the war.

The Religious denominations in Azerbaijan declare their commitment to stop any military aggression, against calls for war, hatred, religious and ethnic intolerance, revanchism, and advocacy of good neighborliness, peace and tranquility between states and peoples. We once again call on world religious leaders, international organizations, parliaments and the world community to work together in the name of these Godly goals, and we particularly call on the Armenian Apostolic Church to promote human values, peace and reconciliation.

May the Almighty help us all in the charitable deeds and justice! Amen!

**Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur PASHAZADEH,
Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims' Board**

**Archmandrite ALEKSIY,
Secretary of Baku and Azerbaijan Diocese
of the Russian Orthodox Church**

**Milikh YEVDAYEV,
Head of the community of Mountain Jews
in Azerbaijan**

**Robert MOBILI,
Chairman of the Albanian-Udi
Christian religious community in Azerbaijan**

**Aleksandr SHAROVSKI,
Head of the community of European Jews in Azerbaijan**

Baku, February 22, 2023