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## 23<sup>rd</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF MASSACRES AGAINST ARMENIANS IN SUMGAI FEBRUARY 27-29, 1988

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- ◆ On the evening of February 27, 1988, a three-day rampage against Christian Armenian civilians living in Sumgait, Soviet Azerbaijan began.
- ◆ Armenian civilians, whose calls for help from police were ignored, were at the mercy of Azerbaijani rioters, who murdered, raped, and maimed Armenians, throwing women and children from windows and burning victims alive, as Azerbaijani authorities watched for three days, even though the capital Baku was only a half hour away.
- ◆ Reports from the Financial Times (March 16, 1988) and New York Times (May 22, 1988) noted Armenians being “hunted” down and killed in their homes.
- ◆ Soviet authorities, who had prohibited journalists from entering the area and had instituted a press blackout, estimated over 30 had been killed and over 200 injured, but others estimated hundreds were murdered.
- ◆ The Washington Post reported accounts of an Armenian being skinned alive before he was murdered and an Armenian woman being raped and killed after her breasts had been cut off. The director of the press agency Novosti explained that the over 30 officially reported deaths “were not merely 32 deaths,” but were the result of “religious fanaticism with a sadistic touch to it.” Washington Post, April 5, 1988.
- ◆ The Washington Post (March 9, 1988), New York Times (March 11, 1988), and Financial Times (March 12, 1988) all reported accounts of a pregnant Armenian woman being disemboweled and her unborn baby being mutilated.
- ◆ In the days before the massacre, Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh, an autonomous region, which Stalin had arbitrarily severed from historic Armenia and forced under Soviet Azerbaijani administration, had been peacefully demonstrating against decades of Soviet Azerbaijani repression and discrimination.
- ◆ The New York Times reported that “[h]uge, peaceful street demonstrations were followed by a rampage of anti-Armenian violence in Sumgait . . . .” New York Times, April 27, 1988.
- ◆ Many believed the massacres were officially sanctioned to send a message to Armenians to stop challenging Soviet Azerbaijani authorities.
- ◆ Azerbaijan’s Communist party leader, Kyamran Bagirov was removed from office for his role in the Sumgait riots. Washington Post, May 30, 1988.
- ◆ The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and Ranking Member Jesse Helms (R-NC) appealed directly to Soviet Premier Mikhael Gorbachev and expressed deep concern about the “brutal killings of hundreds of Armenians in Sumgait.” March 18, 1988.



- ◆ Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) also personally appealed to Soviet Premier Gorbachev, writing that he was “deeply concerned about widespread violence recently directed against Armenians in the Soviet Union” and noting the peaceful demonstrations expressing the “legitimate grievances of the Armenian people of the Soviet Union must be addressed with more than violence and repression.” March 19, 1988.
- ◆ Within months of the Sumgait massacres, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed Amendment 2690 to the FY 1989 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill (H.R. 4782) in July 1988, concerning the Karabakh conflict and calling on the Soviet government to “respect the legitimate aspirations of the Armenian people.” The amendment also noted that “dozens of Armenians have been killed and hundreds injured during the recent unrests.”
- ◆ In July 1988, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning the Sumgait massacres, supporting the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh with the Republic of Armenia, and expressing concern for the safety of Armenians living in Azerbaijan.
- ◆ Sumgait was only the beginning and anti-Armenian pogroms followed in Kirovabad (November 21-27, 1988) and in Baku (January 13-19, 1990), culminating in Azerbaijan instigating a war, during which Armenian civilian population centers were routinely shelled and indiscriminately attacked.
- ◆ In the midst of the massacres in Kirovabad, **Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Andrei Sakharov** reported that more than 130 Armenians had been killed by Azerbaijani mobs in the city of Kirovabad. He noted that “[w]ith the authorities’ connivance, the murders, rapes and arsons are continuing now for a fifth day and are spreading to other cities and towns of Azerbaijan.” He continued that the **“Armenian people are again facing the threat of genocide.** The events in Sumgait and Kirovabad may be its beginning. This must not be allowed to happen!” New York Times, November 26, 1988.
- ◆ Less than 14 months later, Azerbaijan committed yet another anti-Armenian pogrom, this time in the capital Baku starting on January 13, 1990. As a result, Senators John Kerry (D-MA), Claiborne Pell (D-RI), Larry Pressler (S-SD), Paul Simon (D-IL), and Pete Wilson (R-CA) sent a letter to Soviet Premier Gorbachev stating, “we are deeply concerned about the murders, tortures, and property destruction that the Armenian community of Baku has suffered over the past six days as a result of attacks by organized groups of Azerbaijanis.” They continued, “The horrifying upsurge of violence in Azerbaijan only dramatizes the need for the Soviet Government to insure that the 160,000 residents of the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh can exercise their autonomy by reuniting with Soviet Armenia.” January 18, 1990.
- ◆ **Over 100 leading academics and human rights advocates** placed an advertisement in the New York Times on July 27, 1990 titled, “An Open Letter to International Public Opinion on Anti-Armenian Pogroms in the Soviet Union.” The letter, which was signed by professors from Johns Hopkins, Princeton, Brown, Wesleyan, William and Mary, New School for Social Research, Berkeley, UCLA, University of Vienna, and University of Paris and included the Executive Director of the NAACP and Elie Wiesel, urged the international community to take action to protect the Armenian community in Azerbaijan. They noted that the “pogroms of Sumgait in February 1988 were followed by massacres in Kirovabad and Baku in November 1988” and Baku again in 1990. “The mere fact that these pogroms were repeated and the fact that they followed the same pattern lead us to think that these tragic events are no accidents or spontaneous outbursts,” but **that “crimes against the Armenian minority have become consistent practice – if not official policy – in Soviet Azerbaijan.”** The letter concluded, “The international community of states . . . must prove the authenticity of its commitment to human rights in order to ensure that, **due to indifference and silence bordering on complicity, another genocide does not occur.**” New York Times Advertisement, July 27, 1990, pg. A 10.