

Shusha: 28 Years of Exile, Devastation and Hope

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Today, the people of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis throughout the world paused to remember the 28th anniversary of Armenia's occupation of Shusha and the devastation of Karabakh's once most picturesque and vibrant towns.

Shusha stands as uniquely important for the history and culture of Azerbaijan. This mountainous community gave Azerbaijan the overwhelming majority of its poets and composers, including the legendary princess-poet Natavan and the author of the first ever Muslim opera Uzeyir Hajibayov.

Armenia celebrates the barbaric destruction of this ancient community and the accomplished total ethnic cleansing as a victory. Sadly, a celebration of aggression and intolerance by Armenia coincides with the date when the rest of the world marks the victory over Nazi Germany in WWII. Azerbaijan's exercise of global leadership from its membership in the United Nations Security Council to the current chairmanship of the Non-Alignment Movement to championing numerous regional integration and international dialogue initiatives stands in stark contrast to Armenia's deepening external dependency and self-imposed isolation as a result of its ethno-centric policies. Such contrast reflects the choices made by the two nations, respectively.

The future of Shusha is crucial for any settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It has been the heart of Karabakh for centuries, and for the last quarter of a century this heart has been broken. The soul of Shusha is not in the present-day Armenian-controlled ghost town; it lives among the displaced communities scattered around Azerbaijan. Therefore, restoring Shusha is not an architectural makeover project, it can only be an initiative that includes a lasting peace agreement and would bring its Azerbaijani natives back home

