

them had their houses burned down, others were "besieged" by Azerbaidzhani. The villagers were particularly indignant about the Soviet tactic of making the expulsions appear "legal" for public purposes, by having people sign declarations that they had "moved away of their own free will." Documents of this "Operation Zalif," which expose this tactic of Moscow's, have come into Armenian possession.

Because of Azerbaidzhan's Moscow-backed economic blockade of Armenia, and because of the major and still unrepaired damages of the earthquake catastrophe of 1988—nearly 800,000 people live without permanent shelter in northern Armenia—the economic situation of the coming months will be very difficult, especially in regard to energy supplies for next winter. The nuclear plant near the capital, which went on line in 1976, has remained inoperative since the earthquake, and the Sevan Lake hydroelectric plant has been shut down for the same length of time.

But even though—or perhaps precisely because—Moscow is doing everything to block any future moves toward independence, all institutional forces in the Armenian Republic have decided to proceed with the referendum on Sept. 21.

The popular mood is visible on the streets of Yerevan. In recent months the signs of Soviet central power and the communist system have largely vanished. Statues of Lenin have been toppled, and the Lenin relief on the gable of the former Communist Party building, recently taken over by the democratically elected parliament, has been dismantled. Yet there are signs that because of the lingering guerrilla war, a "compromise" on the holding of the referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh will be sought, which ultimately goes in the direction of isolating Armenia and splitting off Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaidzhani control.

Armenian President appeals to Bush

This letter was sent by Armenian President L. Ter-Petrossian to President George Bush on May 8.

The Republic of Armenia and the Armenian people, having opted for democracy and sovereignty, are living through critical times.

Armed forces of the U.S.S.R. and Azerbaidzhani Interior Ministries, supported by heavy artillery, tanks, and helicopter gunships, are implementing a preplanned policy of depopulation of Armenians in Azerbaidzhani territory, specifically those living in villages adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. Many villages have already been forcibly evacuated and others burnt.

There have been repeated cases of pogroms and massa-

ces committed by Soviet and Azerbaidzhani armed forces against the civilian and defenseless Armenian population.

The horrors which only armies can inflict have now been spread to villages inside Armenian territory near the Azerbaidzhani border since last week. Units of the Fourth Army of the U.S.S.R. stationed in Azerbaidzhan have crossed the border into Armenia and have been shelling villages along the border. In the absence of a declaration of a state of emergency, such operations constitute an undeclared war by the central authorities against the civilian population of a constituent republic.

Armenian self-defense units, whose size and importance have been exaggerated in Soviet and Azerbaidzhani reports, are capable of defending the population from brigands and mob attacks but not against armies. Moreover, it is militiamen of the Armenian Interior Ministry that have been the targets of Soviet army operations, in some cases becoming victims of brutal murders.

My government is convinced that these military operations and atrocities are being committed with the aim of destabilizing the situation in Armenia and weakening its legal and legitimate government. Since the victory of popular and democratic forces last August, Armenia has introduced a multi-party system, implemented a policy of land distribution to the peasants, and adopted a constitutional path toward the attainment of independence. In this respect, the government of Azerbaidzhan, still under the control of the Communist Party, has become an ally of the anti-reformist forces in Moscow. The two share an interest in perpetuating authoritarianism and dependency; their joint policies are intended to penalize Armenia for its decision to hold its own referendum on the question of independence and democracy.

It is apparent that such policy decisions and large-scale military operations could not have been implemented without the knowledge and approval of U.S.S.R. President Mikhail Gorbachov himself. Under no circumstances can President Gorbachov and the central authorities of the U.S.S.R. escape the responsibility for the massive violations of elementary human rights, the Charter of the United Nations, and international treaties and conventions.

The government and people of Armenia have followed closely the concerted action of the international community in dealing with violations of international law and standards in the Gulf region in the spirit of the New World Order, and the consequences of the war there.

Armenia wishes to see nothing more and nothing less than the respect everywhere of international standards of behavior by governments.

It is my hope that the government of the United States will consider carefully the implications of Soviet policies with regard to Armenia and other democratic republics of the U.S.S.R. and that it will undertake whatever means it considers necessary and proper to ensure that the principles of collective security, peaceful conflict resolution, and self-determination are respected within, as much as without, the U.S.S.R.