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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 August 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Precarious human rights situation in Russian-annexed Crimea

Three and a half years after the Russian annexation of Crimean peninsula, the indigenous 280,000 Crimean Tatars are suffering from discrimination, persecution, and fear. The raids, arrests, and their systematic exclusion from public life must not be obscured and covered up. The Russian Federation's government is trying to promote tourism in Crimea in order to lessen the consequences of the fact that the number of tourist from Western countries has declined dramatically.

About 30,000 Crimean Tatars have fled from the peninsula since February 26, 2014, when thousands of Crimean Tatars gathered in Simferopol to protest against the impending occupation by the Russian Federation. Since then, the lives of the Crimean Tatars who stayed on the peninsula have been characterized by arbitrary house searches and raids, disappearances, politically motivated court trials, the destruction of their self-representation, and by a systematic policy of Russification. In 2016, their most important self-representation, the Mejlis, was classified as an "extremist organization", and all activities of this body were banned. The Mejlis is considered a kind of "government" of the Crimean Tatars.

After the annexation of Crimea, the radio and TV stations in Crimea were shut down, then the editorial offices were closed and individual media were put under pressure – now, independent journalists and bloggers have been suffering. The journalist Mykola Semena was arrested in April 2016 – and later released under the condition that he should not leave Crimea. On August 23, 2016, his lawyer had applied to the Russian secret service to allow Semena to travel to the Ukrainian mainland for urgent medical treatment. This was rejected by the Russian Federation's authorities. Semena might be facing up to five years in prison, based on charges of "endangering the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation", which refers to a single critical sentence he wrote about the annexation in 2015. His trial started in March 2017. The next hearing in his court case is set for 31 August 2017. The European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) as well as the United States have stated their concern in the case of Semena's prosecution.

The case of the Crimean Tatar leader Akhtem Chijgoz exemplifies the plight of Crimean Tatar politicians. Chijgoz vice president of the Mejlis, was in custody since January 29, 2015 on alleged suspicion of organizing and participating in mass riots on 26 February, 2014. In fact, Akhtem Chijgoz took part in a rally in favor of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The rally took place in front of the Crimean Parliament building. The trial against Chijgoz started in December 2015. Several witnesses have contradicted the prosecution, stating that they never witnessed Chijgoz inciting mass riots. In fact, the rally took place before the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. According to Chijgoz's lawyer, the verdict in his case will be announced on 11 September, 2017.

The Russian intelligence service continues to put pressure on anyone who dares to express even a hint of criticism about the annexation. In Crimea, more than 177 people were arrested and submitted to criminal identification for political reasons in 2016. More than 90 percent of them are said to be Crimean Tatars. They fear that their data could be used for criminal proceedings later on. Apart from that, members of the secret service and the police carried out at least 50 searches of houses, apartments, mosques, and other buildings that are mostly owned or used by Crimean Tatars.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to:

- To urge the government of the Russian Federation to allow for the establishment of an international human rights monitoring presence in occupied Crimea.
- To urge the government of the Russian Federation to take back the classification of the Mejlis as an “extremist organization” and lift the ban on the Mejlis as well as the travel bans for Crimean politicians and activists.
- To urge the government of the Russian federation to end the trial against the journalist Mikola Semena and affirm the right to freedom of expression.
- To urge the government of the Russian Federation to end the trial against Akhtem Chijgoz and set him free.