



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 10

### Technical assistance and capacity-building

## **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.

[04 June 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

## Human rights denied in Russian occupied Crimea

76 years after the deportation of 193,000 Crimean Tatars by Soviet Dictator Joseph Stalin, the Crimeans were unable to commemorate this crime against humanity. Crimean Tatars have been denied by the Russian occupation forces the right to publicly remember the tragedy of their mass deportation.

Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) is deeply concerned about media and press freedom in Russian occupied Crimea. Before the illegal occupation started in 2014, some 3,000 media outlets were operating in the region. They were requested to re-register under the occupation forces. Unfortunately, only 232 of them succeeded in getting the approval to continue their activities. Some radio and TV channels have applied several times to re-register, but their license was refused by the Russian media and communications regulator Roskomnadzor.

The news agency Krymskie Novosti QHA and ATR TV, which were leading independent information outlets of the Crimean Tatar minority, had to stop their activities in the peninsula on April 1, 2015. Even after ATR TV decided to leave occupied Crimea and resumed broadcasting on Crimean Tatar affairs on June 17, 2015, from Ukrainian capital Kyiv, the authorities of the Russian Federation continued to intimidate and criminalize the staff of the TV channel. In May 2020, the Supreme Court of Crimea has started a trial against Lenur Islamov, the owner of ATR TV. He is accused by the Russian authorities of “organizing an illegal armed group, committing sabotage and other extremist activities”. Due to Coronavirus the trial was held behind closed doors. The Russian security service FSB had opened a criminal case against him in October 2015 and declared him for wanted. In December 2015, his property on Crimea has been seized by Russian authorities and a prosecutor had charged him in absentia with sabotage. The absent Islamov refuted the charges and claimed his innocence. Not only the owner of ATR TV, but also the Deputy Director General of the media outlet, Ayder Muzhdabaev, has been accused of supporting “terrorism” under Article 105.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation by publishing “propaganda” or “justifying terrorism”.

Critical reporting on the annexation and the daily repression in Crimea definitely is not tolerated by Russian authorities. In ten villages and towns in northern Crimea, the broadcasting of Ukrainian radio stations was totally blocked in spring 2020, in another nine settlements the FM stations partly were blocked. Furthermore, 20 Ukrainian websites were blocked especially if they regularly were reporting on Crimean Tatars.

Since the annexation, 369 cases of harassment, intimidation and arrests of journalists and bloggers have been registered. At least ten professional or citizen journalists or bloggers are still in jail. Many of them are Crimean Tatars, some are members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supporting human rights for the Muslim minority. The Crimean Tatar freelance journalists Osman Arifmemetov and Remzi Bekirov were arrested in March 2019 in southern Russian and accused of supporting extremist Muslim movements. They are refuting the accusations. Many Crimean Tatar activists who opposed Russia’s annexation of Crimea were criminalized and put on trial on terrorism-related charges. Bekirov was placed in a solitary confinement cell for some time. Later he was transferred to a cell in the basement of the prison where he was unable to stand up or lay down. He will be facing up to 25 years in prison, if the court will confirm the terrorism-charges during trial. The citizen journalist Server Mustafayev was detained in May 2018 on terrorism related charges. He and many other detainees are supporting “Crimean Solidarity”, a NGO created in the year 2016 as a response of Crimean Tatars to the widespread persecution of the minority.

STP is very much concerned about the abuse of punitive psychiatry in Crimea against human rights defenders. At least the two Crimean Tatar political prisoners Raim Aivazov and Yashar Muyedinov were held against their will in psychiatric detention during weeks. In April 2020, three other political prisoners, who were detained in March 2020, were transferred to psychiatric detention. The abuse of psychiatry to silence political opponents has a long tradition in former Soviet Union and the Russian Federation.

Arbitrary raids by security forces, arrests, forced conscription and militarization have created an atmosphere of fear and persecution on Crimea. Due to repression some 48,000 people have been forced to leave the illegally occupied peninsula. This creates new traumatism among Crimean Tatars whose relatives had been experiencing brutal deportation in 1944 under Dictator Stalin.

Russia’s move to strip Ukrainians of their own land by declaring in a decree on March 20, 2020, that foreign nationals cannot have land rights, is a blatant threat to Crimean Tatars to lose their homeland. The Russian Federation has made it virtually impossible to reside in Crimea without acquiring Russian citizenship. Those refusing naturalization are at risk of losing their property. This is a massive violation of the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in Time of War, which prohibits the expropriation of the local population in occupied territories.

STP is alarmed about the persecution of religious minorities in Crimea. Since the annexation, nearly 80 administrative procedures against religious organizations have been launched. Especially the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Light of World Church of the Evangelical Christians and Jewish Religious Community of Simferopol City had fines imposed by the authorities and were suffering from arbitrary harassment. In March 2020, Sergei Filatov was sentenced to six years in custody in a penal colony for his membership in Jehovah's Witnesses. Another member of this religious community was sentenced to a fine for supporting the faith group.

**Society for Threatened Peoples therefore calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the Russian Federation to:**

- end the illegal occupation of Crimea,
  - stop criminalizing Crimean Tatar human rights defenders as “terrorists” and to harass them by intimidation, arbitrary raids and arrests,
  - free all political prisoners,
  - ensure the respect of press and media freedom,
  - guarantee the respect of religious freedom of religious minorities.
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