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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.

[12 August 2020]

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

Situation in Russian-occupied Ukrainian Crimea

After the Russian Federation illegally occupied Ukrainian Crimea in 2014, the Russian authorities have been abusing laws to intimidate and persecute Crimean human rights defenders. Dozens of human rights activists were sentenced to long prison terms. Even six years after the start of that campaign to silence all critical voices on Crimea, Russian authorities are continuing their intimidation tactics.

On June 25, 2020, Russia's Military Court of Appeal confirmed massive sentences against the Crimean Tatar human rights defender Emir-Usein Kuku and five other Ukrainian Muslims. Kuku was sentenced to 12 years, Vadim Siruk to 12 years and Refat Alimov and Arsen Dzhapparov to 8 years in prison. They falsely were blamed for "terrorist activities" of the Muslim movement Hizb ut-Tahrir. This NGO is acknowledged as legal organization in Ukraine, but has been presented by Russian authorities as "terrorist organization" without providing any reliable and convincing proofs. All six men were accused of unproven involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir after their arrest in February and April 2016. All of them will be sent to prison colonies well-known for their exceptionally bad conditions for prisoners. Some of them have been tortured according to testimonies of other prisoners.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed changes to a law on the Federal Security Service (FSB) in August 2020 to silence voices reporting on torture and other human rights violations committed by FSB. Especially in occupied Crimea, FSB has committed torture and other massive human rights violations. The new paragraphs are including provisions that military servicemen and civilian employees of FSB bodies must maintain confidentiality of information of the FSB containing professional secrets.

In Crimea, Ruslan Bekirov is facing criminal charges for having refused to give false testimony and having revealed the torture that the FSB used to obtain his signature under his testimony. He is charged because he has got the courage to lodge a formal complaint against the FSB. The home of the son of the Crimean Tatar activist Dlyaver Bekirov several times was raided by FSB in search for documents proving political activities of Crimean Tatar activists. Especially they were searching for proofs for the involvement of Crimean Tatar activist Enver Seitosmanov in Hizb ut-Tahrir activities. Seitosmanov was sentenced to 17 years in a prison colony in December 2019.

On October 13, 2017, the Crimean Tatar Rinat Paralamov was taken away from his home by masked FSB staff. For about a day he disappeared in the hands of FSB. He was beaten and tortured. After a day of torture, he was released, but several hospitals have refused to admit him despite his desperate condition. The military prosecutor has refused to initiate criminal investigations against the FSB officers responsible for torture and instead launched a criminal procedure against the torture victim.

Some Russian parliamentarians have proposed to amend the federal law on measures against extremism by a bill which will consider as an act of extremism any violation of the Russian Federation's territorial integrity. The wording primarily is aimed at preventing or criminalizing any discussion about the Russian occupation of Crimea.

The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation charged the Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev on April 13, 2020, under three articles of the Russian Criminal Code. On May 27, 2020, the investigation of this case was completed.

On June 10, 2020, the FSB has arrested Andrey Kuliyeovich in Sevastopol and charged him with extremism and the preparation of an act of terrorism. The FSB claims that homemade explosive devices, weapons, ammunition and communication equipment have been confiscated at his home, but no convincing proofs have been presented. He is facing up to 20 years imprisonment.

On July 7, 2020, FSB agents launched a new wave of mass searches in Crimea. Seven persons (Alim Sufyanov, Emil Ziyadinov, Oleksandr Sizikov, Seyran Khayretdinov, Vadim Bektemirov, Zekirya Muratov, Ismet Ibrahimov) have been arrested.

We are deeply concerned about the huge number of Crimean Tatars arrested for political reasons by Russian authorities in occupied Crimea. Among 101 citizens of Ukraine held for political reasons in Russian custody, some 77 persons are Crimean Tatars.

Society for Threatened Peoples International calls on the UN Human Rights Council:

- to urge the Russian Federation to ensure the respect of law and international human rights standards in illegally occupied Ukrainian Crimea,
 - to release all political prisoners linked to the occupation of Crimea,
 - to urge the Russian Federation to end its occupation of Crimea.
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