



# Committee for the protection of rights of the Crimean Tatar people

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*Statement for the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019*

*WORKING SESSION 7: Fundamental freedoms I, including: Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief,*

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## ***Violation of the right to freedom of conscience and religion in the occupied Crimea***

Distinguished moderator, representatives of OSCE member states and participants!

Having occupied Crimea in 2014, in violation of international law, Russia began systemic violations of human rights. Russian repressive practices are gaining more and more momentum. Searches, arrests, detentions are not single episodes any more but systemic and institutionalized. Every day, human rights defenders record dozens of cases of human rights violations throughout Crimea, including violations of freedom of religion. The occupation power is trying to find more and more artificial reasons to arrest completely innocent people, accusing them of crimes that they have never committed. Here are just a few examples registered by the Crimean Tatar Resource Center over the first half of 2019:

-On January 18, on the eve of Friday prayer police officers and riot police arrived at the mosque in Dubki village of Simferopol region. They tried to substitute the imam;

-On March 17, in Sary-su district, Belogorsk, there was an attempt to prevent a prayer service dedicated to illegally convicted political prisoners and the missing during the occupation period of Crimea;

-On March 27, the Russian authorities in occupied Crimea prematurely terminated the lease agreement for the premises, which houses the only Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the peninsula. The “Arbitration Court ”of Crimea ordered the church to return the premises to the “Ministry of Property and Land Relations ”

-On April 15, in the village Sturmovoje, Balaklava district of Sevastopol, officers of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation searched the house of imam of the local mosque Rustem Abilev, after which he was detained and arrested.

Under the guise of fighting against terrorist organizations and their leaders, the occupation authorities are fighting against dissent and socially active citizens. The so-called Crimean authorities continue conducting regular searches in the households of the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian activists. Most of the searches carried out in the first half of 2019 were related to alleged participation in organizations prohibited in the Russian Federation such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jehovah's Witnesses. The largest number of searches was recorded in March and in June 2019, when security officials massively searched 26 and 8 houses of the Crimean Tatars on suspicion of participating in the Hizb ut-Tahrir organization banned in Russia and 9 houses of representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization. Since the beginning of the occupation of Crimea, Russia has prosecuted 63 Crimeans for allegedly participating in or organizing the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir, 50 out of 63 have already been illegally transferred to the territory of the Russian Federation. 13 were sentenced to a term of 5 to 17 years in high security prisons. We urge the OSCE member states to do their best and help to return these people from Russian prisons back to their families. We recommend Russian Federation to release all illegally persecuted people in the so-called Hizb ut-Tahrir case.

Thank you very much for your attention!