



United States Mission to the OSCE

71st Anniversary of the Deportation of Crimean Tatars

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Representatives of many participating States recently underlined the importance of preserving history, learning from it, and honoring victims of horrific episodes in the past by upholding and defending universal human rights today.

May 18, 2015, marked the 71st anniversary of the Soviet government's forcible deportation of more than 230,000 Crimean Tatars from their homeland. Last year we raised the 70th anniversary of this tragic event and emphasized our concern over Russia's attempts to restrict the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association by banning gatherings during the anniversary weekend. This concern, unfortunately, persisted at the 71st anniversary - occupation authorities again banned the Tatar community's traditional memorial demonstration in remembrance of the deportation.

Since Russia occupied Crimea in March 2014, the human rights situation there has deteriorated drastically.

Russia's initial military intervention in Crimea was accompanied by a campaign of violence, including killings, disappearances, imprisonment, and torture against those who opposed the occupation, as well as journalists and members of ethnic and religious minorities.

Systemic policies of repression and discrimination continue under Russia's occupation, against the backdrop of restrictive Russian domestic legislation, which has been imposed – in some cases, retroactively - on Crimea. Communities that have been particularly targeted for persecution include ethnic Ukrainians, Jews, Catholics and other Christians outside of the Russian Orthodox Church, and especially members of the Crimean Tatar community.

Russian occupation authorities have sought to intimidate Crimean Tatars through a campaign of harassment and criminalization. Authorities have conducted dozens of raids on Tatar homes, schools, and mosques; seized control of and closed the headquarters of the Mejlis (the Tatar representative council); and levied unprecedented fines of almost \$100,000 on a major Tatar NGO, the Crimea Foundation.

Some Tatar leaders, including Mustafa Dzhemiliev, Refat Chubarov, and Sinaver Kadyrov, have been banned from returning to Crimea. Those leaders and activists who remain on the peninsula have faced a campaign of baseless arrests, interrogations, and prosecutions for 'extremism' and other alleged crimes, which in some cases have been accompanied by police beatings. Tatar leader Ahtem Ciygoz has been jailed since January 2015, awaiting trial on

trumped up charges of “organizing a mass riot.” On May 6, he was placed in a punishment cell in retaliation for starting a hunger strike, and his pretrial detention was extended by another 2 months on May 15.

Authorities have also failed to identify the perpetrators of the disappearances and killings of Crimean Tatars that took place in the early months of Crimea’s occupation. There are widespread attempts to pressure individual Tatar leaders by threatening their family members and livelihoods. Recent reports of at least seven burnings of Tatar-owned businesses in the town of Rybache are disturbing.

Crimea now has one of the world’s most restrictive media environments. In the 2015 Freedom of the Press report, Freedom House ranked Crimea 195th out of 199 territories assessed. In April 2015, occupation authorities forced the closure of 11 of 12 Tatar media outlets, including television station ATR. Ukrainian outlets are blocked in Crimea, most local independent media outlets have been forced to close, and the few remaining independent journalists are subjected to intimidation and violence.

The citizenship policy of the Russian occupation authorities is of particular concern. Residents of Crimea that refuse to take Russian citizenship, including many Tatars, can be treated like foreigners in their own homeland – without the ability to access many public services, be employed by the state, or potentially, to re-enter Crimea should they depart.

Mr. Chair, the Crimean Tatars should be able to peacefully commemorate the anniversary of their deportation by the Red Army seventy-one years ago. They should be able to do so in an environment in which their rights are respected and protected, and one in which they see a future much brighter than the grim past that the anniversary marks.

We reiterate a call we have made many times since the occupation of Crimea began: for all participating States to support – and certainly to refrain from obstructing – access to Crimea by OSCE institutions and field operations, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

We note that Ukraine circulated on May 19 a report, prepared by civil society, entitled "The Fear Peninsula: Chronicle of Occupation and Violation of Human Rights in Crimea," which catalogs in detail the many legal concerns and human rights abuses that have occurred in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol. We urge all participating States to read this report.

The United States renews its call on Russia to immediately end its occupation of Crimea and to return control of Crimea to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.