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United States Mission to the OSCE

In Solemn Commemoration of the Expulsion of Crimean Tatars by the Soviet Union, 1944-47, and their Continuing Persecution by Russia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 16, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chair for your patience,

Mr. Chair, seventy-five years ago, over 230,000 Crimean Tatars suffered a terrible fate, when, on May 18, 1944, the Soviet government ordered their mass deportation from their Crimean homeland to Soviet Central Asia. Thousands of families were forcibly separated. Nearly half of those deported between 1944 and 1947 perished. This was part of a larger program of deportations within the Soviet Union.

The Crimean Tatar community fought for two generations to return to their homeland. Some, like Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Jemilev, suffered long imprisonment in the Soviet gulag for their role in this effort. When they were allowed to return to Crimea in the late 1980s, Crimean Tatars built community centers, constructed schools teaching in their own language, and established a self-governing body, the Mejlis.

Today, the Crimean Tatars, now citizens of an independent Ukraine, again find themselves the victims of the Kremlin's repression and brutality. Since invading and occupying Crimea in 2014, the Russian government has carried out a campaign of violence, including killings, forced disappearances, and torture against Crimean Tatars and others who oppose the occupation. Tens of thousands of Tatars have fled Crimea because it is no longer safe for them to live in their ancestral homeland. Others, like Mustafa Jemilev, are banned by Russia from entering Crimea. Dozens of Crimean Tatars are languishing in Russian prisons on politically motivated charges. Armed and masked security

forces terrorize Crimean Tatar homes, schools, and mosques with regular raids, and they purportedly search for drugs, weapons, or so-called “extremist literature.” Russia has banned the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, blocked and expelled Tatar-language media outlets, and stopped schools from teaching in their language.

We call on Russia to end its repression of Crimean Tatars and others who oppose its occupation and to comply with its obligations under international law. We renew our call for Russia to end its occupation of Crimea and to release all Crimean Tatars and other Ukrainians it has unjustly imprisoned. Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in force until Russia returns full control of this territory to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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