



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

70 YEARS SINCE THE CRIMEAN TATAR DEPORTATIONS

address by
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to the
Requiem Commemorating 70 years since the Deportations of the Crimean Tatar People

[Check against delivery]

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Mr. Prime Minister, Your Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

I firmly believe that ethnic cleansing is one of the most terrible scourges of humanity; a great tragedy in the history of mankind. Not only because it affects entire communities – including the young, the old and the infirm – but particularly because it targets the very heart of what these communities hold dear: their traditions, their culture, their language. The Soviet authorities committed grave and inexcusable crimes when they punished entire peoples, laying collective guilt for the perceived misdeeds of the few. It took many, far too many, years before these wrongs were even admitted. And we are still waiting for the innocent victims to be rehabilitated. In fact, many such injustices continue to this very day.

Your Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

Today we gather to commemorate Sürgün, the tragedy that befell the Crimean Tatar people 70 years ago. I warmly thank my friends in the Crimean Tatar community for the opportunity to be here today to address you about an issue that has been at the heart of my first nine months in office. But first let me tell you briefly who I am and why I stand here today.

Over 20 years ago, when the returnees to Crimea were struggling to build their settlements and establish their livelihoods, Europe was being torn apart by ethnic violence. Entire communities lost their homes, their lands and their lives in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, and elsewhere. The OSCE participating States took a brave step and created an instrument to try to prevent ethnic conflict from happening again in Europe: the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. I am the fourth High Commissioner, following my predecessors Max van der Stoep, Rolf Ekéus and Knut Vollebaek.

The successive High Commissioners have worked for over 20 years with the Crimean Tatar community, with the Ukrainian Government and with the Crimean authorities for one purpose: to end the injustice and the plight of the Crimean Tatar people. Because when there is no justice, when rights that were taken away are not restored, and when past suffering is not acknowledged, then there can be no sustainable peace in Crimea.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

We are facing a new tragedy: 70 years after the deportations, the Crimean Tatar people are again facing injustice. The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation not only violates fundamental principles, such as Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which the world has duly noted; it creates new uncertainties and fears for the Crimean Tatars. They are being forced to accept new rulers, while they have staunchly and courageously supported Ukrainian statehood since independence.

And it seems that the new rulers in Crimea want to prevent the Crimean Tatars from meeting next Sunday to remember the deportations.

The world should note that right up until the last days before the Crimean Parliament was seized by armed people, it was the Tatars who rallied to defend it, risking their own lives, and who provided food for the Ukrainian servicemen whose bases were besieged. This display of courage now leaves them in an incredibly vulnerable position. They are surrounded by a majority among which many harbour prejudices against them. The Tatars have risked much, and are now at risk themselves.

Ukraine owes much to the Crimean Tatars. I therefore welcome and appreciate the words of Prime Minister Yatseniuk and recent Verkhovna Rada decisions acknowledging the Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people in Ukraine. These are good steps, steps that the Crimean Tatars have been working towards for more than 20 years. I sincerely hope that the authorities in *de facto* control of Crimea respect and restore the rights of the Crimean Tatar people, as well as all other communities, including the ethnic Ukrainians. The current questions must be resolved while respecting the rights of the different ethnicities to a secure future on the peninsula and with full rights to participation. Words must be followed by actions that fully respect the human rights of the Tatar people and their legal representatives.

Mustafa Aga, dear friend, we have discussed these commemorations together many times, in better days than now. While I am truly glad that I can be with you here today, I am also deeply saddened that I stand today before you in Kyiv...

...because I should have stood with you in Simferopol, on Crimean soil.