

United States Mission to the OSCE



Situation of Human Rights in the Temporarily Occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 20, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair.

More than three quarters of a century have passed since Stalin’s forcible deportation of more than 230,000 Crimean Tatars—men, women, and children—from Crimea. May 18 marked the 77th anniversary of this shameful moment in history that led to the deaths of nearly half those removed from their historical homeland.

Today, as we have done in previous years, we join the Crimean Tatar community in remembering all those lost. This painful memory of the deportations remains an indelible part of the Crimean Tatars’ history, as do the moving stories of the survivors who endured decades of harsh internal exile in the Soviet Union before the Crimean Tatars were able to return to their ancestral homeland, now the territory of independent Ukraine.

Stalin and the oppressive Soviet regime are gone, but Crimean Tatars now suffer under Russia’s occupation of Crimea. Crimean Tatars are subject to harassment, intimidation, arrest, imprisonment, and severe abuses at the hands of Russian occupation authorities. Russia has banned the Crimean Tatar Mejlis—the independent, legally recognized voice of the Tatar people—and closed Tatar language media outlets and Tatar-language schools.

Due to Russia’s occupation Crimean Tatars, including some who endured the deportations in 1944, have once again been driven from their ancestral homeland. Tens of thousands of Crimeans have fled Russia’s repression on the peninsula, and Russia has expelled hundreds for refusing to accept Russian citizenship.

The United States remains deeply concerned about the worsening situation in Crimea and the shrinking space for the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Not only Crimean Tatars, but ethnic Ukrainians and other members of ethnic and religious minorities continue to suffer at the hands of Russian occupation authorities, who routinely threaten, harass, detain, and imprison those who oppose the occupation. According to a recent report by the *Crimean Human Rights Group*, as of the end of April, there are more than 100 Crimeans held as political prisoners in Crimea or Russia, including 74 Crimean Tatars. Meanwhile, Russia is militarizing the Crimean peninsula *via* the conscription of young Crimeans and an ongoing military buildup that includes nuclear-capable aircraft and weapons.

We call on Russia to cease its repression of Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and others in Crimea and to end its occupation and militarization of Crimea. We further call on Russia to release all

political prisoners it holds. We reaffirm that Crimea is Ukraine and reiterate our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in force until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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