



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

**Statement by the delegation of Ukraine
on the situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied Autonomous
Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine**

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1314th meeting of the Permanent Council,
20 May 2021

Madam Chairperson,

This week, we decided to raise an additional current issue on the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol under Russian illegal occupation. We deem it important to update the Permanent Council on the dire human rights situation on the peninsula, which regrettably only gets worse.

This situation requires our common action as Organization, which places respect for human rights at the core of its comprehensive security. Until we succeed to stop the aggressor, the temporarily occupied Crimea will remain a "grey zone" of lawlessness and impunity, unacceptable for the OSCE area.

I wish to remind that following Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, almost 50 thousand Ukrainian citizens fled Crimea over intimidation, persecution and fears of the return of the past in its worst manifestations. Among them, there were more than 20 thousand Crimean Tatars.

This has already happened before. Now, under Russian occupation, the Crimean Tatars are facing again political repressions and persecutions comparable to the tragedy of the Stalinist deportation of May 1944, when about 200 thousand Crimean Tatars were forcibly deported from Crimea to Siberia, the Urals and Central Asia. The very name of the indigenous people - Crimean Tatars - was banned in order to destroy their cultural and social heritage and historical presence in Crimea.

The Parliament of Ukraine recognized the deportation of Crimean Tatars from Crimea in 1944 as the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people and set 18 May as a day of remembrance of its victims. As noted in the MFA Statement issued two days ago, on 18 May, Ukraine urges the international community to condemn this crime of the totalitarian communist regime and recognize the 1944 deportation of Crimean Tatars as the act of genocide.

Distinguished colleagues,

Many of those Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, who remained to live under occupation, are harassed, intimidated and persecuted. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people has been banned since 2016, in violation of Russia's international obligations as an occupying Power and contrary to the Order of the International Court of Justice.

According to numerous independent reports, most notably by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as findings of the human rights organizations, the most common abuses in the occupied Crimea encompass violations of the prohibition of torture, the right to liberty and security, the right to a fair trial, the right to respect for private and family life, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, as well as restriction of property rights of non-Russian citizens.

Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars face systematic discrimination in Crimea, which amounts to racial discrimination.

1300 religious organizations were banned after the occupation of the peninsula. Only 7 out of 48 religious communities continue to operate. The occupation administration continues the intimidation and surveillance over Crimean Tatars in mosques and religious schools, labelling them as extremist. It also conducts targeted policy of forcing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine out of the peninsula by various means, including the demolition of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church temple in the city of Yevpatoria.

The natural and cultural heritage of the peninsula is being destroyed. For instance, as we have already informed earlier, the conservation status of 40 objects of the natural reserve fund was illegally downgraded.

The preschool education in Ukrainian is not available at all. The number of children receiving education in Ukrainian decreased by 54 times, to 0.2%. Formally, there is one school with the Ukrainian language as the language of instruction, but, according to local population, it is just a formality and the education process is not in fact in Ukrainian. Only 3.1% of schoolchildren study in the Crimean Tatar language and there is no school with the Crimean Tatar language of instruction.

We also witness the militarization of school education and combat training of Crimean children, aimed at their training for military service in the Russian armed forces.

Since 2015, the Russian occupation authorities have already conducted 12 conscription campaigns on the peninsula, illegally recruiting about 28,000 people, and started a new campaign on 1 April 2021 in violation of the international humanitarian law, in particular the provisions of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention.

Only 8% of Crimean media survived Russian so-called "re-registration" by agreeing to collaborate with the occupying power and to disseminate its propaganda. Those who refused were banned. Russian occupation administration prevents any sign of independent media activities, and thereby cleansed the Crimean information landscape of free expression. Many Crimean Tatar civic journalists remain illegally detained under the politically motivated charges.

Madam Chairperson,

Of particular concern for the OSCE from the human rights perspective must be the fate of over 100 citizens of Ukraine, most of them Crimean Tatars, illegally detained or convicted by the Russian Federation for political reasons.

In order to raise awareness of this problem and consolidate international support for their immediate and unconditional release, the MFA of Ukraine launched a series of publications of letters written by Kremlin's political prisoners from places of imprisonment.

Dear colleagues,

We are grateful to all our international partners for their permanent attention to the developments in Crimea. Most recently, on 11 May 2021, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the decision "Human Rights Situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (Ukraine)" reaffirming that this issue remains central on the European and international agenda.

We take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of stepping up efforts of the OSCE as a regional international organization in contributing to the full implementation of the respective UN GA resolutions on the "Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine."

We encourage the OSCE autonomous institutions to engage more actively in helping protect the human rights of Ukrainian citizens affected by the Russian aggression.

It is also vital to ensure safe and secure access of the SMM throughout Ukraine, including in Crimea. The issue of starting remote monitoring of the situation in Crimea is already overdue. The SMM has the ability to launch such monitoring, and carry out remote analysis of the situation in the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

We call on Russia as an occupying power in Crimea:

- to uphold its obligations under applicable international human rights law and international humanitarian law;
- to put an end to the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the occupied Crimea, as well as to ensure that they can be exercised without discrimination and barriers on any grounds;
- to ensure unimpeded access of the established international human rights monitoring mechanisms to Crimea, pursuant to relevant UN General Assembly resolutions on the human rights situation in Ukraine's Crimea.

Let me conclude, by reiterating that Ukraine strongly condemns Russia's aggression, illegal occupation and attempted annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. We urge Russia to reverse the illegal occupation and to return the Crimean Peninsula to Ukraine where it belongs according to the norms of international law.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.