

13th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
12-23 May, 2014  
UN Headquarters, New York

Agenda Item #4: "Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

Intervention by:  
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Representative of the Crimean Tatar People at the 13th Session of the  
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

20 May, 2014

Distinguished Chair,  
Distinguished Representatives,

It is my honor to greet you on behalf of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People - the representative body of the Crimean Tatars, and to deliver a statement on its behalf, touching upon the respect for human and indigenous rights in Crimea, in line with UNDRIP.

For the last couple of months we have been undergoing through hard times of dramatical importance.

Our homeland - the Crimean peninsula - has turned into a frontline of international confrontation. The indigenous people of Crimea - the Crimean Tatars, have been a victim of the conflict as they were put under the new conditions against their will. Constituting a minority in our own homeland since the deportation under Stalin, and being on the edge of armed clashes, we were denied any chance to influence the process of defining the political status of our country - the Crimea.

Realizing that only political and diplomatic means of conflict resolution can avoid clashes and bloodshed, we have consistently shown our commitment to the principles of nonviolence and the rule of international law. This position has been explicitly expressed in our appeals to the international community. We have been consistently supportive of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and of the resolution of the crisis through diplomatic means. We have applied every possible effort to avoid bloodshed or actions that could be interpreted as provocations during the military action.

We live and will carry on living in Crimea. We have no other homeland to turn to. Under these circumstances, our priority is the wellbeing and security of the vulnerable Crimean Tatar people. From a pragmatic point of view, we have therefore been willing to elaborate new ways of peaceful coexistence.

But as of today we have already been confronted with xenophobia - acts of aggression, directly or indirectly sanctioned by Crimea's new authorities. Utmost attention needs to be paid to paramilitary groups that operate with impunity, and constitute a source of instability and threat to security.

The situation escalated over the past weeks. The entry ban to Crimea put on our leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, a vocal supporter of Ukraine's territorial integrity, sparked international outcry. On May 3, thousands of the Crimean Tatars walked to the border of Crimea and mainland Ukraine to meet their leader and to urge the Crimean authorities to let him come back. Many of the activists were captured on photo and video, which later served as basis for prosecution by law enforcement officials, whereby mainly economically weak individuals were subject to high fines. Subsequent raids on houses of Crimean Tatars, and notably Mr. Dzhemilev, took place, something we considered to be a practice of the Soviet Union.

Last Friday, the Crimean authorities have prohibited any assembly or demonstration. The pretext for this move was security concerns, however, it is highly doubtful that such a militarised region cannot control a peaceful assembly. For the first time in decades the Crimean Tatar people were not be able to commemorate the dreadful deportation of their parents, family, nation.

We will not keep silent. We are well aware of our fundamental rights to freedom of speech, conscience and the right for a peaceful protest, in line with UNDRIP, and we are exercising them. But it is clear that we need international support.

Given all this, we call on the international community and the relevant international bodies in their different capacities:

- To monitor the overall human rights situation and the respect and implementation of the UNDRIP in the Crimean peninsula;
- To officially recognise the Crimean Tatar people as the indigenous people of Crimea, and the Kurultai as their representative body;
- To ensure full involvement of the Kurultai in all ongoing negotiations processes, including at the UN and the OSCE levels;
- To include full autonomy and rights for the Crimean Tatars in Crimea as a condition for any agreement on Crimea (including cultural, economic, social and political rights);
- To take active measures to ensure the immediate safety of the Crimean Tatars, their leaders and representative bodies, as a matter of international security.

Thank you for your attention.

Abduraman Egiz

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