

**Selyam aleikum saygili dunya tamir halqlar temsilciler!**

It is an honor for me to experience the diversity of unique cultures represented here and to become a part of the global struggle for securing human rights of indigenous peoples.

**Dear brothers and sisters!**

Let me also share my story – a story of an indigenous Crimean Tatar young woman, a mother of 2 daughters, a former journalist who was forced to leave native Crimea after 2014 and start fighting for my people that today is again a vulnerable target for repression. This fight once involved my grandfather, who as a child survived deportation from Crimea in 1944 and devoted his whole life to get Crimean Tatars back to their homeland, and my father who had a chance to return to Crimea half a century later and who kept fighting for the restoration of the rights of his people as a member of CT Parliament - Kurultai. Today, I am serving my people and country as the First Deputy Minister of Information Policy of Ukraine.

3 generations of indigenous people of Crimea, who several times in their history could disappear as an entity, and who never ever expected to witness sufferings and repressions again in XXI century.

The irony of the history is that Crimea is not just a mother land for indigenous Crimean Tatars, Krymchaks and Karaites, but also a peninsula that brought peace to the whole world after the second world war, where in 1945 in the Crimean resort town of Yalta, peoples and states had agreed not to violate territorial integrity and keep peace and security.

Keeping that in mind, Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014 turns out to be crucial not just because an indigenous CT population is a target for the whole range of repressions today because of their rejection of, and resistance to the occupation of their Homeland, but also as a fact of violation of existing international order built up by Yalta Peace Conference.

On behalf of the Mejlis – a self-governing and representative body of Crimean Tatar People, let me tell you about the Crimea today – a stolen land – “peninsula of fear” as we call it in Ukraine.

Since 2014 Crimean Tatars face systematic repression acts: arrests on ethnic and religious grounds, political persecution, home and mosque searches, independent media shut down together with the CT and Ukrainian journalists' attacks. The only CT TV channel ATR that has become a symbol of our cultural and language recovery was forced to move out together with 8 other independent media resources.

People are disappearing in Crimea today. Within 2 years 21 Crimean Tatars have gone missing, some of them found dead. The most vicious is the case of Reshat Ametov whose body was found dead and tortured in 2 weeks after his single protest against the annexation. There is video evidence where everyone can see the faces of those who pulled him in the car and took him to an undisclosed location. Russian investigation still has no respond to his wife – mother of 3 fatherless young children.

It is almost a ritual for the special law-enforcement services fully armed to search homes of Crimean Tatars. Hundreds of houses have been invaded, windows broken, children scared. They usually do that at the break of dawn. And when someone knocks on our door at 5 o'clock in the morning, our collective inherited memory says we would be deported. What we have noticed is that those searches are not aimed at finding something, instead it is an efficient instrument of terrifying people and making them scared even to speak and express their position. As an ex-journalist, I often help my foreign colleagues with interviewing people from Crimea. And today, the level of fear even to discuss non-political issues with media is exceptionally high.

I could speak for hours about this, but to conclude my statement, let me just go through some recent developments.

On April 26<sup>th</sup> the Mejlis of Crimean Tatar people was banned and declared an extremist organization by so-called Russian Supreme Court of Crimea. Mejlis is not only a legitimate self-governing body elected by Crimean Tatar Parliament – Kurultai. It is a part of our political identity as a main platform for the restoration of our rights and an embodiment of the right to self-determination. By banning the Mejlis, Russia disrespected the right for the strengthening special political institutions provided for IP's by the UNDRIP. Together with the Mejlis ban, everyone in Crimea got a clear message that CT is a people non grata and outcast. By declaring it an extremist organization more than 2500 people – members of Mejlis are under a direct threat to be called extremists and, therefore, persecuted. At the fake trial on Mejlis the prosecution claimed that it is a public organization not a self-governing body that is allowed to have under the UN Declaration on Indigenous People.

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, last Friday, about 50 armed people invaded the compact settlement of CT in Molodezhnoe – where more than a hundred of CT Muslims were leaving the local Mosque after Friday Namaz (worship service). They were demanded to sit in the buses and to go for the personal identity verification. Almost a month before that 35 CT Muslims were detained and taken to the Department for countering extremism for the fingerprint and DNA analysis.

The aim of those acts is to force CT activists to abandon peninsula and not to be an obstacle in attempts to show the whole world an ideal picture of happy Crimean Tatars speaking Tatar recognized a state language in CT schools. In the reality it is totally different – my 9-year old cousin called her mother from the school a week ago and asked in Crimean Tatar when her mommy was going to pick her up. She was scolded by

her teacher for speaking mother tongue. 97 % of CT school students get education in Russian language.

In 2014 – right after the so-called referendum that the UN GA has not recognized, I felt myself robbed. I made my choice of not keeping silence and not betraying my principles. Today, I am doing my best to be heard.

I call on indigenous peoples present here to provide moral support to us Crimean Tatars at these difficult times. Knowing that we can rely on the understanding and solidarity of world's 400 million indigenous peoples can make a world of difference to us.

**Thank you! Sag oluniz! Дякую! Gracias! Merci!**