

CRIMEAN TATARS STATEMENT

It is my view that the situation around Crimean Tatars (and other indigenous peoples of Crimea) is the most pressing, perhaps the **defining** issue of indigenous peoples in the region Eastern Europe +, and will be so for many years to come.

It is not primarily a political issue, but that of human and civil rights, and **rights of indigenous people** in particular. Whatever geopolitical, military or paramilitary games are being played out by the great (or not so great) powers, the consequence has to be as fair as humanly possible towards indigenous peoples of Crimea. At the minimum, Crimean Tatars must not be subjected to institutionalized violence – physical or mental –, collective punishment or humiliation. Of all indigenous peoples, Crimean Tatars, who have been deported from their homeland twice during the past 3 centuries (last time nearly 70 years ago), have had enough of that.

The current situation of Crimean Tatars is alarming / not particularly encouraging. The situation around citizenship and residence permits is a case in point. Those Crimean Tatars who choose not to take up Russian citizenship are required to apply for a residence permit. Think about it: to have the right to live in their own land. These permits are likely to be temporary, meaning that they need to be periodically renewed. If Crimean Tatars do not apply for the permit, they can be declared illegal aliens and deported (yet again). This process is clearly in violation with the spirit of UNDRIP and its specific articles, such as *Article 10* (Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories). However, since RF – the *de facto* authority - has not endorsed UNDRIP, I cannot appeal to that. So, let me then appeal to **basic decency**. There must be a way how Crimean Tatars can continue to live in freedom and dignity in their homeland without going through a humiliating process of being pressurized to change citizenship, apply for a residence permit or being threatened with deportation. There are surely legal and administrative procedures that would enable this, if only there is political will for it (Mr. Bekirov gave some examples). This is just one of the many issues facing Crimean Tatars right now (upholding official status of Crimean Tatar Language, etc.).

I would like the UNPFII to make recommendations that would reaffirm the rights of Crimean Tatars in the light of current events, but am not overly optimistic about the feasibility. Nonetheless, the world community, UN agencies and indigenous community must pay close attention to the situation, show solidarity and, if possible, provide support to Crimean Tatars. Also, I call on Crimean Tatars to educate the rest of the world about their history, culture, current situation and legitimate pursuits, because the world does not know enough. *A combined effort by Crimean Tatars and the world community would allow to create international solidarity movement for Crimean Tatars.*

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