

**13th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Virtual regional dialogue for the Arctic, Central and Eastern Europe,
Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia
Intervention by First Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine Emine Dzhaparova**

December 2, 2020

[Mr/Mme] Chair,

The commitment to protect indigenous people is affirmed in the Constitution of Ukraine. A landmark decision of the Parliament of Ukraine of 2014 endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Our country has strived to live up to high standards of the Declaration. I personally can attest to this by representing here not only the Government of Ukraine, but also speaking as representative of the country's largest indigenous community – the Crimean Tatars.

While having ever more possibilities for self-realization throughout Ukraine, the Crimean Tatar community, unfortunately, suffers the occupation of its native land, Ukraine's Crimea, by the Russian Federation.

The prosecution by Russia's occupation authorities is hitting the Crimean Tatars the hardest. With the spread of COVID-19 the situation is deteriorating. From our relatives and friends on the ground we know about numerous mortalities among Crimean Tatars, especially among vulnerable groups and rural population. Nevertheless, the statistics is hidden by Russia despite its duties as of occupying power.

The virus spreads within the detention facilities as well, endangering political prisoners, most of them Crimean Tatars. This should serve as an additional incentive for international community to demand from Kremlin their release.

The COVID-19 has provided Moscow with another opportunity to tighten the grip over human rights and is used as a curtain for ongoing crimes. Intimidation, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, killings, restriction of civic rights remain a daily reality. Mejlis – our representative body – still banned despite ICJ decision.

While many states restrict movement due to COVID-19, Russia continues to forcefully change a demographic structure in Crimea, as a part of its colonization policy. It is estimated that between 150 000 and 500 000 persons have moved to Crimea from Russia since 2014. In addition to March decree depriving Crimean Tatars of their right to land, this mass transfer of people affects their social and economic rights and opportunities, and thus, means for living. Russia also continues illegal conscription amidst the spread of COVID-19, with 2 500 persons to be drafted.

School curriculum is heavily affected by military-patriotic education. Whatever Russian official propaganda says, there are clear discrepancies between the formal language status of a native language school or class and the de facto use of Crimean Tatar in the curriculum, thus, no school with full instruction in Crimean Tatars language can be found in Crimea.

This account of crimes is far from complete but it clearly points to the systematic policy of annihilation of Crimean Tatar community under Russia's occupation. Ukraine calls on the Expert Mechanism to pay close attention and adequately react to these violations of the international law and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

Ukraine remains open to cooperation with EMRIP aimed at its engagement in further strengthening Ukraine's Government efforts to further promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples.

I thank you.