



ASSOCIATION OF REINTEGRATION  
OF CRIMEA

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To UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

**Indigenous Peoples' Right to Religion in Crimea  
and Ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict**

Our Association of Reintegration of Crimea (ARC)<sup>1</sup>, is non-governmental expert and human rights organisation<sup>2</sup>, our expert researches are related with human rights and humanitarian issues, including their fundamental rights, including right to religion or belief, also as with issues of the transitional justice for Crimean peninsula, with relevant humanitarian, informational, economic, social and financial impacts<sup>3</sup>.

Our responses (submission) are devoted to the situation of indigenous peoples, including Crimean Tatars, Crimean Karaites and Krymchaks in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and city of Sevastopol (hereinafter – Crimea). The response deals with the issues identified by the Association in its work, namely the issue of intentional and organised Russian policy against Indigenous Rights in the Crimea, including the right to religion.

Since 2014 Crimean peninsula was illegally occupied by Russia. The main lesson for better protection against human rights violations and atrocities against religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict or insecurity is that in conditions of the informational society the key challenge in such violation is the propaganda and hate speech policy targeted against religious groups<sup>4</sup>.

International structures must cooperate in issues of truth broadcasting on issues of counteraction the discrimination of religious minorities. Other ways of influence on behavior of the Russia-controlled “authorities” and punitive structures in the Crimea may have forms of decision of international organizations, of sanction policy and on collective interstate negotiation the situation with human rights in the Crimea.

Crimean Tatars now constitute only 20 % of the Crimean population, and the ongoing russification of the ethnic groups in Crimea in all areas of life is the key challenge for the Crimean Tatars today. The number of schools with education in Crimean Tatar language has been reduced by Russian de facto authorities and the indigenous language is studied just as one subject of the curriculum in regular schools. Knowledge and usage of the native language has thus become simply an additional, but not the key element of the Crimean Tatar identity.

Crimean Tatars are Sunni Muslims in their major part and their religious discrimination is a key issue of repressions against Indigenous Crimean Tatar People in the peninsula. Religious

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<sup>1</sup> <https://arc.construction/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/associations/detail-annonce/associations\\_b/20210005/1348](https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/associations/detail-annonce/associations_b/20210005/1348)

<sup>3</sup> <https://owncloud.unog.ch/s/65Cjhlud3G2yBu?path=%2FCivil%20Society%20Organizations>

<sup>4</sup> <https://arc.construction/17035> ; <https://arc.construction/23118>

component in persecution of Crimean Tatars by the Russian occupational “authorities” in the Crimea is a part of a systematic and wide-scale campaign of cultural erasure of the Indigenous People of Crimea, the element of racial discrimination of Crimean Tatars by Russian de-facto “authorities”<sup>5</sup>.

We pointed in 2021 to UN officials that main lesson for better protection against human rights violations and atrocities against religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict or insecurity is that in conditions of the informational society the key challenge in such violation is the propaganda and hate speech policy targeted against religious groups.

International structures must cooperate in issues of truth broadcasting on issues of counteraction the discrimination of religious minorities. Other ways of influence on behavior of the Russia-controlled “authorities” and punitive structures in the Crimea may have forms of decision of international organizations, of sanction policy and on collective interstate negotiation the situation with human rights in the Crimea<sup>6</sup>.

In case 166 International Court of Justice<sup>7</sup> researches exactly the issue of the violation the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by Russian de-facto “authorities”, including hate speech usage against Ukrainians, who in common belongs to Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and Crimean Tatars, who are Muslims, in Russian “official” and Russia-controlled media in the Crimea.

European Court established in its Decision on 16 December 2020 in case 20958/14 that such Russian de-facto “authorities” administrative practices exist in the Crimea against certain ethnic groups since 2014, including discrimination the Crimean Tatars, as harassment and intimidation of religious leaders not conforming to the Russian Orthodox faith, as arbitrary raids of places of worship and confiscation of religious property, in violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>8</sup>.

On July, 1 2021 Ukraine adopted the law “On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine” where in article 4 it pointed that the indigenous peoples of Ukraine have the right to observe, revive and develop their spiritual, religious and cultural traditions and customs, and to preserve their tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

This norm stated, that the list of places and objects of religious and cultural significance of the Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine, the procedure for using these objects, their financing and receiving income from such activities should be determined by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine after consultations with Indigenous Peoples’ representative bodies<sup>9</sup>.

Since 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 Russia committed broad and open military aggression to all Ukraine’s territory from own territory, occupied Crimea, Belarus, Black and Azov seas against Ukrainian mainland. Due last four months of fights Russia occupied some territories of Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya regions and strong fights are going near cities of Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and others with total population more than 8 millions persons near the frontline.

A lot of persons were killed or kidnapped as “non-loyal” ones in conditions of Russian occupation of Melitopol and other cities in Southern Ukraine in March 2022. In particular, in

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<sup>5</sup> <https://arc.construction/5788>

<sup>6</sup> <https://arc.construction/23665>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/166/166-20191108-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-207622>

<sup>9</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1616-20#Text>

Melitopol there are daily prayers for peace in Ukraine and rallies in support of Ukraine, which is extremely painful for the aggressor. On February 10, at 6 am, armed men in Russian military uniforms broke into the house of Leila Ibragimova, a deputy of the Zaporizhia Regional Council, a representative of the indigenous Crimean Tatar People, and the director of the Melitopol City Museum of Local Lore<sup>10</sup>.

Russian de-facto authorities use the so-called “fighting with extremism and terrorism” practice to discriminate Crimean Tatars of religious ground.

For example on July 9, the Muslims of Crimea celebrated the great religious holiday of Eid al-Adha. Although the occupying “administration” invariably tried to exploit this day in its propaganda, the actual aggressor’s actions shed light on the true attitude of the Russian invaders towards the Crimean Tatar People.

After all, on the eve of the holiday, the aggressor’s Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don announced unlawful and inhumane “sentences” to three Crimeans, defendants in the so-called “Hizb ut-Tahrir case.” In particular, for their own religious beliefs, which did not lead to any harm, Ernest Ibragimov and Oleg Fedorov received more than 13 years in prison from the aggressor, and Ismet Ibragimov – 19 years in prison.

Such a demonstrative new step of repression, deliberately organized by the Russian special services the day before Eid al-Adha, became another international crime of the aggressor as part of his desire to increase intimidation and discrimination against the Crimean Tatar People<sup>11</sup>.

Our Association believes that a special research on the situation with the freedom of religion of indigenous people in conditions of the armed conflicts and related “grey zones” like Crimea, done by the UN Special Rapporteur, may be a starting point for improvement of the situation. The Special Rapporteur’s visit to Ukraine, including the Crimea would contribute to collection of information, and would enable the Rapporteur to make a first-hand impression of the situation with the freedom of thought in the region of conflict.

We hope that special statement of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Russia’s repressions against ethnic Crimean Tatars, in framework of Rapporteur’s mandate will be extremely important for further defense of rights of Ukrainian citizens and other persons in the zone of conflict.

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In the name of the Association of Reintegration of Crimea  
Respectfully Submitted by  
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<sup>10</sup> <https://arc.construction/26918>

<sup>11</sup> <https://arc.construction/33901>