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STATEMENT

9th Local and Regional Governments Forum — 2026 HLPF Special Event

UN Headquarters, New York — 14 July 2026

Distinguished delegates, colleagues,

My name is Zera Mustafaieva. I speak today as President of the Crimean Tatar Foundation USA, representing the Crimean Tatars — the autochthonous nation of Crimea.

Who we are

Our nation survived the Sürgün — the genocide of 1944, during which nearly half - 46,2 percent - of our nation was killed. We survived the pogroms of 1918–1921, 1932–1933, and 1938. After 1991, we achieved a self-organized return to our homeland without support from any state — we rebuilt our nation and our homes, restored our national consciousness, re-established our own national government — the Mejlis and Qurultay — and adopted our own Constitution. Since the illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, Crimean Tatars have remained among the strongest defenders of Ukraine, and we continue to exercise our inalienable right to self-determination as the autochthonous nation of Crimea and the Indigenous people of Ukraine, recognized under Law of Ukraine No. 1616-IX 'On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine' and guaranteed under Article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples".

We also note that official Ukrainian and Russian census figures list Crimean Tatars as no more than 11 percent of the population of Crimea. Independent research conducted by the Crimean Tatar Academy of Sciences and Arts and Purdue University places the actual figure up to 26,25 percent — a gap that reflects decades of undercounting and demographic manipulation, not our true numbers.

Why we are here

We are not speaking today as observers of a hypothetical risk. We are survivors, and across generations we carry the living knowledge of what the early warning signs of genocide look like — because we have lived through this before, more than once. We recognize those same signs in Crimea today. That is why we are here.

What is happening now

According to the Crimean Tatar Foundation USA, the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, and Crimean Tatar civil society media (CEMAAT), since late June 2026 the occupying regime's perpetrators and affiliated Telegram channels — among them a channel identified as SMERSH — have engaged in direct and public incitement to commit genocide against the Crimean Tatar nation, in violation of Article III(c) of the 1948 Genocide Convention, fabricating claims that Crimean Tatars are responsible for drone strikes on Russian military infrastructure, that they hide drones in mosques, in greenhouses, under women's Muslim clothing. This is not a spontaneous rumor. It is a deliberate mechanism to consolidate the the unlawfully implanted of Russian population against the autochthonous nation on its own ancestral territory — the same mechanism used by Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines in Rwanda, which incited the Hutu majority to commit genocide against the Tutsi minority. The same mechanism was used against our nation in Crimea in 1918, and again in 1944, on the eve of the Allied victory over fascism. It is a bitter historical irony that this same mechanism is being deployed again today, as Ukraine and its partners work toward victory over Russia's modern fascist aggression.

CEMAAT reports that this campaign serves three purposes at once: it deflects the anger of the Russian majority onto the Crimean Tatar nation; it intimidates Crimean Tatars as a form of preventive punishment for disloyalty at a moment when the occupying military machine is weakening; and it turns an entire nation into a hostage to be traded in future negotiations with Europeans, with Turkey, or even with Ukraine.

This is not our first warning. In March 2014, Crimean Tatar civic activist Reshat Ametov was publicly abducted in the center of Simferopol and found dead twelve days later, with clear signs of brutal torture on his body — his genitals had been cut off, his spine and fingers broken, and an eye gouged out. This was a deliberate atrocity that broke the mass character of peaceful protest by the autochthonous nation of Crimea during the illegal occupation of Crimea. He was not the last. Ervin Ibragimov, a member of the World Congress of Crimean Tatars, was abducted near his home in Bakhchysarai in May 2016 and remains missing. Vedzhiye Kashka, an 82-year-old veteran of the Crimean Tatar national movement, was killed during an occupying-forces raid in Simferopol in November 2017. Dzhemil Gafarov, a 60-year-old detainee with a chronic kidney condition, died in February 2023 after occupying regime deliberately denied him medical care. Rustem Virasti, a father of three, died in detention in 2025 after months of torture and concealment of his whereabouts.

According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center (CTRC), as of 2026 the occupying regime holds 280 members of the Crimean Tatar nation hostage — 51,4 percent of all 545 hostages held throughout the occupation — a disproportion of up to 4.85 to 1 relative to the Crimean Tatar share of Crimea's population. Of 61 people killed during the occupation, 29 were Crimean Tatars — 47.5 percent. Of those forcibly disappeared, 19 of 28 were Crimean Tatars — nearly 68 percent, the highest disproportion of any category of documented abuse. CTRC further documented 10,018 recorded human rights violations in occupied Crimea in 2024 alone. The independent CriTaRep dataset (2014–2024), compiled by the European Centre for Minority Issues, likewise identifies Crimean Tatars as the largest single group affected by repression in occupied Crimea over the past decade.

In closed-door negotiations — including messages conveyed to the leadership of the Mejlis — perpetrators of occupying regime discussed a scenario involving the staged murder of a Slavic family, including children, intended to be followed by supposed “retribution”: a pogrom against a Crimean Tatar nation carried out by alcohol-fueled vigilantes. The information groundwork for such dehumanization can now be laid by Telegram provocateurs, such as the regime figure known as Talipov. Under this scenario, the occupying regime would deliberately fail to intervene for two to three days — a method of engineered “non-intervention” that totalitarian communist regime and Russian regime's paramilitary apparatus have

used since the pogroms in Fergana and Sumgait, in order to maximize terror and panic, after which any subsequent “solution” is made to appear as a relief. Against this backdrop, internal discussions describe scenarios for what is explicitly termed a “final solution to the Crimean Tatar question” — a blueprint that Catherine II and Stalin left behind for Putin.

The regime’s paramilitary apparatus discussed, and in some cases planned, additional provocation scenarios aimed at inciting violence against the Crimean Tatar nation. These include proposals to relocate Crimean Tatars deep into Russia under the guise of humanitarian evacuation, or to expel them following mass violence — modeled on the 19th-century forcibly removed of the Ubykh people and the 1989 forced removal of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria. Each of these scenarios is designed to appear “humane” in the eyes of the international community, diverting attention from the question of who bears responsibility for this war.

Our legal obligation, and yours

The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was written, first and foremost, as an instrument of prevention — not as a mechanism for recognition after the fact. Its drafters understood that genocide is not a single event but a process with identifiable stages, and that the international community's obligation begins the moment those stages become visible — not after a genocide has already occurred.

We are bringing you these facts today so that this Forum, and every State Party to the 1948 Convention, cannot later say they did not know. Under the Convention, the obligation to prevent is not discretionary. States that fail to act on credible early warning bear responsibility for that failure — not only morally, but under the terms of the treaty they ratified.

This is not a hypothetical obligation. On 19 April 2017, the International Court of Justice issued a binding order in *Ukraine v. Russian Federation* requiring Russia to refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar nation to conserve its national institutions, including the Mejlis. Nine years later, Russia continues to violate that binding order. On 26 June 2026, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination found that Russia had violated the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination through its persecution of three Crimean Tatar lawyers. These are not our claims alone — they are findings of the United Nations' own judicial and treaty bodies.

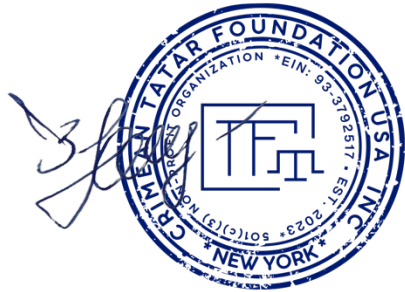
Our request

We ask this Forum, UN-Habitat, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, and the relevant United Nations bodies on atrocity prevention and the rights of autochthonous nations (Indigenous peoples) to:

- treat this warning with the seriousness the Genocide Convention demands, and refer it to the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and to the Responsibility to Protect mechanism;
- support independent, verified documentation of the situation facing Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea;
- recognize the Crimean Tatars as the autochthonous nation of Crimea in all relevant UN processes concerning localization, self-governance, and the rights of nations living under occupation;
- engage our foundation as a stakeholder and partner in future work on rebuilding local self-governance and the resilience of autochthonous nations and Indigenous peoples in Crimea.

The Crimean Tatar nation has already survived genocide once, in 1944, and with its own hands rebuilt its nation, its government, and its Constitution. We ask you not to let history repeat itself while the warning is still being given — before it becomes another chapter the world can only mourn after the fact.

Thank you.



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