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In February 2014 Russian forces entered Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and occupied it militarily. In March 2014 Russia announced the peninsula had become part of the Russian Federation following a sham referendum that violated Ukraine's constitution. On March 27, 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 68/262 on the "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine," which called on states and international organizations not to recognize any change in Crimea's status and affirmed the commitment of the UN to recognize Crimea as part of Ukraine. In April 2014 Ukraine's legislature (Verkhovna Rada) adopted a law attributing responsibility for human rights violations in Crimea to the Russian Federation as the occupying state. The United States does not recognize the attempted "annexation" of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Russian law has de facto applied in Ukraine's Crimea since the Russian occupation and purported "annexation" of the peninsula. For detailed information on the laws and practices of the Russian Federation, see the Country Reports on Human Rights for Russia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A local authority installed by the Russian government and led by Sergey Aksyonov as "prime minister" of the "state council of the republic of Crimea" administered occupied Crimea. The "state council" was responsible for day-to-day administration and other functions of governing. On September 18, Russia's nationwide parliamentary elections included seats allocated for occupied Crimea, a move widely condemned by the international community. "Authorities" closed the election to independent observers; it was not free and fair and was held in contravention of the Ukrainian constitution.

Russian authorities maintained control over Russian military and security forces deployed in Crimea.

Russian security services continued to consolidate control over Crimea and restrict human rights. Occupation authorities imposed and disproportionately applied repressive Russian Federation laws on the Ukrainian territory of Crimea.

The most significant human rights problems in Crimea during the year related directly to the Russian occupation.

Russian security services engaged in an extensive campaign of intimidation to suppress dissent and opposition to the occupation that employed kidnappings, disappearances, physical abuse, political prosecution, repeated interviews, and interrogations by security forces. Russian security forces routinely detained individuals without cause and harassed and intimidated neighbors and family of those who opposed the occupation.

Occupation authorities deprived members of certain groups, particularly ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars, of fundamental civil liberties, including the freedom to express their nationality and ethnicity, subjecting them to systematic discrimination. On May 12, Russian authorities banned the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, a democratically elected body representing the Crimean Tatar people, claiming it was an extremist organization, and prohibited all meetings, gatherings, or financial activities of the group. Continuing their policy of imposing Russian citizenship on all residents of Crimea, occupation authorities subjected persons who refused Russian citizenship to discrimination in accessing education, health care, and employment. They also interfered with freedom of expression and assembly, criminalizing the display of cultural and national symbols, preventing groups of private individuals from celebrating their national and cultural heritage, and restricting access to education in Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages.

Russian authorities engaged in a widespread campaign to suppress free speech and media in Crimea. Independent media ceased to operate in Crimea. Occupation authorities questioned, detained, and charged with extremism the few remaining independent journalists who worked independently, often merely for expressing their belief that Crimea remained part of Ukraine.

Other problems included poor conditions in prisons and pretrial detention facilities; political interference in the judicial process; limitations on freedom of movement; the internal displacement of thousands of individuals to government-controlled Ukraine; failure to allow residents of Ukraine's region of Crimea to exercise the ability to vote in periodic and genuine elections to choose their leaders; official corruption; discrimination and abuse of ethnic and religious minority groups; discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons; kidnapping and transport of orphans to Russia by occupation authorities; and employment discrimination against persons who did not hold a Russian passport.

Russian-installed authorities took few steps to investigate or prosecute officials or individuals who committed human rights abuses, creating an atmosphere of impunity and lawlessness. Occupation and local "self-defense" forces often did not wear insignia and committed abuses with impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

Russian occupation authorities did not adequately investigate cases of abductions and killings of Crimean residents from 2014 and 2015. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 Crimean residents who had disappeared during the occupation were later found dead. Occupation authorities did not investigate other suspicious deaths and disappearances, occasionally categorizing them as suicide. Human rights observers reported that families frequently did not challenge findings in such cases due to fear of retaliation.

b. Disappearance

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, as of October 1, 28 persons had disappeared since the occupation of Crimea, including 12 later found dead. Russian occupation authorities did not adequately investigate the deaths and disappearances. Human rights groups reported that police often refused to register reports of disappearances and

intimidated and threatened with detention those who tried to report a disappearance. Ukrainian government and human rights groups believed Russian security forces kidnapped the individuals for opposing Russia's occupation to instill fear in the population and prevent dissent.

On May 24, a group of uniformed men kidnapped Ervin Ibragimov, a member of the Bakhchisaray Mejlis and of the Coordinating Council of the World Congress of Crimean Tatars, after stopping his car on a road outside Bakhchisaray. Footage from a closed-circuit television camera showed the men forcing Ibragimov into a car and departing. According to the Crimea Human Rights Group, the men wore uniforms of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' traffic police. According to the HRMMU, on May 25, Ibragimov's father went to the Federal Security Service (FSB) in Simferopol to file a complaint and provide the television footage. The FSB officers allegedly refused to file the complaint and told him to send it by mail. A week before he disappeared, Ibragimov told friends that he had noticed a car waiting outside his house that later followed him during the day. Ibragimov had planned to travel to the town of Sudak on May 25 to attend the court hearing of a group of Crimean Tatars charged for holding an "unauthorized" gathering on May 18 to mark Crimean Tatar Deportation Remembrance Day. On June 1, Ibragimov's employment record book and passport were found near a bar in Bakhchisaray. While occupation authorities opened an investigation into the case, according to the Crimea Human Rights Group, they specifically excluded the possibility of a political motivation for the disappearance or of state involvement.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

There were widespread reports that Russian authorities in Crimea abused residents who opposed the occupation. Human rights monitors reported that Russian occupying forces subjected Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians in particular to physical abuse. For example, on June 11, Ukrainian blogger and activist, Yuri Ilchenko, escaped from house arrest in Sevastopol and fled across the administrative boundary to government-controlled Ukraine. Ilchenko had been awaiting trial on extremism charges from February 2015 for his online writings expressing his opposition to the occupation of Crimea. Ilchenko and his parents claimed to be the first individuals in Sevastopol formally to decline taking Russian citizenship. In August he gave several accounts to the press describing his mistreatment during detention in a pretrial facility in Simferopol that lasted from February 2015 through June 2. Ilchenko claimed that security officials had repeatedly beaten him and collaborated with other inmates to continue beatings and threats while he was in detention, to coerce him explicitly into taking Russian citizenship, and to punish him for speaking Ukrainian. He claimed they forced him to remain awake for days and beat him when he fell asleep in retaliation for refusing to wear a "St. George's ribbon," a Russian military symbol. Ilchenko claimed occupation authorities denied him clothing, bedding, and medical care.

Occupation authorities demonstrated a pattern of using punitive psychiatric incarceration as a means of pressuring detained individuals, including in the case of Ilmi Umerov (see section 1.d.). For example, on November 3, authorities ordered that six Crimean Tatar defendants accused of belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir be subjected to psychiatric evaluation and confinement against their will without apparent medical need (see section 1.d.).

Human rights monitors reported that occupation authorities also threatened individuals with violence or imprisonment if they did not testify in court against individuals that authorities believed were opposed to the occupation.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Physical Conditions: Prison and detention center conditions reportedly remained harsh and overcrowded. In June the director of the Russian Federal Prison System stated that Crimea lacked sufficient prison facilities and that there were twice as many inmates as there were cells necessary

to house them. Human rights groups reported that prisons suffered from overcrowding and poor conditions.

According to a 2015 report on Crimea by the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, health care in prisons had deteriorated since the occupation began. Yuri Ilchenko reported that prisoners in the Simferopol pretrial detention facility lacked proper food, sanitation, and health care. On March 1, the Crimea Human Rights Group reported that a group of four Crimean Tatars detained in February on politically motivated "terrorism" charges were living in cells in a Simferopol pretrial facility that were infested with fleas and bedbugs, were forced to sleep in shifts on a single filthy bed, and given food that contained cockroaches.

Administration: According to the 2015 OSCE/ODIHR report, persons incarcerated during the Russian occupation did not have the opportunity to retain Ukrainian citizenship. Russian authorities compelled all individuals who were in prison or pretrial facilities when the occupation began to accept Russian citizenship. As of August the Human Rights Ombudsman's Offices of Ukraine and Russia were working on a solution that would allow some prisoners to return to Ukraine.

Independent Monitoring: Occupation authorities did not permit monitoring of prison or detention center conditions by independent nongovernmental observers or international organizations. Occupation authorities permitted "human rights ombudsman," Ludmila Lubina, to visit prisoners, but human rights activists regarded Lubina not as an independent actor but as representing the interests of the occupation authorities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Occupation authorities arbitrarily detained protesters, activists, and journalists for opposing the Russian occupation.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Russian government agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, the Federal Investigative Committee, and the Office of the Prosecutor General applied and enforced Russian law in Crimea. The FSB also conducted security, counterintelligence, and counterterrorism activities and combatted organized crime and corruption. A "national police force" operated under the aegis of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In addition to abuses committed by Russian forces, "self-defense forces," largely consisting of former Ukrainian Ministry of Interior officers allegedly linked to local organized crime, reportedly continued to operate and commit abuses. These forces often acted with impunity in intimidating perceived occupation opponents and were involved in extrajudicial detentions and arbitrary confiscation of property. While the "law" places the "self-defense forces" under the authority of the "national police," their members continued to commit abuses while receiving state funding for their activities as well as other rewards, such as beachfront property and service medals. For example, on December 8, members of "self-defense" forces allegedly beat two residents of the village of Shchelkino. Police arriving at the scene declined to arrest members of the self-defense forces. An investigation into the incident continued.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports that Russian occupation authorities made arbitrary arrests, in particular targeting Crimean Tatars.

On May 12, police arrested Ilmi Umerov, a member of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, accusing him of "undermining the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation" for stating that Crimea remains part of Ukraine. Umerov, who suffered from health problems, has since been taken from court hearings in poor health. On August 18, Umerov was forcibly subjected to psychiatric hospitalization, ostensibly for an examination, exacerbating his health problems. On September 7, occupation authorities released him from the hospital following international publicity over the case. At year's end his case remained in pretrial investigation.

As of October 25, occupation authorities had arrested 19 Crimean residents, mostly Crimean Tatars, accusing them of belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a pan-Islamic organization prohibited in Russia but not Ukraine. Human rights groups believed occupation authorities intended to intimidate Crimean Tatars, discredit the Mejlis leadership, and instill fear in the local population to prevent dissent through the arrests.

Russian authorities continued to detain Akhtem Chiygoz, the deputy leader of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis. Russian authorities arrested Chiygoz in January 2015 and charged him with "inciting a mass riot" during protests he organized at the Crimean parliament in 2014 that were disrupted by pro-Russian activists, resulting in clashes between the groups. Subsequently, occupation authorities prosecuted individuals alleged to have participated in the protest, although Russia did not exercise control over Crimea at the time. Human rights groups reported that authorities reviewed video of the incident and selectively brought charges against leading Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian individuals who subsequently opposed the occupation, in particular members of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis. Video footage shows Chiygoz and other Crimean Tatar leaders working to defuse tensions in the hopes of avoiding clashes with counterprotesters. Occupation authorities refused to investigate acts of violence committed by pro-Russian "protesters," who were likely working for Russian security services according to independent observers. On December 12, authorities extended Chiygoz's detention until April 2017.

Throughout the year Russian authorities conducted mass arrests designed to humiliate and intimidate Crimean Tatars. On April 1, Russian security forces detained 35 men, mostly Crimean Tatars, in Pionierske, took them to a "center to combat extremism," and collected DNA samples from them. Human rights groups claimed that Russian security forces attempted to recruit some as police informants. On May 6, Russian security forces detained more than 100 Crimean Tatars at a mosque in Molodizhne. On May 7, Russian security forces detained another 35 Muslims, many of whom were Crimean Tatars, at a market in Simferopol.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Under the Russian occupation regime, the "judiciary" was neither independent nor impartial.

Trial Procedures

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied Crimea.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Russian occupation authorities routinely detained and prosecuted individuals for political reasons (see section 1.d.). They also transferred Crimean cases to Russia's legal system and changed the venue of prosecution for some detainees. Human rights groups identified several dozen Crimean residents as political prisoners held in either Crimea or Russia. These included: Oleg Sentsov, Oleksander Kolchenko, Oleksiy Chirniy, Oleksander Kostenko, Ilmi Umerov, Akhtem Chiygoz, Ali Asanov, Mustafa Dehermedzhy, Mykola Semena, Andrii Kolomiets, Ruslan Zaytullaev, Rustam Vaytov, Nuri Primov, Ferat Sayfullaev, Enver Bekirov, Vadim Siruk, Muslim Aliev,

Emir-Ussein Kuku, Refat Alimov, Arcen Dzhepparov, Enver Mamutov, Remzi Memetov, Zevri Abseitov, Rustem Abultarov, and others.

According to Mejlis member Gayana Yuksel, as of October 26, occupation authorities have deprived 67 Crimean Tatar children of a parent because of politically motivated imprisonment since the start of the occupation.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

Occupation authorities and others engaged in electronic surveillance, entered residences and other premises without warrants, and harassed relatives and neighbors of perceived opposition figures.

Russian occupation authorities routinely conducted raids on homes to intimidate the local population, particularly Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians, ostensibly on the grounds of searching for weapons, drugs, or "extremist literature." In its June report, the HRMMU expressed concern about "the growing number of large scale 'police' actions conducted with the apparent intention to harass and intimidate Crimean Tatars and other Muslim believers." On February 11 and 12, Russian occupation authorities raided Crimean Tatar villages in the Yalta and Bakhchisaray regions. According to the Crimea Human Rights Group, men with guns and in balaclavas burst into homes and in some cases broke through doors or windows, despite encountering no resistance from the residents. Between April 16 and 20, authorities conducted several raids on Crimean Tatar homes in the Alyushta region. According to press reports, police entered Crimean Tatar homes and demanded to know how many persons lived in the house, where they went shopping, where their children studied, and who sold drugs in the village. They also demanded to inspect gardens and greenhouses.

Human rights groups reported that Russian authorities had widespread authority to tap telephones and read electronic communications and had established a network of informants to report on suspicious activities. According to Mejlis members, Russian authorities had invited hundreds of Crimean Tatars to "interviews" where authorities played back the interviewees' telephone conversations and read their e-mail aloud. Media reported that in July the FSB interviewed a doctor in a Feodosia hospital after a colleague had denounced him for privately expressing pro-Ukrainian views. The doctor stated that posters in the hospital hallways advertised an FSB hotline. The eavesdropping and visits by security personnel create an environment in which persons are afraid to voice any opinion contrary to the occupation authorities, even in private.

According to press reports, on January 22, the Russian FSB sent a notice to all post offices in Crimea containing a list of individuals deemed "extremist," but which was in fact a list of individuals known to oppose the occupation, with instructions to report to the FSB any correspondence sent or received by these individuals.

Occupation authorities harassed family members of a number of political opponents. On February 2, Russian migration and security officials questioned Erol Abdulzhelilov, grandson of Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Jemilev, demanding his passport and summoning him to a police station. On February 18, Russian authorities summoned Yevgeny Kostenko, the brother of Oleksander Kostenko, imprisoned on political grounds, and threatened him with a forced psychiatric examination when he refused to answer questions. On September 26, occupation authorities pressured the young children of imprisoned Crimean Tatar activist, Emir-Ussein Kuku, to make statements about Kuku that could be used to strip him of his parental rights.

Following the sabotage of electrical lines from government-controlled territory to occupied Crimea, Russian officials cut power and natural gas to the homes of Crimean Tatar Mejlis members in retaliation.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

Occupation authorities significantly restricted freedom of speech and press, and subjected dissenting voices to harassment and prosecution. They refused to register independent print and broadcast media outlets, forcing them to cease operations. Threats and harassment against international and Ukrainian journalists were common.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Individuals could not publicly criticize the Russian occupation without fear of reprisal. Human rights groups reported that the FSB engaged in widespread surveillance of social media, telephones, and electronic communication and routinely summoned individuals for "discussions" for voicing or posting opposition to the Russian occupation.

For example, on August 12, occupation authorities in Yalta charged Larysa Kitaiska with extremism because of a social media posting that they believed to be anti-Russian. Kitaiska had left Crimea for mainland Ukraine after the occupation began, but had temporarily returned to resolve a property matter when she was charged. Kitaiska left Crimea shortly after she was charged; she maintained that occupation authorities brought the case in retaliation for her pro-Ukrainian views and participation in the 2013-14 Euromaidan movement.

On October 5, armed security forces raided the home of Suleyman Kadyrov, a member of the Feodosia Mejlis, because of a March Facebook posting in which Kadyrov stated that Crimea remains a part of Ukraine. On October 11, occupation authorities charged Kadyrov with separatism.

Press and Media Freedoms: Independent print and broadcast media could not operate freely. Occupation authorities refused to register most independent media outlets, forcing them to close in 2015.

On March 25, *Krymska Svitlytsya*, the only Ukrainian-language newspaper remaining in Crimea, ceased publication. According to its website, the newspaper moved operations to Kyiv after it could no longer provide for the safety of its employees in Crimea.

On January 15, Russian occupation forces detained blogger and journalist Zair Akadyrov as he covered the trial of the "February 26" group of political prisoners and took him to a police precinct for questioning.

On December 7, the "prosecutor general" of Crimea charged Mykola Semena with "undermining Russian territorial integrity via mass media," a criminal offense punishable up to five years in prison. Semena, a freelance writer for the news website *Krym Realii*, had written pieces using a pseudonym criticizing the de facto Crimean government and Russian occupation. Occupation authorities detained Semena twice in 2015, and human rights groups believed that Russian security forces hacked into his computer to prove he had written articles critical of the occupation. Authorities placed Semena, who was in poor health, under house arrest in April, under the condition that he not leave Crimea. On September 29, a judge denied Semena's request to seek medical treatment in government-controlled Ukraine.

On June 14, Russian occupation authorities arrested Alexi Sapov, editor of *Argumenty Nedeli-Krym*. Sapov was one of the last reporters to cover the trials of Crimean Tatars. Sapov was previously a journalist in Vladimir, Russia, where his reporting led to accusations that he had blackmailed a member of the Russian parliament. Russian authorities extradited Sapov to Vladimir, Russia.

Violence and Harassment: There were numerous cases of Russian security forces or police harassing independent media and detaining journalists in connection with their professional activities.

On May 11, Russian authorities detained Igor Burdyga, a Ukrainian journalist covering the anniversary of the deportation of Crimean Tatars. According to Burdyga authorities detained him for his journalistic work, accused him of being a member of the Ukrainian nationalist group Right Sector, and forced him to testify that he had been involved in the demolition of electrical power lines in Ukraine that supplied Crimea. After seven hours of detention, authorities released Burdyga and he left Crimea.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, journalists overwhelmingly resorted to self-censorship to continue reporting and broadcasting. Russian occupation authorities banned most Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar-language broadcasts, replacing the content with Russian programming. Human rights groups reported that Russian authorities forbade songs by Ukrainian singers, such as Ruslana and Jamala, from playing on Crimean radio stations. Censorship of independent internet sites became more widespread.

Internet Freedom

Russian occupation authorities restricted free expression on the internet by imposing repressive laws of the Russian Federation on Crimea (see section 2.a. of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia). Security services routinely monitored and controlled internet activity to suppress contrary opinions. According to media accounts, occupation authorities interrogated residents of Crimea for posting pro-Ukrainian opinions on Facebook or in blogs.

On May 27, journalist Lilia Bujurova received a warning from security forces about postings she made on social media that Crimea was part of Ukraine.

On November 11, the Yevpatoria city court sentenced Serhiy Vasylchenko, a local anarchist, to 10 days in jail for "extremism" after he made calls on social media to boycott the Russian Duma elections in Crimea.

Throughout the year, Russian authorities blocked internet sites they considered "extremist," but that in fact provided mainstream reporting about the situation in Crimea. For example, in February they blocked the sites of *Ukrainska Pravda*, *cancel.net*, and *Apostrophe*. Following the arrest of Mykola Semena in April, Russian authorities blocked the website of *Krym Realii*. By August Russian authorities had blocked more than 60 websites as "extremist" for stating that Crimea remained a part of Ukraine.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Russian authorities in Crimea engaged in a widespread campaign to suppress Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian languages. While Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian are official languages in occupied Crimea, authorities continued to reduce instruction in schools and offered the languages only as an optional language at the end of the school day. In 2015 authorities closed the Crimean Tatar school in Bakhchysarai. The Mejlis reported that authorities continued to pressure Crimean Tatars to use the Cyrillic, as opposed to the Latin, alphabet.

On May 27, Russian security officers interviewed children at School No. 15 in Blizhne, Feodosia District, after receiving reports that some had not worn the St. George's Ribbon, a Russian military symbol, on May 9. According to human rights monitors, authorities interviewed students about their opinions on Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea. Authorities singled out Crimean Tatar boys

for questioning, and witnesses reported that FSB officers stated they would conduct similar investigations in the future.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

Organizations representing minority communities reported gross and widespread harassment and intimidation by occupation authorities to suppress their ability to assemble peacefully. Abuses included arbitrary searches, interrogations, threats of deportation, and unsubstantiated accusations of possessing "extremist" literature.

According to the HRMMU, on July 4, occupation authorities amended a 2014 resolution listing the places in Crimea where public events could be held, decreasing the number almost by half (from 665 to 366). The HRMMU noted that the amendments further restricted freedom of assembly to a shrinking number of "specially designated spaces," an unnecessary move that appeared "designed to dissuade the exercise of the right of freedom of assembly."

On March 1, authorities in Simferopol refused to allow the commemoration of the birthdate of Taras Shevchenko, the national poet of Ukraine. On March 9, Simferopol authorities issued a blanket prohibition on public gatherings not organized by the government from March 7 to March 22.

Occupation authorities prohibited gatherings and meetings to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of the 1944 Soviet mass deportation of Crimean Tatars on May 18. On May 17, Ilmi Umerov received a preemptive warning from police not to organize any type of gathering. In the days leading up to the anniversary, schoolteachers forbade students, particularly Crimean Tatar students, to skip school to participate in commemorative events. The Mejlis reported that Crimean Tatar communities did not seek permission for gatherings as they assumed that occupation authorities would forbid them. Throughout Crimea peaceful assemblies took place, but authorities arrested Crimean Tatars displaying flags and other symbols, including at least one person in Bakhchysarai, four in the Kirovsky District, and four in Sudak.

Occupation authorities forbade any assembly marking Crimean Tatar Flag Day on June 26.

On August 20, a group named The Deceived of Crimea gathered in Simferopol to protest rampant corruption in Crimea following Russia's occupation in 2014. Despite having obtained permission from the local government, authorities prohibited protesters from assembling for a demonstration planned to coincide with a visit by President Putin of Russia.

There were reports of occupation authorities using coercive methods to provide for participation at pro-"government" rallies. For example, according to press reports, a Duma candidate shared on social media a photograph of an order authorities sent to municipal government offices in Feodosia, which stated that attendance at a September 8 rally in support of the United Russia party was mandatory and that those unable to attend must write an explanatory note to their superiors.

There were reports that occupation authorities charged and fined individuals for allegedly violating public assembly rules in retaliation for gathering to witness security force raids on homes. For example, courts fined at least five Crimean Tatars for gathering to witness security force raids on neighboring homes in Bakhchisarai in May. Crimean Tatar leaders claim the charges were designed to intimidate Crimean Tatars into passively remaining in their homes during raids.

Freedom of Association

Occupation authorities broadly restricted freedom of association for individuals that opposed the occupation.

On February 15, the "prosecutor general" of Crimea filed a motion to ban the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, an elected, representative body of Crimean Tatars that the Ukrainian government legally recognizes. On April 13, the prosecutor general provisionally banned the Mejlis pending a court decision; the Russian Ministry of Justice upheld the decision on April 18. On April 26, a Russian occupation court declared the Mejlis an extremist organization for continuing to recognize Ukrainian sovereignty in Crimea. On September 29, the Russian Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision. The ban forbids Mejlis organized meetings or demonstrations, sharply restricts its financial activities, and prohibits the display of the Mejlis flag and symbols. While the Mejlis was led by a central council of 33 members, its organization extended to towns and villages, meaning that up to 2,000 local members of Mejlis groups were under threat.

In late September authorities fined at least eight Mejlis members for allegedly taking part in a meeting of an illegal organization, stemming from their informal gathering at the home of Ilmi Umerov on September 22. They had gathered to wish exiled Crimean Tatar leader, Refat Chubarov, a happy birthday via Skype, but authorities had monitored the meeting and determined that it constituted a meeting of the banned Mejlis. On December 29, Umerov announced that he was unable to pay the fine as occupation authorities had frozen his bank accounts by putting him on a list of "extremists."

On February 11, Russian authorities summoned Nariman Jelal, the highest ranking member of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis not incarcerated or exiled, demanding he detail the activities of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis and his future travel plans.

Russian authorities raided groups and institutions associated with Ukrainian culture. On March 31, security forces raided the Taras Shevchenko Association in Simferopol and seized approximately 250 books for promoting Ukrainian nationalism. Many of the seized materials dealt with the Holodomor, a famine produced by Soviet authorities in 1932 and 1933 that led to the deaths of millions of Ukrainians. On July 18, authorities questioned Leonid Kuzmin, a member of the Ukrainian Cultural Association. Authorities compelled Kuzmin to sign a nondisclosure agreement, forbidding discussion of the grounds for his questioning.

Russian occupation authorities carried out numerous raids on Crimean Tatar cultural and spiritual institutions. On January 27, Russian police raided the Crimean Tatar children's center Elif in Dzhankoi, seizing books and materials. On January 28, police raided the Islamic Cultural Center in Simferopol, again seizing books and materials.

Russian laws imposed on Crimea that regulate NGOs prohibit any group that receives foreign funding and engages in vaguely defined "political activity" to register as a "foreign agent," a term that connotes treason or espionage. While authorities had not included any Crimean NGOs on the list during the year, the law had a chilling effect on their activities (see sections 2.b. and 5 of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia).

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's [International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

Russian occupation authorities did not respect rights related to freedom of movement and travel.

In-country Movement: There were reports that occupation authorities selectively detained and at times abused persons attempting to enter or leave Crimea. According to human rights groups, Russian authorities routinely detained adult males at the administrative boundary for additional questioning, threatening to seize passports and documents, seizing telephones and memory cards, and questioning them for hours. Crimean residents travelling on Ukrainian passports were required to complete migration paperwork when crossing the administrative boundary between Kherson Oblast and occupied Crimea. As of April 1, Russian authorities forbade Crimean residents with Ukrainian license plates from driving out of Crimea and required all Crimean residents to obtain Russian driver licenses.

On February 25, when Ukrainian journalist Anastasia Ringis attempted to visit her parents in Crimea, Russian authorities prohibited her from entry until 2020. On March 22, Ukrainian authorities reported that Russian occupation authorities banned Kherson residents Rustem Gugurik, Bekir Gugurik, and Bilyal Seytumerov from admission to Crimea for five years.

Occupation authorities also prohibited entry into Crimea by Mustafa Jemilev and Refat Chubarov, members of the Verkhovna Rada and the former and current chairmen of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, respectively; Crimean Tatar activist Sinaver Kadyrov; and Ismet Yuksel, general director of the Crimean News Agency, on the pretext that they would incite radicalism.

There were reports that authorities forcibly relocated stateless persons in retaliation for their political activism. For example, on November 7, authorities deported Crimean Tatar activist Nedim Khalilov, who had initiated a court case several months earlier against occupation authorities, which sought to have Russia's occupation of Crimea declared illegal. Khalilov possessed only a Soviet identity document, which stated that his place of birth was Uzbekistan. He had obtained neither Ukrainian nor Russian citizenship on ideological grounds. After a brief court hearing, occupation authorities forcibly deported Khalilov to a detention center in Russia; at year's end, he was still awaiting deportation to Uzbekistan, where he had no relatives, housing, or other support.

Citizenship: Russian occupation authorities require all residents of Crimea to be Russian citizens. Those who refuse Russian citizenship may be subjected to arbitrary expulsion. According to the Russian Office of the Federal Bailiff's Service, occupation authorities expelled a couple with Israeli and Ukrainian citizenships from Kerch in February. Additionally, authorities denied those who refused Russian citizenship access to government employment, education, and health care, as well as the ability to open bank accounts and buy insurance, among other limitations. One media report detailed the case of a woman in Yevpatoria who could not have stitches removed because she had not accepted Russian citizenship. In another case, a displaced person from the Donbas could not receive treatment for a dog bite.

According to media sources, Russian authorities prosecuted private employers who continued to employ Ukrainians. According to the Crimea Human Rights Group, on April 8, occupation authorities fined the company Voyazhkrym 35,000 rubles (\$570) for employing a Ukrainian. On April 18, authorities fined the Fregat shipbuilding company in Kerch 250,000 rubles (\$4,100) for employing a Ukrainian.

In some cases authorities compelled Crimean residents to surrender their Ukrainian passports, complicating international travel, as many countries did not recognize passports issued by Russian occupation authorities.

Occupation authorities announced that, as of January 1, individuals who retained Ukrainian citizenship must register their passports or be subjected to fines or imprisonment.

Internally Displaced Persons

Approximately 30,000 residents of Crimea registered with Ukraine's State Emergency Service as IDPs on the mainland, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The Mejlis and local NGOs, such as Krym SOS, believed the actual figure could be as high as 100,000 as most IDPs remained unregistered. Many individuals fled out of fear that occupation authorities would target them for abuse because of their work as political activists or journalists. Muslims, Greek Catholics, and Evangelical Christians who left Crimea said they feared discrimination due to their religious beliefs.

Crimean Tatars, who made up the largest number of IDPs, said they were concerned about pressure on their community, including an increasing number of arbitrary searches of their homes, surveillance, and discrimination. Additionally, many professionals left Crimea because Russian occupation authorities required them to apply for Russian professional licenses and adopt Russian procedures in their work.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

Recent Elections: Russian occupation authorities have prevented residents from voting in Ukrainian national and local elections since Crimea's occupation began in 2014.

On September 18, Russia's nationwide parliamentary elections included seats allocated for occupied Crimea, a move widely condemned by the international community. The Crimea Human Rights Group recorded incidents where occupation authorities coerced residents into voting in the elections, including threats of dismissals and wage cuts.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

Corruption: There were multiple reports during the year of systemic rampant corruption among Crimean "office-holders," including through embezzlement of Russian state funds allocated to support the occupation. According to media reports, more than half of the funding for transportation infrastructure during the year was misspent or unaccounted for, and funds for infrastructure in Crimea were being funneled to the Kerch bridge project without adequate oversight. Human rights sources also reported misspent or stolen medical services funds adversely affected the provision of health care under Russian occupation.

Financial Disclosure: There were no known requirements for Russian occupation authorities or their agents to file, verify, or make public any income or asset disclosure statements, nor was there a mechanism to provide for public access to information about their activities.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Most independent human rights organizations ceased activities in Crimea following Russia's occupation. Occupation authorities refused to cooperate with independent human rights NGOs and ignored their views, and they harassed human rights monitors and threatened them with fines and imprisonment.

Russia continued to deny access to the peninsula to international human rights monitors from the OSCE and the United Nations. A Council of Europe human rights delegation visited Crimea in April.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Children

Birth Registration: Under both Ukrainian law and laws imposed by Russian occupation authorities, either birthplace or parentage determines citizenship. Russia's occupation and purported annexation of Crimea complicated the question of citizenship for children born after February 2014, since it was difficult for parents to register a child as a citizen with Ukrainian authorities. Registration in Ukraine requires a hospital certificate, which is retained when a birth certificate is issued. Under the occupation regime, new parents could only obtain a Russian birth certificate and did not have access to a hospital certificate. During the year Ukrainian government instituted a process whereby births in Crimea could be recognized with documents issued by occupation authorities.

Institutionalized Children: There were reports that Russian authorities continued to permit kidnapping of orphans in Crimea and transporting them across the border into Russia for adoption. Ukraine's government did not know the whereabouts of the children.

Anti-Semitism

According to Jewish groups, an estimated 10-15,000 Jews lived in Crimea, primarily in Simferopol. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Since the beginning of Russia's occupation, authorities singled out Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians for discrimination, abuse, deprivation of religious and economic rights, and violence, including killings and abductions (see sections 1.a., 1.b., 1.c., 1.d., 1.f., 2.a., 2.b., and 2.d.).

Crimean Tatars are an ethnic group native to Crimea, dating most recently to the Crimean Khanate of the 15th century. In 1944 Soviet authorities forcibly deported more than 230,000 Crimean Tatars to the Soviet Far East for allegedly collaborating with the Nazis during World War II. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many surviving Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea. Prior to the Russian occupation, there were approximately 300,000 Crimean Tatars living in Crimea.

There were reports that government officials openly advocated discrimination and violence against Crimean Tatars. For example, during a public online discussion on December 13, Natalya Kryzhko, a member of the "parliament," threatened to "load [Crimean Tatars] on barges and drown them in the Black Sea" in reaction to requests by two Crimean Tatar villages to restore their historic Crimean Tatar place names.

Occupation authorities harassed Crimean Tatars for speaking their language in public and forbade speaking it in the workplace. There were reports that teachers prohibited schoolchildren from speaking Crimean Tatar to one another.

Occupation authorities placed restrictions on the Spiritual Administration of Crimean Muslims, which is closely associated with Crimean Tatars. According to human rights groups, Russian security services routinely monitored prayers at mosques for any mention that Crimea remains part of Ukraine. Russian security forces also monitored mosques for anti-Russian sentiment and as a means of recruiting police informants.

Laws forbid religious gatherings outside established institutions. Crimean Tatars reported that Russian occupation authorities threatened the custom of home funeral services and have compiled lists of gravediggers and Muslim leaders.

Russian occupation authorities also targeted ethnic Ukrainians. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, on June 10, a court convicted Vladimir Baluch of insulting an official during an investigation into a stolen automobile. Baluch maintained the charges were in retaliation for his displays of Ukrainian ethnic symbols and opposition to the occupation. On December 8, the FSB raided Baluch's home after he posted a sign "renaming" his street in honor of the "heavenly hundred" protesters who died during the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests in Kyiv. During the raid the FSB claimed to have found explosives, which Baluch insists its agents planted, and arrested Baluch. He faced weapons charges carrying a prison term of four years. On December 27, a court extended his detention until February 2017. In 2015 security forces detained and beat Baluch for flying a Ukrainian flag at his home.

Occupation authorities have not permitted churches linked to ethnic Ukrainians, in particular the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, to register under Russian law. Occupation authorities harassed and intimidated members of the churches and used court proceedings to force the UOC-KP in particular to leave properties it had rented for years. According to a January 16 court decision, the UOC-KP was compelled to vacate part of the St. Vladimir and Olga church in Sevastopol after its lease expired and was required to pay an administrative fine of nearly 600,000 rubles (\$9,800). Church officials reported regular and systematic surveillance of UOC-KP churches and parishioners.

Russian occupation authorities targeted businesses and properties belonging to ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars for expropriation and seizure. Particularly, they prohibited Crimean Tatars affiliated with the Mejlis from registering businesses or properties.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Human rights groups and local gay rights activists reported that much of the LGBTI community fled Crimea after the Russian occupation began. Those who remained live in fear of verbal and physical abuse due to their sexual orientation. According to a report commissioned by the Ukrainian Center for Civil Liberties and Memorial's Antidiscrimination Center in Saint Petersburg, the Russian group Occupy Pedophilia is active in Crimea. The group used social media to lure suspected LGBTI persons to locations where they are humiliated, filmed, and beaten. According to one report, a group of six men patrolling a park beat two individuals in Simferopol. The victims did not file a complaint with police for fear of retaliation. Individuals were accosted and abused for wearing nonconformist clothing, on the assumption that they must be LGBTI persons. Human rights groups stated that these groups operated with the tacit support of local authorities, who did not investigate such crimes.

Russian occupation authorities prohibited any LGBTI groups from holding public events in Crimea. On April 25, an LGBTI activist in Sevastopol announced plans to hold a peaceful protest. In response Sergei Aksyonov, the head of the occupation authorities in Crimea, stated that authorities would prevent any such assembly. Subsequently, "self-defense" forces threatened to expel LGBTI individuals from Crimea forcibly. LGBTI individuals faced increasing restrictions on their right to assemble peacefully, as occupation authorities enforced a Russian law that criminalizes the so-called propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors (see section 6 of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia).

Section 7. Worker Rights

Russian occupation authorities announced that the labor laws of Ukraine would no longer be in effect after January 1 and that only the laws of the Russian Federation would apply (see section 7 of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia).

Russian occupation authorities imposed labor laws and regulations of the Russian Federation on Crimean workers, limited worker rights, and created barriers to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the ability to strike. The NGO Freedom House reported that pro-Russian authorities threatened to nationalize property owned by Ukrainian labor unions in Crimea. Ukrainians who did not accept Russian citizenship faced job discrimination in all sectors of the economy. Only Russian passport holders could continue to work in "government" and municipal positions.

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