

Title	State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Ukraine
Publisher	Minority Rights Group International
Country	Ukraine
Publication Date	28 June 2012
Cite as	Minority Rights Group International, <i>State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Ukraine</i> , 28 June 2012, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fedb3eac.html [accessed 27 November 2012]
Disclaimer	This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Ukraine

The twentieth anniversary of a referendum that restored the Crimean Peninsula's autonomous status was marked in Ukraine on 20 January 2011. The referendum, approved by 93 per cent of voters shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, continues to cause divisions on the Peninsula. The pro-Russian Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia National Front held a protest on the anniversary, claiming that the 1991 referendum was really about the Republic of Crimea becoming a union republic within the Soviet Union (USSR), not within Ukraine, as the USSR still existed when the referendum was held.

Many Crimean Tatars, who are indigenous to the Crimean Peninsula, boycotted the referendum. According to Refat Chubarov, a Crimean Tatar community leader quoted by the media outlet Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Ukrainian service, the Crimea's current autonomous status does not guarantee the protection of cultural, social or economic rights of the Crimean Tatars.

On 18 May, more than 15,000 Crimean Tatars gathered in the centre of Simferopol, the capital of Crimea, to mark the anniversary of the mass deportation of the Crimean Tatars by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1944, when the entire Crimean Tatar population was deported to Central Asia and the Siberian region of Russia for alleged collaboration with Nazi Germany. As reported by RFE/RL, the demonstrators carried Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar national flags and banners with slogans such as 'The deportation of 1944 should be recognized as genocide against the Crimean Tatars!' The Crimea was officially transferred from Russia to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954. Crimean Tatars started returning *en masse* to Crimea from Central Asia in the late 1980s and 1990s, and demanded their land and property back. They currently account for about 13 per cent of the Peninsula's 2 million population, 60 per cent of whom are Russians.

In February 2011, the *Kyiv Post* reported on the long struggle of the repatriated Crimean Tatars to reclaim their land. Allegedly a total of 1,400 hectares of land are occupied by 15,000 Crimean Tatars who have been unable to buy land legally on their return to Crimea. Some are now squatting illegally on plots of land without basic infrastructure, running water and electricity. Crimean Tatars and the authorities contest the requirements for obtaining land. Prime Minister Vasyl Dzharty reportedly stated that Tatars do not face discrimination in obtaining land, while according to the newspaper source more than 60 per cent of the Tatars have never received any land and have no place to live.

In its 2011 report, CERD noted that the question of 'restitution and compensation for the loss of over 80,000 private dwellings and approximately 34,000 hectares of farmland upon deportation remains unresolved'. This is a particularly crucial issue since 86 per cent of the Crimean Tatars living in rural areas did not have the right to participate in the process of agricultural land restitution because they had not worked for state enterprises. CERD called for the government to restore the political, social and economic right of the Tatars in Crimea.

At the UN Forum on Minority Issues in 2011, Nara Narimanova of the Crimean Tatar Youth Council, gave evidence on the situation of Crimean Tatar women in Ukraine. High levels of unemployment, poor living conditions and discrimination have put Crimean Tatar women in a particularly vulnerable situation, according to Narimanova.

A major issue is the lack of opportunity for Crimean Tatars to educate children in their mother tongue; there are only two universities where Crimean is taught. In April 2011, the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea announced that adopting a draft law on languages in Ukraine was an issue 'of extreme urgency'. In February 2012, the Crimean parliament appealed to the Ukrainian parliament to adopt draft legislation that would ensure the use of minority languages in culture and education. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission recommended passage of the draft law in December 2011. The law was also supported by 16 higher educational institutions and the representatives of 36 national minorities.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.