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2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ukraine (Crimea)

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. The UN General Assembly’s Resolution 68/262 on the “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine” of March 27, 2014, and Resolution 75/192 on the “Situation of Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (Ukraine)”of December 28, 2020, called on states and international organizations not to recognize any change in Crimea’s status and affirmed the commitment of the United Nations 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 been applied in 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 Report on Human Rights for Russia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ANNOUNCEMENT: The Department of State will release an addendum to this report in mid 2021 that expands the subsection on Women in Section 6 to include a broader range of issues related to reproductive rights.

A local occupation authority installed by the Russian government and led by Sergey Aksyonov as “prime minister” of the “state council of the republic of Crimea” administers occupied Crimea. The “state council” is responsible for day-to-day administration and other functions of governing. In 2016 Russia’s nationwide parliamentary elections included seats allocated for purportedly annexed Crimea, a move widely condemned by the international community and that contravened the Ukrainian constitution.

Russian government agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Federal Investigative Committee, and the Office of the Prosecutor General, applied and enforced Russian law in Crimea as if it were a part of the Russian Federation. 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. Russian authorities maintained control over Russian military and security forces deployed in Crimea. Members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: forced disappearances; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by Russia or Russia-led “authorities,” including punitive psychiatric incarceration; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and transfer of prisoners to Russia; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the occupation judiciary; pervasive arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including violence, threats of violence, or unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and website blocking; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including on the Crimean Tatar Mejlis; severe restrictions of religious freedom; serious restrictions on movement; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; restrictions on political participation; serious acts of corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for violence against women; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups, or indigenous people, including Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex persons.

Occupation authorities took few steps to investigate or prosecute officials or individuals who committed human rights abuses, creating an atmosphere of impunity and lawlessness.

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

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

According to the human rights group Crimea SOS, there were no new reports that occupation authorities committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, but impunity for past killings remained a serious problem. The Russian government tasked the Russian Investigative Committee with investigating whether security force killings in occupied Crimea were justifiable and whether to pursue prosecutions. The HRMMU reported the Investigative Committee failed to take adequate steps to prosecute or punish officials who committed abuses, resulting in a climate of impunity. The Office of the Prosecutor of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea also investigated security force killings from its headquarters in Kyiv, but de facto restrictions on access to occupied Crimea limited its effectiveness.

There were no reported investigations for the four Crimean Tatars found dead in 2019. Occupation authorities did not adequately investigate 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. Human rights groups reported 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

There were reports of abductions and disappearances by occupation authorities. Crimea SOS reported 45 individuals have gone missing since Russian forces occupied Crimea in 2014, and the fate of 15 of these individuals remained unknown. The OHCHR reported occupation authorities have not prosecuted anyone in relation to the forced disappearances. NGO and press reports indicated occupation authorities were responsible for the disappearances. For example, in March 2014, Maidan activists Ivan Bondarets and Valerii Vashchuk telephoned relatives to report police in Simferopol had detained them at a railway station for displaying a Ukrainian flag. Relatives have had no communication with them since, and the whereabouts of the two men remained unknown. Occupation authorities denied international monitors, including the OHCHR and OSCE, access to Crimea, which made it impossible for monitors to investigate forced disappearances there properly.

Occupation authorities did not adequately investigate the deaths and disappearances, according to human rights groups. Human rights groups reported that police often refused to register reports of disappearances and intimidated and threatened with detention those who tried to report disappearances. The 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.

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

There were widespread reports that occupation authorities in Crimea tortured and otherwise abused residents who opposed the occupation. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, “The use of torture by the FSB and the Russia-led police against Ukrainian citizens became a systematic and unpunished phenomenon after Russia’s occupation of Crimea.” Human rights monitors reported that Russian occupation authorities subjected Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians in particular to physical abuse. For example, on January 28, plainclothes occupation authorities from the “ministry of internal affairs” detained Server Rasilchak, a 17-year-old Crimean Tatar, shortly after Rasilchak, his father, and two friends were stopped by traffic police at a gas station in Saki. The men beat and arrested Rasilchak and took him to a police station, where he was subjected to electric shocks, beaten, and threatened with sexual assault for several hours. Rasilchak’s mother claimed she filed a formal complaint with police, but human rights groups noted the difficulty of tracking the status of complaints and investigations in Crimea given the atmosphere of fear and impunity.

Occupation authorities reportedly demonstrated a pattern of using punitive psychiatric incarceration as a means of pressuring detained individuals. For example, according to press reports, on June 23, authorities transferred Crimean Tatar Ruslan Suleimanov to the Crimean Clinical Psychiatric Hospital for a forced psychiatric evaluation. Suleimanov was arrested in March 2019 and charged with allegedly belonging to the pan-Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned in Russia as a terrorist group but legal in Ukraine. Human right defenders viewed the authorities’ move as an attempt to break his client’s will and intimidate him.

According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, as of late September, approximately 10 Crimean Tatar defendants had been subjected to psychiatric evaluation and confinement against their will without apparent medical need since the beginning of the occupation (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 whom authorities believed were opposed to the occupation.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions reportedly remained harsh and life threatening due to overcrowding and poor conditions.

Physical Conditions: The Crimean Human Rights Group reported inhuman conditions in official places of detention in Crimea. According to a June interim report by the UN secretary-general, inadequate conditions in detention centers in Crimea could amount to “inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” According to the report, prisons in Crimea were overcrowded, medical assistance for prisoners was inadequate, and detainees complained of systematic beatings and humiliating strip searches by prison guards.

Overcrowding forced prisoners to sleep in shifts in order to share beds. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, detainees held in the Simferopol pretrial detention center complained about poor sanitary conditions, broken toilets, and insufficient heating. Detainees diagnosed with HIV as well as tuberculosis and other communicable diseases were kept in a single cell. On July 7, the Crimean Human Rights Group reported that three of the defendants in a case involving alleged involvement in the group Hizb ut-Tahrir complained of harsh conditions, including being kept in a basement cell with a sealed window in one case and sharing a 20-bed cell with 23 inmates in another.

There were reports detainees were denied medical treatment, even for serious health conditions. According to the June UN secretary-general's special report, detainees often had to rely on relatives to provide medicine, since the medical assistance provided at detention centers was inadequate. For example, Dzhemil Gafarov, a 58-year-old Crimean Tatar civic activist imprisoned in Crimea, received inadequate treatment for severe kidney disease. On October 22, the Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsperson reported Gafarov's medical condition had severely deteriorated while in detention. As of November occupation authorities continued to ignore requests from Gafarov's lawyer that Gafarov be hospitalized or medically released.

According to the Crimean Resource Center, 32 Crimean prisoners were transferred to the Russian Federation in the first eight months of the year, 26 of whom were Crimean Tatars. One factor in the transfers was the lack of specialized penitentiary facilities in Crimea, requiring the transfer of juveniles, persons sentenced to life imprisonment, and prisoners suffering from serious physical and mental illnesses.

According to defense lawyers, prisoners considered Russian citizens by the Russian Federation were denied Ukrainian consular visits, and some Crimean residents were transferred to prison facilities in Russia without Ukrainian passports.

Prison authorities reportedly retaliated against detainees who refused Russian Federation citizenship by placing them in smaller cells or in solitary confinement.

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

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

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.

Arbitrary Arrest: Arbitrary arrests continued to occur, which observers believed were a means of instilling fear, stifling opposition, and inflicting punishment on those who opposed the occupation. Security forces conducted regular raids on Crimean Tatar villages and the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, accompanied by detentions, interrogations, and often criminal charges. The Crimean Resource Center recorded 68 detentions and 70 interrogations that were politically motivated as of September 30. For example, on May 30, Ukrainian soldier Yevhen Dobrynsky disappeared while on duty near the administrative boundary between mainland Ukraine and Crimea. On June 2, the FSB announced it had detained Dobrynsky for "illegally crossing the border from Ukraine to Russia." As of October, Dobrynsky was still detained by occupation authorities.

The HRMMU noted that justifications underpinning the arrests of alleged members of "terrorist" or "extremist" groups often provided little evidence that the suspect posed an actual threat to society by planning or undertaking concrete actions.

The HRMMU noted the prevalence of members of the Crimean Tatar community among those apprehended during police raids. According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, of the 173 individuals arrested between January and August, 133 were Crimean Tatars. The HRMMU noted raids were often carried out on the pretext of purported need to seize materials linking suspects to groups that are banned in the Russian Federation, but lawful in Ukraine.

For example, according to press reports, on July 7, the FSB raided houses of Crimean Tatars in various parts of the peninsula. Security forces reportedly targeted the houses of activists belonging to the Crimean Solidarity movement, a human rights organization that provides the relatives and lawyers of political prisoners with legal, financial, and moral support. Seven individuals were arrested during the raid. According to human rights groups, security forces had no warrant for the raid and denied detained individuals access to lawyers. Of the seven men arrested during the raid, three were charged with organizing the activities of a terrorist organization (Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is legal in Ukraine), which carries a sentence of up to life in prison. The rest were charged with participating in the activities of a terrorist organization, which carries a sentence of up to 20 years in prison.

Jehovah's Witnesses were also targeted for raids and arbitrary arrests. For example, on May 26, Russian security forces in Kerch conducted searches of four homes belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses, and one man was arrested on "extremism" charges as a result of the searches. The group is banned in Russia as an extremist organization but is legal in Ukraine. On June 4, Jehovah's Witness Artyom Gerasimov was sentenced to six years' imprisonment on "extremism" charges. Prosecutors presented secret audio recordings of Gerasimov and his family reciting prayers

and Bible verses in their home, alleging these actions constituted illegal "organizational activities" on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Gerasimov was the second Jehovah's Witness during the year to receive a six-year prison sentence on extremism charges after an arbitrary arrest for exercising his freedom of religion.

Failure to submit to conscription into the Russian military was also used as a basis for arbitrary arrests. Since 2015, Russia has conducted annual spring and fall conscriptions in Crimea, and failure to comply is punishable by criminal penalty. Since the beginning of the occupation, nearly 30,000 persons have been conscripted, and in February the Crimean Human Rights Group documented eight new criminal cases of Crimean residents for evading military service in the Russian Federation Armed Forces.

Detainees were often denied access to a lawyer during interrogation. For example, on August 31, FSB officers searched the homes of four Crimean Tatar activists belonging to the group Crimean Solidarity. FSB officers detained all four activists: Ayder Kadyrov, a correspondent for the *Grani.ru* online media, Ridvan Umerov (a leader of the local mosque), and Crimean Solidarity members Ayder Yabliakimov and Enver Topchi. The men were interrogated for eight hours, during which authorities refused to grant their lawyers access to them. Kadyrov's lawyer claimed that authorities forced Kadyrov to sign a confession.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Under Russian occupation authorities, the judicial system was neither independent nor impartial. Judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys were subject to political directives, and the outcomes of trials appeared predetermined by government interference. The HRMMU noted that lawyers defending individuals accused of extremism or terrorism risked facing harassment or similar charges themselves. For example, human rights lawyer Emil Kurbedinov reported that occupation authorities physically surveilled him and likely tapped his office phone. Kurbedinov has faced longstanding pressure for his involvement in defending human rights defenders and activists in Crimea, including being previously arrested in 2017 and 2018.

Trial Procedures

Defendants in politically motivated cases were increasingly transferred to the Russian Federation for trial. 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.

Occupation authorities limited the ability to have a public hearing. According to the HRMMU, occupation authorities banned family members and media from the courtroom for hearings related to charges of Hizb ut-Tahrir membership and other activities deemed subversive under Russian law. The courts justified the closed hearings by citing vague concerns about the "safety of the participants." The courts failed to publish judgments in these cases.

Occupation authorities interfered with defendants' ability to access an attorney. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, defendants facing terrorism or extremism-related charges were often pressured into dismissing their privately hired lawyers in exchange for promised leniency.

Occupation authorities intimidated witnesses to influence their testimony. On June 11, the FSB charged a former witness with providing false testimony at the hearings of individuals accused of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir. In an August 2019 court hearing, the witness retracted his pretrial statements, claiming they had been coerced by FSB officers during interrogation. While the HRMMU found the witness's claims of mistreatment to be credible, the court dismissed the allegations and ruled that the witness's retraction was intended to assist the defendant in avoiding criminal liability. The former witness faced five years in prison.

The HRMMU reported that occupation authorities retroactively applied Russia's laws to actions that took place before the occupation of the peninsula began.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, as of August, 105 Crimeans were being deprived of freedom in occupied Crimea or in Russia on political or religious charges, 73 of whom were Crimean Tatar Muslims prosecuted on terrorism charges.

Charges of extremism, terrorism, or violation of territorial integrity were particularly applied to opponents of the occupation, such as Crimean Tatars, Jehovah's Witnesses, independent journalists, and individuals expressing dissent on social media.

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

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.

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

Occupation authorities routinely conducted raids on homes to intimidate the local population, particularly Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and Jehovah's Witnesses ostensibly on the grounds of searching for weapons, drugs, or "extremist literature." According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, occupation authorities conducted 38 searches between January and August; 25 were in the households of Crimean Tatars.

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. Authorities reportedly encouraged state employees to inform on their colleagues who might oppose the occupation. According to human rights advocates, eavesdropping and visits by security personnel created an environment in which persons were afraid to voice any opinion contrary to the occupation authorities, even in private.

Occupation authorities regularly used recorded audio of discussions regarding religion and politics, obtained through illegal wiretapping of private homes, and testimonies from unidentified witnesses as evidence in court. For example, in June 2019 occupation authorities detained four Crimean Tatars in the Alushta region of Crimea on terrorism charges related to alleged involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir. Russian prosecutors used FSB wiretaps of the men’s conversations during private religious classes about the concept of an Islamic caliphate in Crimea as evidence the men were planning a “forcible seizure of power.” As of November the men were being held at detention facility in Rostov-on-Don in Russia as the trial proceeded.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

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

Occupation authorities significantly restricted the exercise of freedom of expression and subjected dissenting voices including the press to harassment and prosecution. Occupation authorities’ reported failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters led to de facto restrictions on the exercise of freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Speech: The HRMMU noted occupation authorities placed “excessive limitations on the freedoms of opinion and expression.” On July 31, occupation authorities began enforcing a law that prohibited the unauthorized dissemination of information damaging to the FSB’s reputation without the FSB’s approval. Enforcement of this law in Crimea deprived Crimean residents of the opportunity to publicly criticize and disseminate information about reportedly unlawful actions of FSB officers and alleged violations or abuses of human rights.

Individuals could not publicly criticize the Russian occupation without fear of reprisal. Human rights groups reported 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 occupation. These unlawfully obtained recordings were often used against those who were arbitrarily arrested in closed trials.

Occupation authorities often deemed expressions of dissent “extremism” and prosecuted individuals for them. For example, according to press reports, on January 18, the FSB placed a 34-year entry ban on Taras Ibrahimov, a Ukrainian journalist who covered politically motivated lawsuits and human rights violations in Crimea. Occupation authorities officially informed Ibrahimov of the ban but did not provide a justification.

Occupation authorities harassed and fined individuals for the display of Ukrainian or Crimean Tatar symbols, which were banned as “extremist.” For example, on March 9, police dispersed a small group of women who began singing the Ukrainian national anthem during an authorized ceremony next to a monument to Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko in Simferopol. Police told the women their actions constituted an “act of provocation.”

Occupation authorities deemed expressions of support for Ukrainian sovereignty over the peninsula to be equivalent to undermining Russian territorial integrity. For example, on May 22, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation charged in absentia Crimean Tatar television channel ATR deputy director Ayder Muzhdabaev with violating a Russian law against “public calls for committing terrorist activities.” The charges were purportedly due to his support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity, which he routinely expressed on the daily talk show that he cohosted.

There were multiple reports that occupation authorities detained and prosecuted individuals seeking to film raids on homes or court proceedings. For example, according to press reports, journalist Amet Suleimanov was among those arrested on “terrorism” charges in the FSB’s March 11 raid on multiple Crimean Tatars’ homes in Bakhchisaray district. Occupation authorities first detained Suleimanov in 2017 for filming security forces during a raid on the home of a fellow member of Crimean Solidarity. Occupation authorities have detained and released him multiple times since 2017, citing vague “terrorism” concerns. As of October Suleimanov was under house arrest.

During the year occupation authorities prosecuted individuals for the content of social media posts. For example, on May 28 a “district court” in occupied Crimea fined the acting chairman of the Alushta Muslim community, Ruslan Emirvaliev, for a social media post made in 2016 containing an image of a boy pointing at a banner displaying the words of the Islamic *shahada*, or statement of faith, in Arabic script. Court documents characterized these words as “an inscription in an unknown language, of an unknown nature and content.”

Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent print and broadcast media could not operate freely. Most independent media outlets were forced to close in 2015 after occupation authorities refused to register them. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, after the occupation began, many local journalists left

Crimea or abandoned their profession. With no independent media outlets left in Crimea and professional journalists facing serious risks for reporting from the peninsula, civic activists were a major source of information on developments in Crimea.

Violence and Harassment: There were numerous cases of security forces or police harassing activists and detaining journalists in connection with their civic or professional activities. For example, on November 3, occupation authorities detained two journalists of the Russia-based *Grani.ru* website near a Russia-controlled military court building in Simferopol on administrative charges related to public order. The journalists had come to the military court building to report on the sentencing of three Crimean Tatars by a military court in Rostov-on-Don, which was due to be delivered on the same day. Occupation authorities suggested the reporters had been involved in protests in support of the defendants, although local media reported the crowds of protesters had already dispersed when the journalists were arrested.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, journalists resorted to self-censorship to continue reporting and broadcasting.

There were reports occupation authorities sought to restrict access to or remove internet content about Crimea they disliked. As of September Russia-led authorities blocked 30 websites in Crimea, including the websites of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis (a representative body that Russia deems extremist), Jehovah's Witnesses, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Ministry of Integration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, and several independent Ukrainian news outlets, among others. Censorship of independent internet sites was widespread (see Internet Freedom).

Occupation authorities banned most Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar-language broadcasts, replacing the content with Russian programming. On June 22, the Crimean Human Rights Group reported that occupation authorities were continuing to block Ukrainian FM radio stations in northern Crimea by broadcasting their stations on the same wavelength. The signal of Ukrainian FM radio stations was heard in only five of the area's 19 settlements.

Human rights groups reported occupation authorities continued to forbid songs by Ukrainian singers from playing on Crimean radio stations.

National Security: Authorities cited laws protecting national security to justify retaliation against opponents of Russia's occupation.

The Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service included prominent critics of the occupation on its list of extremists and terrorists. Inclusion on the list prevented individuals from holding bank accounts, using notary services, and conducting other financial transactions.

Authorities frequently used the threat of "extremism," "terrorism," or other purported national security grounds to justify harassment or prosecution of individuals in retaliation for expressing opposition to the occupation. For example, on May 25, the Russia-controlled "supreme court" in occupied Crimea began hearing the in absentia trial of Lenur Isliamov, the owner of the Crimean Tatar television channel ATR. In 2015 occupation authorities charged Isliamov with "organizing an illegal armed group, committing sabotage, [and] public calls for extremist activities." In 2015 Isliamov led a group of volunteers near the administrative border in blocking the transport of commercial goods to and from occupied Crimea. The Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group called the act an "essentially peaceful civic blockade of Crimea," and the Ukrainian government subsequently approved the formal registration of Isliamov's organization.

Internet Freedom

Russian occupation authorities restricted free expression on the internet (see section 2.a. of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia), by imposing repressive Russian Federation laws on Crimea. Security services routinely monitored and controlled internet activity to suppress dissenting opinions. According to media accounts, occupation authorities interrogated and harassed residents of Crimea for online postings with pro-Ukrainian opinions (see Censorship or Content Restrictions, above).

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Occupation authorities engaged in a widespread campaign to suppress the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian languages (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

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.

According to the June UN secretary-general's special report, "public events initiated by perceived supporters of Ukrainian territorial integrity or critics of policies of the Russian Federation in Crimea were reportedly prevented or prohibited by occupation authorities."

Human rights monitors reported that occupation authorities routinely denied permission to hold assemblies based on political beliefs, in particular to opponents of the occupation or those seeking to protest the actions of the occupation authorities. Those who gathered without permission were regularly charged with administrative offenses. Expansive

rules about what type of gatherings required permits and selective enforcement of the rules made it difficult for protesters to avoid such offenses. For example, according to a local news website, on January 19, police shut down a small women-led rally in Kerch against the possible closure of the Taigan Safari Park, which faced mismanagement-related litigation in Russia-based courts. Police and representatives of the Kerch city council told the rally's participants that holding a public event unauthorized by the city council was illegal. The participants complied in ending the rally, and several of them began disseminating leaflets to passers-by. An hour later, police detained several of the women and took them to the police station. Police did not register the arrests.

Occupation authorities brought charges for "unauthorized assemblies" against single-person protests, even though preauthorization is not required for individual protests. For example, according to the Crimean Human Rights Group, on June 8, police charged activist Serhiy Akimov with an administrative offense for holding a one-person protest in Simferopol in front of the Crimean "parliament" building in support of Russian politician Nikolay Platoshkin, who was under house arrest in Moscow.

There were reports that authorities used a ban on "unauthorized missionary activity" to restrict public gatherings of members of religious minorities. For example, on April 1, the "prosecutor" of Alushta opened administrative proceedings against Yusuf Ashirov, the imam of the local Islamic community, for "illegal missionary activity." The prosecutor did not explain how Ashirov's performance of Friday prayers, a traditional rite for Muslims, violated the law.

A "regulation" limits the places where public events may be held to 366 listed locations, which, as the HRMMU noted, restricted the ability to assemble to a shrinking number of "specially designated spaces," a move that appeared "designed to dissuade" peaceful assembly.

There were reports occupation authorities charged and fined individuals for allegedly violating public assembly rules in retaliation for gathering to witness security force raids on homes.

Freedom of Association

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.

Occupation authorities broadly restricted the exercise of freedom of association for individuals who opposed the occupation. For example, there were numerous reports of authorities taking steps to harass, intimidate, arrest, and imprison members of the human rights group Crimean Solidarity, an unregistered movement of friends and family of victims of repression by occupation authorities (see section 1.d.). During the year the Crimean Human Rights Group documented multiple cases in which police visited the homes of Crimean Solidarity activists to threaten them or warn them not to engage in "extremist" activities. For example, on May 6, Seyran Menseitov, a member of the Crimean Solidarity movement, received a letter from the Yevpatoriya "prosecutor's office," which warned him against participating in gatherings related to the May 18 "Day of Remembrance for the victims of the Crimean Tatar Genocide," as they might constitute "extremist" activities. At least 10 other Crimean Tatar activists and journalists received similar "preventive warnings" in advance of the May 18 holiday.

According to human rights groups, Russian security services routinely monitored prayers at mosques for any mention that Crimea remained part of Ukraine. Russian security forces also monitored mosques for anti-Russia sentiment and as a means of recruiting police informants, whose secret testimony was used in trials of alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members.

The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People remained banned for purported "extremism" despite a decision by the International Court of Justice holding that occupation authorities must "refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis." Following the 2016 ban on the Crimean Tatar Mejlis as an "extremist organization," occupation authorities banned gatherings by Mejlis members and prosecuted individuals for discussing the Mejlis on social media.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement

Occupation authorities imposed restrictions on freedom of movement.

In-country Movement: Occupation authorities maintained a state "border" at the administrative boundary between mainland Ukraine and Crimea. According to the HRMMU, the boundary and the absence of public transportation between Crimea and mainland Ukraine continued to undermine freedom of movement to and from the peninsula, affecting mainly the elderly and individuals with limited mobility. The government simplified crossing the administrative boundary for children in a decree that came into force on February 9. Children younger than 16 were allowed to cross the administrative boundary between mainland Ukraine and Crimea both ways if accompanied by one parent. Notarized permission of the second parent was no longer required. Children ages 14-16 could cross the administrative line both ways unaccompanied if they studied at an educational institution located in mainland Ukraine and resided or were registered in Crimea.

There were reports occupation authorities selectively detained and at times abused persons attempting to enter or leave Crimea. According to human rights groups, occupation authorities routinely detained adult men at the administrative boundary for additional questioning, threatened to seize passports and documents, seized telephones and memory cards, and questioned them for hours.

On March 14, Ukrainian authorities restricted crossing of the administrative boundary as a COVID-19 preventative measure. Under the restrictions, only individuals registered as residents of government-controlled territory could cross into mainland Ukraine, and only individuals registered in Crimea could cross into the occupied peninsula. Public backlash to the measures led the government to expand authorized crossings four days later, allowing for crossings for humanitarian reasons, such as family reunification, cases of serious illness, and the death of a close relative. On June 15, the State Border Guard Service rescinded the residency requirements and resumed normal operations of checkpoints along the administrative boundary, while still requiring self-isolation for persons leaving occupied Crimea. On August 1, the service rescinded the self-isolation requirement but temporarily closed the crossing points again from August 8 to 30.

On March 18, Russian occupation authorities banned Ukrainian citizens from entering occupied Crimea, citing COVID-19 prevention as justification. The number of administrative boundary crossings dropped to nearly 1 percent of historical levels as a result of these restrictions. For instance, from April to May, the State Border Guard Service registered 4,000 crossings of the administrative boundary, compared with 344,000 crossings during the same period in 2019.

On April 3, Russian occupation authorities imposed upon Ukrainians in Crimea a measure banning those they considered Russian citizens from leaving the territory of what they considered the Russian Federation. Occupation authorities justified the action by asserting that many Ukrainians in Crimea had Russian passports, many of which were issued without being requested. For example, on April 5, FSB officials at the administrative boundary denied the request of a Ukrainian citizen seeking cancer treatment in Kyiv to exit occupied Crimea, citing her alleged Russian citizenship. Similarly, on April 17, Soviet dissident and marathon swimmer Oleh Sofianyk presented a Ukrainian passport to Russian officials at the administrative boundary in order to cross into mainland Ukraine. The officials refused his request to exit occupied Crimea, citing his alleged Russian citizenship. On April 27, Sofianyk attempted a second time to exit Crimea, but authorities again refused his request. Sofianyk managed to leave the peninsula on June 2.

In other cases, occupation authorities issued entry bans to Crimean Tatars attempting to cross the administrative boundary. For example, on May 23, the FSB detained 61-year-old human rights defender Diliaver Memetov when he attempted to pass through an administrative boundary checkpoint for a planned trip to mainland Ukraine. Occupation authorities took Memetov to a police station, where he claims police tore out pages from his passport. Upon his release three hours later, Memetov attempted to cross again, but was denied entry and fined a substantial amount for presenting a damaged passport.

Occupation authorities launched criminal cases against numerous high-profile Crimean Tatar leaders, including Member of Parliament Mustafa Jemilev; the chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Refat Chubarov; the director general of the ATR television channel, Lenur Isliamov; and ATR deputy director Aider Muzhdabayev.

According to the HRMMU, Ukrainian law restricts access to Crimea to three designated crossing points and imposes penalties, including long-term entry bans, for noncompliance. Crimean residents lacking Ukrainian passports, who only possessed Russian-issued Crimean travel documents not recognized by Ukrainian authorities, often faced difficulties when crossing into mainland Ukraine.

Citizenship: Russian occupation authorities required all residents of Crimea to be Russian citizens. Those who refused Russian citizenship could be subjected to arbitrary expulsion. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, during the six years of Russia’s occupation, approximately 2,000 Ukrainians were prosecuted for not having Russian documents, and approximately 530 persons were ordered to be “deported.”

According to the HRMMU, in 2019 Crimean “courts” ordered “deportation” and forcible transfer of 109 Ukrainian citizens whose residence rights in Crimea were not recognized.

Residents of Crimea who chose not to adopt Russian citizenship were considered foreigners but in some cases could obtain a residency permit. Persons without Russian citizenship holding a residency permit were deprived of key rights and could not own agricultural land, vote or run for office, register a religious congregation, or register a vehicle. 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.

According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, Russian authorities prosecuted private employers who continued to employ Ukrainians. Fines could be imposed on employers for every recorded case of employing a Ukrainian citizen without a labor license. Fines in such cases amounted to several million dollars.

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

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Approximately 47,000 residents of Crimea registered as IDPs on the mainland, according to the Ministry of Social Policy. The Mejlis and local NGOs, such as Crimea SOS, believed the actual number could be as high as 100,000, as most IDPs remained unregistered. Many individuals fled due to 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 left because of pressure on their community, including an increasing number of arbitrary searches of their homes, surveillance, and discrimination. In addition, 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 prevented residents from voting in Ukrainian national and local elections since Crimea's occupation began in 2014.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

Corruption: There were multiple reports of systemic rampant corruption among Crimean "officeholders," including through embezzlement of Russian state funds allocated to support the occupation. For example, on March 28, a "district court" found the former head of the Feodosiya city administration, Dmitri Shchepetkov, guilty of abuse of office and attempted bribe taking. He was sentenced to eight years in prison and fined 42 million rubles ($560,000).

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses 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, ignored their views, and 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.

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 the country 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. In 2016 the Ukrainian government instituted a process whereby births in Crimea could be recognized with documents issued by occupation authorities.

Anti-Semitism

According to Jewish groups, the Jewish population in Crimea was approximately 10,000 to 15,000, with most living in Simferopol. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups

Since the beginning of the occupation, authorities singled out Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians for discrimination, abuse, deprivation of civil liberties and religious and economic rights, and violence, including killings and abductions (also see sections 1.a.-1.d., 1.f., 2.a., 2.b., and 2.d.). The June UN secretary-general's report noted, "Law enforcement authorities seemed to target actual or perceived critics of the occupation of Crimea and the policies of the Russian Federation on the peninsula, such as the Mejlis and Crimean Solidarity."

There were reports that Russian occupation authorities openly advocated discrimination against Crimean Tatars. Occupation authorities harassed Crimean Tatars for speaking their language in public and forbade speaking it in the workplace. There were reports teachers prohibited schoolchildren from speaking Crimean Tatar to one another. Crimean Tatars were prohibited from celebrating their national holidays and commemorating victims of previous abuses (see section 2.b.).

Occupation authorities also restricted the use of Crimean Tatar flags and symbols (see section 2.a.).

By the end of 2014, Ukrainian as a language of instruction was removed from university-level education in Crimea. According to the Crimean Resource Center, schools in Crimea no longer provided instruction in Ukrainian. Crimean Tatar was the sole instruction language for seven schools, and five schools that previously offered all instruction in Crimean Tatar added Russian language instruction. In 2017 the International Court of Justice ruled on provisional measures in proceedings brought by Ukraine against the Russian Federation, concluding unanimously that the Russian Federation must "ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language."

Occupation authorities have not permitted churches linked to ethnic Ukrainians, in particular the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) 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 OCU in particular to leave properties it had rented for years. On July 24, "court bailiffs" issued an order to Archbishop Klyment of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine to dismantle the only OCU church in Yevpatoriya within five days.

The largest OCU congregation in Crimea closed in September 2019 following a ruling by occupation authorities that the cathedral located in Simferopol must be "returned to the state." The church was shut down after repeated refusals by the authorities to allow it to register.

Russian occupation authorities prohibited Crimean Tatars affiliated with the Mejlis from registering businesses or properties as a matter of policy.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Human rights groups and LGBTI activists reported that most LGBTI individuals fled Crimea after the Russian occupation began. Those who remained lived in fear of abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The UN Human Rights Council's independent expert received reports of increased violence and discrimination of the LGBTI community in Crimea, as well as the use of homophobic propaganda employed by the occupation authorities. LGBTI persons reportedly were frequently subjected to beatings in public spaces and entrapped by organized groups through social networks. The council's report noted, "this environment created an atmosphere of fear and terror for members of the community, with related adverse impacts on their mental health and well-being."

According to the HRMMU, NGOs working on access to health care among vulnerable groups have found it impossible to advocate for better access to healthcare for LGBTI persons due to fear of retaliation by occupation authorities.

Occupation authorities prohibited any LGBTI group from holding public events in Crimea. LGBTI individuals faced increasing restrictions on their exercise of free expression and peaceful assembly, because 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

Occupation authorities announced the labor laws of Ukraine would not be in effect after 2016 and that only the laws of the Russian Federation would apply.

Occupation authorities imposed the labor laws and regulations of the Russian Federation on Crimean workers, limited worker rights, and created barriers to the exercise of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the ability to strike. Trade unions are formally protected under Russian law but limited in practice. As in both Ukraine and Russia, employers were often able to engage in antiunion discrimination and violate collective bargaining rights. 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 holders of Russian national identification cards were allowed to work in "government" and municipal positions. Labor activists believed that unions were threatened in Crimea to accept "government" policy without question and faced considerable restrictions on advocating for their members.

Although no official data were available, experts estimated there was growing participation in the underground economy in Crimea.

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