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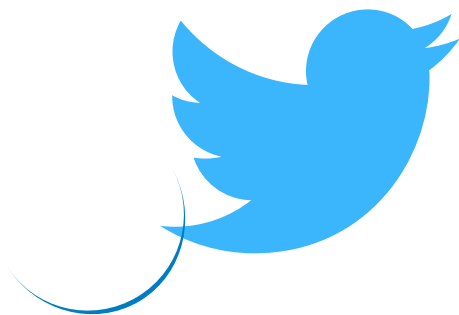
Russian Repression a Persistent Reality in Crimea

Another Unjust Verdict Against Crimean Tatars

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Активисты «Крымской солидарности» во время вынесения приговора 16 сентября 2020 г. © Частный архив

Last week, a Russian military court sentenced [seven Crimean Tatars](#) to prison terms ranging from 13 to 19 years. It is part of a pattern of politically motivated prosecutions that has been happening in Russia-occupied Crimea for the past six years.

The seven men were convicted of organizing or participating in a “terrorist organization.” One man was acquitted.

In a system based on rule of law and justice, none would even have been prosecuted.

The men are [activists](#) with [Crimean Solidarity](#) which was established in 2016 to support Crimean Tatars arrested or jailed on politically motivated grounds. It helped organize legal support for detainees, financial and social support for their families, and live-streamed court proceedings and police searches. Since 2017, authorities have [jailed the group’s members](#) and raided their homes.

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The activists were accused of involvement in [Hizb ut-Tahrir](#), an international Islamist movement that [seeks to establish](#) a worldwide caliphate based on Sharia, but publicly denounces violence as a means to achieve its goal. In 2003, Russia banned Hizb ut-Tahrir as a terrorist organization, but it is not banned in Ukraine or most of Europe. In recent years, Russian authorities have prosecuted dozens of peaceful activists in Crimea for alleged involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir.

None of the charges against the eight were related to planning, carrying out, or being an accessory to any act of violence.

From the beginning, authorities showed disregard for due process. They conducted warrantless searches at the homes of six of the men during their arrest in 2017. Two lawyers representing some of the men [told me](#) the security services and police refused to let them enter the homes during the searches. The lawyers were also denied timely access to procedural documents. As is usual in [such cases](#) in Crimea, the prosecution relied mostly on recordings of discussions about religion and politics obtained through wire-tapping, and testimony from “secret witnesses.”

Crimean Tatars have been the main voice of peaceful dissent to Russia’s occupation of Crimea. As a result they have also been victims of [enforced disappearances](#), [arbitrary arrests](#), torture, and [ill-treatment in custody](#). Last week’s verdict, once again, shows just how determined Russian authorities are to make Crimean Tatar activists – and their families – pay the price and how they will subvert the law and courts to do so.

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