



2014 Report on International Religious Freedom - Crimea

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Executive Summary

In February Russian forces occupied Crimea and in March, Russia announced Crimea had become part of the Russian Federation. A UN General Assembly Resolution declared continued international recognition of Crimea as within Ukraine's international borders. The U.S. government does not recognize the attempted annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and maintains that Crimea continues to be a part of Ukraine. The occupation authorities put in place by Russia de facto implement the laws of the Russian Federation on the territory of Crimea. The occupation authorities subjected religious minorities, in particular the UOC-KP, the UGCC, and Muslim Tatars to harassment, intimidation, detentions, and beatings. They ordered all religious groups to reregister with the Russian government by January 1, 2015, later extended to March 1, 2015, or face losing their legal status. The occupation authorities also seized control of UOC-KP religious property by using soldiers without insignia and "self-defense" forces to prevent UOC-KP access. They raided mosques, confiscated literature they deemed "extremist," and formed a Crimean Tatar organization as a rival to the legally recognized representative body of the Crimean Tatars in order to supplant the local Muslim leadership.

Religious minorities were subject to physical harassment and intimidation as well as a media campaign that portrayed the Crimean Tatar community, the UOC-KP, and the UGCC as "traitors" or "extremists." Jewish, Muslim, and UOC-KP religious properties were vandalized.

The U.S. government publicly condemned religious abuses committed by the occupation authorities in Crimea, particularly the use of "extremism laws" to search, harass, and intimidate religious congregations, especially of Muslim Tatars. Officials from the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv were unable to visit Crimea following its occupation by the Russian Federation, but were able to meet with Crimean Muslim and Christian leaders in other parts of the country to demonstrate U.S. support for their right to practice their religious beliefs.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Crimean peninsula consists of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) and the city of Sevastopol. According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, the total population of the peninsula is 2,353,129. No recent independent survey provides data on the religious affiliation of Crimea's population.

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, as of January 1, there were 2,083 religious organizations (a term including parishes, theological schools, monasteries, and other constituent parts of a church or religious group) in the ARC and 137 in Sevastopol. The numbers include organizations both with and without legal entity status. Muslims have 1,007 religious organizations in the ARC, of which 921 are affiliated with the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea, Ukraine's biggest Muslim group. The UOC-MP is the largest Christian denomination. It has 535 religious organizations. Other Christian denominations include the UOC-KP, with 44 organizations, Roman Catholicism with 13, UAOC with 10, and the UGCC with nine. There are more than 280 Protestant churches including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Lutherans, as well as 80 Jehovah's Witness organizations.

There are approximately 300,000 Tatars, who make up 13 percent of the Crimean population. Tatars are overwhelmingly Muslim. In addition, there are several Jewish congregations in Crimea. Adherents of the UOC-MP, Protestants, and Muslims are the largest religious groups in Sevastopol.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Pursuant to international recognition that the Autonomous Republic of Crimea remains within Ukraine's international borders, Crimea continues to be officially subject to the constitution and laws of Ukraine. In the aftermath of Russia's occupation and attempted annexation, however, the occupation authorities de facto implement the laws of the Russian Federation on the territory.

Government Practices

The occupation authorities subjected religious minorities, in particular the UOC-KP, the UGCC, and Muslim Tatars, to harassment, intimidation, detentions, and beatings. They ordered all religious groups to reregister with the Russian government by January 1, 2015, or face loss of their legal status. On December 25 the deadline was extended until March 1, 2015. Russian forces reportedly prevented UOC-KP priests from entering their churches, resulting in a loss of UOC-KP control over most of their places of worship. The occupation authorities also raided mosques and confiscated literature they deemed "extremist." They supported the creation of a pro-occupation Muslim organization in opposition to the Mejlis, the legally recognized representative body of the Crimean Tatars.

According to the UOC-KP and NGOs, the occupation authorities and "self-defense" groups engaged in a campaign of surveillance and intimidation against the UOC-KP since March. "Self-defense" groups protested in front of UOC-KP churches, intimidating parishioners, and Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) agents sat in churches, recording the names of parishioners. FSB agents reportedly met with all UOC-KP priests individually for what were termed "conversations."

The UOC-KP reported that on June 1, members of the "self-defense" forces broke into the UOC-KP Intercession Church in Perevalne. They reportedly verbally abused the parish priest and beat his pregnant wife and daughter, who suffered from cerebral palsy. Police representatives who arrived at the scene reportedly sided with the attackers. A senior UOC-MP representative condemned the assault and appealed to UOC-KP followers to refrain from retaliatory violence against the UOC-MP. The occupation authorities refused to investigate the incident. The church was since closed.

Since the beginning of the Russian occupation of Crimea, UGCC priests reported harassment at the hands of the FSB and local pro-Russian militia. Priests, along with all other Crimean residents, were pressured to take Russian citizenship.

On March 15, members of the pro-Russian "self-defense" forces and police kidnapped Sevastopol-based Greek Catholic priest Mykola Kvyach from his church during a religious service. Joined by Russian security officers, they questioned the priest for eight hours. According to Kvyach, he was verbally and physically abused after his captors reportedly found bulletproof vests in his apartment that they said he had intended to give to Ukrainian military personnel stationed in Crimea. They also accused Kvyach of supplying weapons to the Ukrainian Navy. He left Crimea upon his release.

UGCC Yalta priest Ihor Havryliv and Yevpatoria priest Bogdan Kostetsky reportedly went into hiding after hearing that members of pro-Russian militia might detain them.

On June 6, the AUCCRO expressed concern over attempts to spark religious hatred and draw religious groups into violent confrontation within Crimea. The AUCCRO urged the occupation authorities in Crimea to prevent the use of violence in dealing with interdenominational relations. It also called on all religious groups not to give in to provocations, but to honor the freedom of worship and promote religious peace.

The occupation authorities ordered all religious groups to register with the Russian federal government by January 1, 2015. In December the deadline was extended until March 1, 2015. If an organization did not register by that time, it would lose its legal status, including the right to own property and control bank accounts, among other rights. Only Russian citizens could register a religious organization. The Government of the Russian Federation conferred Russian citizenship on all residents of Crimea unless they specifically opted out. Many members of religious minorities, especially Tatars, Greek Catholics, and members of the UOC-KP, refused Russian citizenship. Those who refused Russian citizenship, or who were citizens of other nations, were subject to expulsion if they were not granted residency.

On October 20, the AUCCRO, individual religious leaders, and NGOs expressed concern that under Russian law religious organizations which had existed in their localities for less than 15 years would be ineligible to reregister their statutes and would either cease to exist or have to join one of Russia's existing religious associations.

On April 26, the Crimean Diocese of the UOC-KP released a statement that Russian soldiers had denied its priest and his parish members access to the St. Clement Church in Sevastopol. As of October, the UOC-KP reported that two out of thirteen UOC-KP churches in the Crimea were no longer under its control.

The Crimean Tatar community refused to recognize Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea and refused to take part in the "referendum" conducted by the occupying authorities to support annexation. The Tatar community also refused to participate in the elections staged by the occupying authorities to form a new Crimean government.

The occupation authorities reportedly utilized Russian laws banning "extremism," which allowed officials to prohibit the activity of a religious association and to confiscate religious materials, to target Tatar communities and Muslim institutions. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

On April 22, Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev told Channel Five, a Ukrainian news outlet, that Russian FSB officers maintained a conspicuous presence at Crimean mosques, taking note of "who has a longer beard" and "how religious people are" in an apparent effort to categorize devout Muslims as "Islamic radicals."

The occupation authorities conducted searches at Crimean mosques and other religious and educational Muslim buildings in order to seize Islamic publications viewed by the Government of

the Russian Federation as "extremist." On August 27, a court in Dzhankoy found a madrassah director guilty of possessing "extremist materials." The court fined the director and confiscated the publications.

On September 17, the occupation authorities raided a mosque, a school, and four residences of Tatar Muslims, seeking "extremist" materials. The Borchokrak Mosque was raided and the occupation authorities prevented worshipers from entering. On September 22, the occupation authorities raided the Derekoi Mosque in Yalta seeking "extremist" materials. Two pamphlets were found. The Turkish imam was summoned for questioning. By November eight of 10 Tatar religious schools had been searched by the occupation authorities.

In August the Tauride Muftiate was formed by the occupation authorities as a competing Muslim organization to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea. In September the Tauride Muftiate took over the Juma-Jami Mosque in Evpatoria. Tatar Muslims said they believed the occupation authorities had created the Tauride Muftiate in order to supplant local Muslim leadership and said it was supervised by the Russian FSB.

Officials put in place to administer Russian law in the territory denied residence permission to foreign religious leaders who previously had been granted permanent residency by the government in Kyiv. They denied residency permits to all 23 Turkish imams working with the Tatar Muslim community. They also refused requests to extend the residency permit for Piotr Rosochacki, a Polish citizen and parish priest in Simferopol. The Greek Catholic Church reported only four of its 12 congregations in Crimea had a priest because of the de facto authorities' refusal to grant residency permits.

Baptist congregations stated authorities had restricted their activities and they could no longer conduct Sunday school or sporting events without permission.

The occupation authorities raised rents in historical buildings they controlled, in one case up to 50,000 hryvnia per month (\$3,171), for some UOC-KP churches located in historic buildings that were the property of the Ukrainian government and had been rented to UOC-KP congregations for nominal fees. UOC-KP officials said they might not be able to pay the new rental amount.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to media reports, on September 2, unidentified individuals detained UGCC priest Bohdan Kostetskyi and 15 members of his parish traveling from Yavpatoriya to Yalta. The priest and parishioners were held in a basement and released September 3. The FSB reportedly had previously summoned Kostetskyi for questioning several times.

According to several religious groups, Russian-supported media engaged in a campaign to create suspicion and fear of certain religious groups, especially the UOC-KP and UGCC, which were depicted as "fascists" for supporting the Ukrainian government and "traitors" for not supporting the Russian occupation of Crimea. Tatar leaders said the same media depicted Tatar Muslims as radical Muslims and "terrorists" who were a threat to the Russian Federation.

On February 28, after Russian troops and pro-Russian "self-defense" forces had taken control of Simferopol, unidentified individuals painted a swastika and anti-Semitic graffiti on the building housing a synagogue of the Progressive Judaism Congregation and the Crimean Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Crimea. Jewish community leaders said it was the first anti-Semitic incident at the synagogue in over 20 years.

On June 13, an unidentified individual threw Molotov cocktails at a mosque in Simferopol and painted a swastika on its fence. The building was not damaged.

On July 21, unidentified individuals set fire to the dacha of Archbishop Clement, head of UOC-KP Crimea Diocese, in Mramorne Village. According to the UOC-KP, the fire reportedly destroyed a small church located at the site.

On November 12, unidentified arsonists set fire to a mosque in Sonyachna Dolyna Village, Sudak District. A guard extinguished the fire.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government publicly called attention to religious abuses committed by Russian forces and occupation authorities in Crimea, particularly condemning the use of "extremism laws" to search, harass, and intimidate religious congregations, especially those of Muslim Tatars. Embassy officials also publicly condemned efforts to intimidate Christian minorities.

Embassy and U.S. government officials were unable to visit Crimea following its occupation by the Russian Federation. Embassy officers met in other parts of Ukraine with Muslim and Christian leaders whose congregations have been affected by the actions of the occupying authorities to listen to their concerns and reassure them of U.S. support for their right to practice their religious beliefs.

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