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# **Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, May 16, 2019**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Michael Levitt**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, May 16, 2019

• (0955)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 142nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today we have the pleasure of hosting a delegation representing the Crimean Tatar people.

Mustafa Dzhemilev is a member of Ukraine's parliament and leader of the Crimean Tatar people. Akhtem Chiygoz is deputy chairman of the Milli Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people.

We are also pleased to be joined once again by the Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada, His Excellency Andriy Shevchenko.

Gentlemen, thank you for appearing today to speak to us about the situation in occupied Crimea and the risks the Crimean Tatar people face. As Canadians and parliamentarians, we want to reiterate our unyielding support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression and the illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea.

If you would like to proceed with your opening statement, we will then move straight to questions from the members.

Go ahead, Mr. Dzhemilev.

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev (Member of Parliament, Leader of Crimean Tatar People, Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada)):** *[Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:]*

Members of the committee, it is a great honour to be here today and to have the opportunity to testify about what's going on in occupied Crimea.

We came here because of the 75th anniversary of the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people. Today or tomorrow, I believe Parliament will hear a statement by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, recognizing the deportation and genocide of the Crimean Tatar people. This is a very welcome event for us.

We will also participate in the raising of the Crimean Tatar flag to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the deportation. This is a huge gesture of support for us.

My name is Mustafa Dzhemilev. For 23 years, I have led the parliament of the indigenous Crimean Tatar people. Shortly before

the occupation in 2013, I resigned because of my age, but I remain a member of the Ukrainian parliament. I have been a member of parliament for 20 years now.

On April 14, 2014, I was banned from entering Crimea because of some danger to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, but I think the real reason was that I did not recognize the occupation.

Nevertheless, we have a lot of detailed information on everything that goes on in Crimea. The Crimean Tatar Mejlis has been banned from the territory of the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, it continues its activities, even though it is facing great difficulties.

There are many acts of lawlessness perpetrated by the occupying state. What can be done to protect the local population from the activities of the occupying government? It's a question that is impossible to answer. I do not believe that anything can be done until the territory is freed from the occupiers.

No international organizations are allowed access. There is a lot of Russian propaganda. The Russians are disseminating lies about how happy the people are while living under the Russian occupation regime.

What is of most concern to us is that the Russian occupying government is now expelling indigenous Crimean Tatar people out of Crimea and bringing in citizens of the Russian Federation to take their place. This is similar to what Russia did in 1783 during the first time it occupied the peninsula, when 90% of the people who were living there were Crimean Tatars. By the time of the revolution of 1917, we were a minority on our land. In 1944, there was a total deportation and genocide, and for half a century we have fought to be able to come back to our homeland.

The situation is dramatic and has become exacerbated, because we fought for 40 years to come back to our homeland, and yet again we are forced to leave it. We have fought for so many years against the totalitarian regime, and now we are again facing a regime that's even worse than the Soviet regime.

We are grateful to every country that is lending support to our country in these difficult days. Unfortunately, the support is not sufficient. We did not expect the occupation to last as long as it has. It's the fifth year of the occupation, and we want stronger sanctions against the occupying country.

Here with me is the deputy chief of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Akhtem Chiygoz. He spent three years in a Russian prison for defending the integrity of his country. He was freed at the end of 2017, thanks to interventions by Turkish President Erdogan .

Russian propaganda said that this was an act of great humanity by Putin, but later we discovered that in exchange for the freedom of Akhtem Chygoz, Putin obtained the freedom of two Russian assassins from Turkey. That was his sole motivation.

We are also working with the Turkish Prime Minister right now to help with freeing political prisoners, but we have been unsuccessful so far. Approximately 85 persons right now are in jail, and the number is growing. There are searches every day in the houses of Crimean Tatar people. It's a very routine thing now, and people are not even registering them anymore.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have about the situation in Crimea.

• (1000)

**The Chair:** We will now move to questions. We will begin with MP Bezan, please.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Dzhemilev for being with us again, and Mr. Chygoz. Ambassador, it's always great seeing you.

I think all of us at this committee, and indeed all parliamentarians, will loudly proclaim that Crimea is Ukraine. We will always recognize the rights of the Tatars and that they deserve to have their homeland back.

It is a pity that 75 years after the forced deportation and genocide of the Tatar people under Stalin and the former Soviet Union, we're at a stage where Putin is repeating history.

I would like to dive more into what type of sanctions we need to defend Crimea, to defend Ukraine and to push more hardship upon the Russian Federation for this invasion and illegal occupation of Crimea.

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

First of all, we are of course grateful for the sanctions that have been imposed on the aggressor state so far. We are grateful for the reaction of the international community, including Canada, to the occupation of Crimea.

I wish there was a similar reaction to the occupation of part of Georgia in 2008. Perhaps that would have prevented the occupation of Crimea. Nevertheless, there are sanctions, but those sanctions are insufficient to make Russia leave the occupied territory.

I think we have to make the price of the occupation for Russia as high as possible. It is already high, but perhaps not as high as it could be.

I know all these sanctions also damage the countries that impose sanctions, especially those countries that neighbour the Russian Federation, because the sanctions affect oil and gas trade and stop the flow of currency. Nevertheless, Russia faces isolation, and it will slowly turn into a North Korea until it's forced to take into account international human rights.

It is very important to impose sanctions because of the repression against the indigenous Crimean Tatar people. As far as sanctions go,

we believe that the Magnitsky act should be expanded to include the repressions against the Crimean Tatar people, the indigenous people of Crimea.

We know the names of all the prosecutors and judges who are coming up with these unjust verdicts. It would be great if they were included in the Magnitsky act. I think some of the most effective acts would be to stop buying oil and gas from the Russian Federation and switching Russia out of the SWIFT international banking system.

I think there are many steps that could be undertaken, but I understand that it also comes at a cost to the countries that impose those sanctions.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you for that. At the House of Commons, I was proud to support and sponsor the Magnitsky legislation that we have in Canada, and of course Raynell Andreychuk started that in the Senate. I forgot to mention, but I think we've talked about it in the past, that I'm also banned from Russia, so I can't go to Crimea right now either. It would be unfortunate if I never get to set foot in beautiful Crimea.

You mentioned that we have to expand the Magnitsky list. We have to go to sectoral sanctions, such as finance and energy products. I would also venture to say that sanctions on agriculture products that come from Russia are something else we need.

Could you go into a little more detail on the human rights abuses that have been suffered by the Tatars in particular in Crimea, and in other parts of Russia, for that matter, by those who might have stayed back in Russia after the forced deportation 75 years ago?

We know that the Mejlis, the legislative body of the Tatars, has been shut down. We know that media outlets that are focused on the Tatars have also been shut down in Crimea. We know that it has also become more difficult to worship or gather in mosques and community places.

You talk about all the political prisoners who are languishing in jail. What other things are happening, and where can we move the yardsticks in making sure that Putin and his Kremlin kleptocrats are no longer abusing the human rights of Tatars in Crimea?

• (1005)

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

As you rightly mentioned, as soon as the Russian Federation entered Crimea, it got rid of all democratic institutions. They were all put under the control of Russian occupiers. You could say only what was to the liking of the new government.

From day one, we've seen abductions and assassinations. We have 49 cases of abductions to date. We have found only six bodies, and these had signs of torture; the majority were never discovered. Eleven people were able to escape to mainland Ukraine. The rest of them remain. We don't know where they are. We believe there is great likelihood that they are no longer alive.

We see fewer abductions and assassinations now, because there was a big outcry at the beginning, but the arrests keep going. There are searches done under the pretext of searching for weapons or banned literature. In the case of weapons, sure, but “banned literature” isn't a clear term for Ukrainians, because after Ukraine obtained its independence, no literature was banned or forbidden. However, Russians have a long list of literature that is forbidden, and it's a crime to read it. As of April 14, the list contains about 3,000 to 6,000 titles. The officers of the FSB, the Russian federal security service, who come to do the searches don't even know what they're searching for. They do not have this huge list. They just confiscate whatever they don't like or anything that's not written in the Russian language. Sometimes they confiscate our Quran, because they do not know what it is.

If they want to find something, they will bring it with them. For example, they will bring ammunition and plant it during a search. These searches are very different from the searches that went on during the Soviet times. I had over 10 searches performed during the Soviet times. They would come and say, “We've received information that you have anti-Soviet literature. Please give it over, because we'll search your house.” Even if you gave over some literature, they would still search your house. There was a certain process. Right now, there is no due process. They come and say, “We have some information that you have weapons, narcotics, or banned literature”, and with no warrant they just enter the house. They damage the house. They humiliate the dignity of the people who are being searched. We think they are aiming at provoking people to retaliate in order to further exacerbate the conflict.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dzhemilev.

We will now move to MP Wrzesnewskyj, please.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Dzhemilev, as always, it's a pleasure to see you. I think back to 2010, when we sat in your office in the Mejlis in Simferopol, and over tea you related the tragic history of the Crimean Tatars—through the czarist period, the repeated ethnic cleansings that occurred during the time of the Russian empire, and then, of course, the horrors of the *Sürgünlik*, the deportation and genocide of the Crimean Tatars.

At that time, very few people in the world knew who the Crimean Tatars were. After that tragic history, there were not a lot of Crimean Tatars. Today, I believe that most of the world has heard of the Crimean Tatars, but they don't understand the very important historical context of the ethnic cleansings, the genocide and the current ethnocide.

You've already spoken of the importance of the motion that I will be presenting this afternoon. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our colleague Kerry Diotte, who introduced a similar piece of legislation three years ago, as I did last night publicly. I think it's important that we now have an opportunity on this critically important 75th anniversary to do the right thing and to raise international awareness.

Last week Latvia passed a similar motion. Could you explain to us why that historical context is so important, especially today, with the

ongoing and meticulously planned strategic ethnocide of the Crimean Tatar people?

• (1010)

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

First of all, as you know, it's not just the Crimean Tatars who were deported. The Soviet government committed genocide against about 13 peoples, including English people, etc. It was done strategically in order to remove from the borders the people who were not ethnically Russian and who were not loyal to Russian imperial interests.

They were all accused of collaborating with the Nazis. This was an absurd accusation, because all of the adult population was fighting in the war. The people who were deported were women and children, who died.

It's very important to understand that it wasn't the deported people who committed the crime; it was the deporting nation. They are now committing these crimes again. We have to remind them that these crimes have already been committed by their state. Every time the genocide is recognized, it brings up to the eyes of the world the subject of the occupation and the situation of the people.

I don't think we'll receive any kind of compensation, and we don't really need their compensation for the deportation. All we want is for them to leave our land and allow us to live on our land.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Thank you.

Mr. Dzhemilev, there are very few international leaders who have had lengthy one-on-one conversations with President Putin. In fact, many are perplexed by President Trump's public statements after such lengthy one-on-ones.

You had a critically important 45-minute conversation with President Putin. At that time your family were hostages of the Russian occupation. Your son was, in fact, arrested and incarcerated. Can you provide us with insights from this conversation?

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

I have to say that Russian propaganda keeps saying that they had to send their troops to Crimea because there was an illegal seizure of power in Ukraine and that the people who came to power were a threat to the Russians who lived there. However, on February 15, when Yanukovich was still the president of Ukraine, I received a proposal from Putin. There was a Mr. Vakhitov. He represents an oil company, and we know that he works for the Russian security forces. He said that Putin wanted to see me. He told me to go to Sochi and told me where I could meet him. When I asked him what we were going to discuss with his president, he said it was about the future of Crimea. This was on February 15. It was before all the events happened in Kiev.

At that time, Yanukovich was still in power, so the Russians had long-standing plans. I said that it was not my level and that I still could not understand; I was perplexed as to why his president would be interested in a region that didn't belong to his state. He told me that his task was to send me the invitation and that mine was to accept it. I said, no, I did not accept it, but when everything happened, I said that we would send a delegation to Kazan to talk to them, particularly on business matters.

When Crimea was occupied, we received a phone call from Mr. Shaimiev, the president of the Tatar republic. He invited me to come to see him. I agreed. I decided that I would go to see Mr. Shaimiev. I knew he was a counsellor or adviser for Putin, and I hoped to at least know what kind of plans they had about Crimea.

A day later he called me again. He told me that Putin had heard about our meeting and he also wanted to speak to me. I said that I had nothing to tell Putin; I was going to Kazan only to see him. Then he told me that the meeting place was changed to Moscow, and if I wanted to see him, he would be in Moscow, so I went to Moscow.

During my conversation with Mr. Shaimiev, when he asked me how they could help us in this situation, I told him that Russia was committing a huge mistake. They would have to pay for many, many years and they had to remove their troops from our territory. Then he told me that I'd better say that to Mr. Putin myself. He was waiting for me on the phone line. I went upstairs and talked to him for a few minutes.

I have to say that in Russia, particularly Putin's regime, they understand what it means to have the voice of indigenous people. It's important for them to have the loyalty of the indigenous people and their support of the occupation. He talked about how wonderfully our people would live. They would resolve all the problems we had, including economic problems, once we became part of the Russian Federation. He said that Ukraine had Crimea for 23 years and they could not resolve these problems; it would take them just a few months to resolve them.

My reply was that if he wanted to do anything good for us, he should remove his troops. Then I would understand that he wanted to help us to resolve our problems. We were victims of genocide when we were part of the Russian Federation, and obviously, Russia was responsible for it. I asked how the issues would be resolved and what shape that would take. I told him he had to discuss this not with me but with the leadership of my country. For these negotiations to come to a good result, I told him, he had to remove his troops. That was number one.

Obviously, he didn't like this talk. At that point and from then on, I was banned from entering Ukraine.

●(1015)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dzhemilev.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Thank you so much, Mr. Dzhemilev. Clearly, Mr. Putin had not read the transcripts from the 15 years of interrogations you underwent while you were incarcerated in the Soviet gulag.

Thank you so much for being with us today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Wrzesnewskyj.

We will now move to MP Duncan, please.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you very much, Your Excellency. It's always good to have you here.

Mr. Dzhemilev, welcome back to Canada again.

I have to say on behalf of my colleagues and everybody here that we admire your relentless advocacy on behalf of the Tatar people. It is an exhausting campaign, and you are a remarkable man. Thank you so much.

I know that my colleagues, as well, would welcome.... I'm not sure that we have the list of the additional Russian people who we think should be included on the Magnitsky list. My party campaigned relentlessly during the previous government and in this government to expand that list against the Russian oligarchs, members of the military, businessmen and so forth. We would welcome receiving that list and joining the campaign to extend that list.

My question to you, sir, is about the International Criminal Court. Clearly this is a case of genocide that has just not started with the seizure of Crimea, the most recent seizure, but has gone on and on for decades, if not hundreds of years.

I'm curious to know if you've received any support in bringing cases toward the criminal court. My guess is that these perpetrators fly directly from Crimea back to Russia. I'm wondering if, in any circumstances, they fly into Europe or into Ukraine, and if there is any campaign to seize some of these people and begin proceedings against them.

●(1020)

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

I think all this will be possible after the main perpetrator is arrested. It's Mr. Putin. Of course, as long as he's in power, they will find refuge in the Russian Federation.

With regard to the international federation, in April 1917 the international court of the UN tabled a decision. The demand was to remove the ban from the work of the Mejlis, the assembly of the Tatar people, but Putin doesn't pay attention to such decisions. What can we do?

The only way we can fight it is to increase sanctions. It's the only mechanism that we have at our disposal. I'm talking about those who should be on the Magnitsky list. The Ukraine prosecutor's office collects all the information about the people who should be on that list. We will supply you with all the last names of judges, prosecutors and FSB officials and the kinds of crimes they have committed against human rights.

We have a secret document of the FSB, the security service of Russia. It tells us about the plan of the FSB, the security service of Russia, to convince Crimean Tatars to support the Russian position.

First of all, it's by putting pressure on them, particularly using Islam. Of course, once people who participate in this type of campaign visit foreign countries, they should be arrested. I think that's one thing that we could do.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I'm wondering, sir, if you could give us some suggestions of other nations that we might increase our dialogue with, nations that may be major trading partners with Russia on energy, agriculture and so forth, so that we could put our efforts not just on ending any purchase that we might make, any trade we have, but also on other countries to get them on board.

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

When I start analyzing how these countries voted during the general assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and so on—particularly the general assembly—I am just amazed at the number of countries that simply don't want to cast their vote. Countries such as Cuba and North Korea are obvious, and we know about their votes, but there are many countries that simply don't want to cast their vote. They want to maintain a good relationship with the Russian Federation.

Hence my question: What kind of morality are those countries showing to us? It is as if they're saying that they don't care. It's as if we were attacked by some bandits or highwaymen, but they don't want to interfere. For instance, a country that has the right of veto should have the responsibility for the security of the world, but they don't want to vote during the meetings of the Security Council concerning our country.

I think we should have sanctions not only against the aggressor, but also against those countries that support the aggressor. I don't see it being done. Obviously, I understand there are regimes that are supported by Russia. They receive weapons. They are not democratic; however, there are some ways of exerting pressure on them.

I know that the GDP is smaller than Italy's. It's half the GDP of California. Russia is not an empire anymore. Nevertheless, it is blackmailing the world with black weapons. It's too bad that western countries just succumb to this pressure. I think that's the most important thing.

• (1025)

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** In closing, I'll say that it's our honour to support the motion that Borys is bringing forward in the House. We're pleased it's coming forward. It's our honour to be able to support this call to act against the genocide.

Thank you very much, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Duncan.

We will now go again to MP Wrzesnewskyj, please.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Thank you.

Mr. Dzhemilev, in case I don't have an opportunity later on, I'd like to say that I look forward to the day when we'll sit and drink tea once again—this time in Bakhchysarai. I truly believe that day will come.

Mr. Dzhemilev, I would request an undertaking on your part to provide our committee with a list of prosecutors, arresting officers, judges, jailers and torturers who have been involved in the repression of Crimean Tatars. Could that be provided to our committee? Then

when we write a report, we can have this as an addendum to the report and we can publicly name those individuals.

Mr. Dzhemilev, we know that an incredible militarization has occurred on the Crimean peninsula since the beginning of the occupation. It's tremendously worrying, especially in the context of the nuclear non-proliferation agreements that took a long time to put into place. My understanding is that in addition to the hundreds of thousands of army personnel, there are now terrible weapons on the Crimean peninsula, potentially including nuclear weapons. I was wondering if you'd like to comment on that.

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

Crimea had the Kyzyltash nuclear base near Simferopol. It was built in 1952; the construction finished in 1954, after the death of Stalin. About 5,000 prisoners worked on the construction site, and after that, for secrecy, all those people were shot.

This nuclear base has existed throughout the time of the Soviet Union, and in 1996, after Ukraine declared independence and signed the Budapest memorandum to give up its nuclear weapons, the weapons located on the nuclear base were transferred to the Russian Federation in accordance with the agreement. This base was closed. It no longer existed.

When the Russian occupiers arrived, the first thing they did was to restore the nuclear base back to life. The work continued 24-7. Some Crimean Tatars also worked on the site, so we had complete information on the activities that were going on there. At the end of the work, not only the Crimean Tatars but also the local Crimean workers were asked not to work there anymore, and only Russians who were brought from Russia worked there.

We received some information later from two sources that six nuclear warheads are located on that nuclear site. We received that information from our sources in Crimea and Moscow. Our intelligence says it is possible there are nuclear weapons, but there is no exact information. The CIA said the same, that there was no exact information; however, two reliable sources have told us that there are six nuclear warheads there.

Several months ago, when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was reviewing the questions of nuclear security and safety for nuclear power plants, I spoke there. I said that it is not just the nuclear power plants that are dangerous and I asked them to please pay attention to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. I spoke about the nuclear weapons proliferation in Crimea. I asked them to call together a special commission that would verify whether nuclear weapons were present there, because if they are, this violates the Budapest memorandum.

Second, Crimea is part of Ukraine, so we gave up nuclear weapons, and now, yet again, we have nuclear weapons on our territory. Those nuclear weapons are threatening not just our country, but the entire Black Sea region. That is the situation.

Of course, the militarization is ongoing and ramping up. They are building the Tavrida highway, and they are building it with no regard for cultural heritage or the environment. They are razing everything down. They have cut down 30% of the forests of Crimea. Everything is done for the purpose of military construction. This militarization threatens the environment and nature in Crimea, and that is another aspect that should be taken into account. This is a crime against the Crimean peninsula.

• (1030)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

MP Saini is next, please.

**Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Good morning and welcome. Thank you very much for coming today. I really want to thank you for what you have done, especially under circumstances that are very extreme for not only yourself but also for your family, with the recent arrest of your son.

I want to ask you a more human question about the situation on the ground in Crimea. We know that a lot of Crimean businesses have been targeted. We know that it is very difficult for some Crimeans to get a job. What have been the economic implications of this annexation on the Crimean people in their day-to-day living and their ability to earn a living and take care of their families?

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

On the Crimean peninsula, Russia's not interested in the economic situation there. The Crimean peninsula is being fully funded by the budget of the Russian Federation, and Russian economists are saying that the annual upkeep of Crimea will cost from \$3 billion to \$5 billion, but I think this includes some military expenditures as well.

As far as business and the economic situation goes, I guess you can judge the well-being of any country or region by its trade. When Crimea was controlled by Ukraine, the trade turnover was about \$3 billion. In 2017, the trade turnover was about \$200 million. They traded with Syria, with Assad's regime; with Armenia; with those countries that do recognize the occupation. Of course, business activities have decreased sharply.

In addition to that, many companies just close their doors. Those who came to power raided and took control over other businesses. In order to do business in Crimea, you can't be just a businessman. You can't not be implicated in politics. Every day you would have to demonstrate how loyal you are to the regime. You have to proclaim how great it is to be within Russia, that Putin is great, and then you can have some hope that your business will do well, but Crimean Tatars do not know how to say those things, and of course we were the first to lose our businesses.

Overall, business activity on the whole has gone down, but the Russian Federation does not care about that. What they most care about is Crimea as a military bridgehead.

• (1035)

**Mr. Raj Saini:** That's actually the point I wanted to get to. When Crimea was annexed, one of the understandings was that there would be greater Russian investment in Crimea, but because of the sanctions and because of the economic situation in Russia right now,

especially with the drop of oil prices and the sanctions they have incurred, it seems that now there's less investment in Crimea. However, the ethnic Russian population still has a majority there. They must be suffering under these conditions also.

Has there been no outcry from them at all with this situation?

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

There have been outcries from people, and they have been kidnapped or murdered or jailed, and they cannot raise an outcry from there.

Russians in all their speeches are saying proudly that all the citizens who live in Crimea have Russian passports and that nobody is protesting. Indeed, that is true. Everybody has the Russian passport, because if you don't have one, you cannot get a job, you cannot get education for your children, and you can't even get health care. If you went to the hospital, the first thing you'd be asked for is your passport. If you don't have a passport, you might as well just die there.

As far as the outcry goes, even those who supported the occupation but were hoping to speak out at the protests and defend their rights, as they could when Ukraine was in control, are also suffering repression. They are being beaten up.

I have seen Crimean Kazakhs on YouTube who were defending their rights. They were picketing with some demands at a building, and they were being beaten up. They were shouting, "Hey, we are Russians. Why are you beating us up? We're not Crimean Tatars." So even those people who support the occupying state are also being repressed.

**Mr. Raj Saini:** What the Russians have tried to do over the last four or five years is set up parallel organizations or co-opt existing organizations such as the Mejlis, which they banned. Alternatively, they have set up clone organizations to try to infiltrate Crimean organizations.

How effective has that been over the last four or five years?

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

Of course, the Mejlis is very important for them. Back in 2011, we saw instructions for the FSB, which said that the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people was the greatest obstacle in implementing the strategic interests of Russia in Crimea. It didn't say what the strategic interests were, but it did say that we were an obstacle to achieving them. There was quite an ambitious plan outlined to infiltrate the leadership of the Mejlis with pro-Russian people, and so on. It was not realistic, but that was the plan.

After the occupation, there was an attempt to bribe the Mejlis, getting them to accept the Russian occupation. That failed, so they started with repressions. They banned me from entering Crimea. The president of the Mejlis can no longer enter the peninsula. Two other people have been arrested, and so on. They managed to take over the spiritual administration of the Muslims of Crimea. That administration is no longer respected by the Crimean Tatars, because they listened to the FSB.



They are setting up children's and women's organizations. They are financing them, and membership in those organizations is pretty much the same. They are trying to show that the Crimean Tatars are remaining politically active, and that these activities are in support of Putin's regime.

They have not been successful in doing the same with the Mejlis, and they will not succeed. The Russian legislation does not include laws allowing them to conduct Mejlis elections, and even if they managed to do it, the Crimean Tatars would not vote in them. That's why they cannot tell the court in The Hague why they're not lifting the ban on the Mejlis. They have no answer.

• (1040)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the final question, we'll now move to MP O'Toole, please.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Dzhemilev. I'd like to echo the comments of the chair and my colleagues in welcoming you and thanking you for being here, particularly for the 75th anniversary. I'd also like to thank you personally for your leadership and strong resolve for your people for decades. It's greatly admired.

I first became aware of the modern struggles the Crimean Tatars faced in Crimea with the aggression of the Putin regime through the work of Dr. Andrew Bennett. You may recall that he was Canada's ambassador for religious freedom. I know he travelled to Kiev. There were some investments in the religious freedom fund, and you collaborated with him on a few occasions, both in Ukraine and in Canada.

Can you talk a little about the work Dr. Bennett did, and whether you saw that work as a positive factor in raising awareness about the Crimean Tatars?

**Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev:** [*Witness spoke in Russian, interpreted as follows:*]

I am afraid I do not have enough information to be able to answer, but I can say that we're well aware that Canada has been doing a lot for many years, working on various projects to support us and Ukraine. We're very grateful.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Is there anything else we could be doing? Ambassador, if you'd like—

**The Chair:** Go ahead, please, Ambassador.

**His Excellency Andriy Shevchenko (Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada):** Extraordinary work was done by Ambassador Bennett and by many other Canadians who travelled to Ukraine in the last five years to try to learn about the situation.

It was also very important that Ambassador Bennett studied not just the repression of the Crimean Tatars but also other human rights

violations that occurred in occupied Crimea. We are talking about repression of the followers of the Ukrainian church and of representatives of different ethnic groups.

I think by now the international community has a very clear picture of these massive human rights violations in the occupied territories, which include both Crimea and the part of Donbass that is occupied by the Russians. Again, we are thankful to those friends of Ukraine who spent their time exploring the situation in Ukraine and other places around the world.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Thank you very much, Ambassador.

In that vein, that office was, as you may know, wound down in 2016 by this government and replaced with the office of human rights, with a much larger budget. I'm wondering whether there's been any specific work from that office as part of Global Affairs in supporting the Tatars in Ukraine.

Do you have any thoughts on what more we could do? We talked about Magnitsky sanctions. Obviously there's political support for that. Is there more we could be doing? Specifically, do you have any insight on work from the office of human rights in the last two years?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** I'll just say that I think in that sense, Ukrainians were privileged to enjoy this very strong, multi-party consensus that we see in Canada on the issue of Ukraine and the Russian occupation.

Again, I think we are very privileged to see this very strong co-operation across the aisle, and we really hope that it will stay that way and that different authorities and institutions of the Canadian government will be able to do what they have to do.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Thank you very much.

Thank you for your visit. We look forward to working with you in the future.

**The Chair:** As this session is now coming to a close, I want to thank our two guests, Mustafa Dzhemilev and Akhtem Chygoz. It's so important that we had you here today, along with Ambassador Shevchenko. Support for Ukraine among Canadian parliamentarians, the government, the Canadian people across the country is something we really want to uphold. After hearing the plight of the Tatars today, it is incredibly important to keep this front of mind.

I want to again acknowledge MP Wrzesnewskyj's motion that's going to be before the House and say that we will make sure your plight—the repression that you are feeling from the Russian aggression and the denial of human rights, political rights, religious rights—will not be forgotten and will be brought to the attention of the Canadian people.

I want to thank everybody who has attended here today.

With that, we shall adjourn.





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