



Member of the Ukraine Parliament (of “Our Ukraine – People’s Self Defence”) and human rights activist Mustafa Dzhemiliev appealed to Canada for support for the indigenous Tatar people of Crimea at a meeting chaired by Edmonton East Member of Parliament Peter Goldring, who assured him of Canada’s continuing support for Ukraine.

## CRIMEAN TATARS OF UKRAINE LOOK TO CANADA FOR SUPPORT

While Mr. Goldring has visited Ukraine on eight different occasions, he has not specifically been in the Crimean region, but told Mr. Dzhemiliev he is well aware of the issues in the region. Included in the regional issues of concern is the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet at a leased base in Sebastopol, a lease which was extended in exchange for favourable and consistent oil and gas prices for Ukraine. However this lease is seen as a lessening of sovereignty by many Ukrainians.



Mustapha Dzhemiliev, member of the Ukraine Parliament (centre), speaks at a Parliament Hill meeting chaired by Peter Goldring, part of Mr. Dzhemiliev’s cross-country tour of Canada.

Mr. Dzhemiliev, a member of the “Our Ukraine” party in the Ukrainian national Parliament, is also the Chairman of the Mejlis, the representative body of Crimean Tatars.

The entire Crimean Tatar population was deported by the Soviets in 1944 based on the claim that the Crimean Tatar people had collaborated with the Nazis and only returned to Crimea following Ukraine’s 1991 independence. Mr. Dzhemiliev, aged six months at the time of the deportation, grew

up in exile in Uzbekistan. When he was 18, in exile in Tashkent, he formed a political organization called the Union of Young Crimean Tatars.

His political activities caused difficulties – the Soviet authorities arrested him several times between 1966 and 1986. He served long sentences in a series of prisons, labour camps and under house arrest for

“anti-Soviet activities.”



In the 1970s he protested the charges against him by going on a 303 day hunger strike, which he survived only because he was force fed by the authorities.

In 1989 Mr. Dzhemiliev was elected Chairman of the Central Board of the newly founded Crimean Tatar National Movement and was also able to return with his family to Crimea; a move which ultimately enabled 250,000 Tatars to return to their homeland.

In 1991, when free elections took place in Ukraine following independence, the Second Qurulatay (Assembly) of the Crimean Tatar People elected Mustafa Dzhemiliev, Chairman of Mejlis, the single representative body of the Crimean Tatars. He was re-elected Chairman in 1996, 2001, and 2007; a position that he presently holds. He was also elected to the Ukrainian Parliament in 1998 as a member of the Narodnyy Rukh Ukrainy (People's Movement of Ukraine). Subsequently in 2002, 2006 and 2007 he was re-elected as member of the "Our Ukraine" party.

Mr. Dzhemiliev has received many international awards recognizing his persistent reliance on non-violent means in his advocacy for Tatar rights. In 1998, he received the

Nansen Refugee Award from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and he has also been nominated several times for the Nobel Peace Prize.

His political activism on behalf of his people has resulted in his making some enemies as well. In October of 2009 a group calling itself "At-Takir val-Hijra", with reported ties to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda attempted to assassinate him. He escaped unharmed and two members of the group were arrested in the attempt.

Mr. Dzhemiliev came to Canada to explain the concerns of his people at some of the current trends in Ukraine, especially his perception of increasing Russification of the Crimea.

"We are not prepared to live in Russia," he

told the members of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, of which Mr. Goldring has been a member for more than six years. Mr. Dzhemiliev explained that he understood those of Russian background who desire closer ties with that country, but he doesn't want any part of Ukraine to become part of Russia. Considering the presence of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol and Russian military actions in Georgia in 2008, he has concerns



Members of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group pose with Mustafa Dzhemiliev in the rotunda of Parliament Hill's Centre Block.



that there might be a similar conflict in Crimea at some point in the future. The Russian lease of military facilities in Sevastopol was supposed to expire in 2017 but was extended for a 25 year period in 2010 in return for gas price and delivery concessions. He acknowledged that the issue was one that Ukrainians would have to deal with themselves, as he sees the fleet's presence as a major threat to the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Mr. Dzhemiliev said while Crimea may only be four per cent of Ukraine's territory with five per cent of its population it receives the most news coverage due to its strategic location.

In addition to concerns about the Russian military presence and influence in Crimea Mr. Dzhemiliev is also concerned about the rights of the indigenous peoples of the regions. He says in the 20 years since Ukraine once more became an independent nation there has been no progress on laws to protect the human rights or status of the Tatar people. Nor has there been restitution or return of property confiscated when the Tatar people were deported in 1944. It has been suggested that the cost for just the housing lost by the Tatars in 1944 is about \$6 billion.

He would like to see an international conference held to discuss the Crimean Tatar issue and to help pressure the government of Ukraine to act. He said his organization has support from the Baltic states and other countries. In addition to compensation for confiscated properties, Mr. Dzhemiliev has also raised the issue of the lack of educational opportunities in the Crimean Tatar language, which was an official language on the Crimean Peninsula prior to 1944.



Member of the Parliament of Ukraine, Mustapha Dzhemiliev poses with Peter Goldring, Member of the Parliament of Canada for an official picture in the Hall of Honour.

Mr. Dzhemiliev has met with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. He said the president told him he would do his best to address the issues raised by the Tatar people. His impression however was that the president more importantly wanted a commitment from the

Tatars to join his political coalition, something they hesitated to do as they disagree with the President on the Russian Fleet issue. Mr. Dzhemiliev said it seemed the President was more interested in strengthening his political position than dealing with the Tatar's issues.

Mr. Goldring pointed out that Canada has close ties to Ukraine and has raised issues internationally on Ukraine's behalf, as he himself had done at the 2008 Organization

for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly in Kazakhstan. At that gathering Mr. Goldring took the lead and prevented a Ukrainian resolution on the Holodomor from being amended by Russia through the intervention efforts of Turkey and Kazakhstan. The amendment would have described the Holodomor as a natural occurrence as opposed to Stalin's man-made famine of historical record. After the successful plenary intervention Mr. Goldring went on to speak strongly at the closing session directly against Russian interventions designed to strip the resolution of all references and suggestions of the Holodomor as being man-

made. Again with Mr. Goldring's help and strong intervention, Ukraine's resolution passed the 56-nation OSCE Assembly totally as presented by Ukraine.

"That is exactly the kind of support we are seeking," Mr. Dzhemiliev responded.

In a world of increasing ethnic tensions, it is to be hoped that the grievances of the Tatar people can be resolved peacefully.

**Update:** An international forum on Crimean Tatars of Ukraine issues is scheduled for late August 2011 at the next congress of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, a group formed in 1991 to lobby for self-proclaimed indigenous people and minorities.

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*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*

**Your Opinion Matters...**

**Do you think Canada should be supportive of claims by indigenous peoples in other countries ?**

Yes

No

**Should there be an international body whose sole task is to mediate such claims?**

Yes

No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
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