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Human Rights in Russian-Occupied Crimea (abstract)

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

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Research Panel: Migrants and Minorities

Presenter: Jaro Bilocerkowycz, University of Dayton

Title: Human Rights in Russian-Occupied Crimea

Abstract: Russia's use of hybrid warfare to occupy and annex Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014 drew intense international coverage. This effort to change borders in Europe by force was broadly condemned by the international community as an illegal violation of international law and Ukrainian law. In response, various economic sanctions were leveled against Russia and Crimean leaders and companies. Since Crimea has been occupied by Russia and de facto annexed into the Russian Federation, there has been only modest international coverage of internal developments within Crimea.

What is the human rights situation for the Crimean population since Russian occupation of the peninsula? Have some groups been subjected to more systematic violation of their political, economic, and cultural rights than others? Analysis of the human rights situation in Crimea under Russian control is especially apt, since claims of an alleged threat to the Russian minority population of Ukraine were made prior to Russia's controversial intervention.

In actual fact, there was no threat to the human rights of Crimea's major ethnic groups: Russians (58%), Ukrainians (24%), and Crimean Tatars (12%) prior to Russian occupation, notwithstanding Russian propaganda against Ukraine's democratic revolution. Since Russia's occupation, the indigenous population, the Crimean Tatars, a Muslim minority, have been harshly repressed. They had suffered mass deportation under Stalin and strongly favored Crimea remaining under Ukrainian rule. Their top political leaders have been banned from Crimea and strong-armed methods are being used to neutralize or disband their Mejlis, a local representative assembly. Crimean Tatars are being subject to intimidation, harassment, and armed searches, and numerous youth have been found dead. Ethnic Ukrainians in Crimea have also suffered discrimination, harassment or arrest for their pro-Ukraine views or for their use of the Ukrainian language. Calling into question Russian control of Crimea, is considered "inciting ethnic hatred" and "extremism."

Keywords: Human Rights, Ukraine, Russia, Crimean Tatars

Biography: Jaro Bilocerkowycz is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Dayton. He earned a PhD from the University of Washington. An expert on Ukraine and Russia, he is the author of *Soviet Ukrainian Dissent: A Study of Political Alienation* (Westview Press, 1988). He also wrote "The Problem of Sexual Trafficking in Post-Communist Europe," a chapter in *Children's Human Rights—Progress and Challenges*, Linda Majka and Mark Ensalaco, eds. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).