

## **Ahiska Turkish American Council**

Dear Chairman,

As representative of a public organisation

Involved in the protection of the rights of the Ahiska Turks (Meskhetian Turks), I wish to draw your attention to the problem that has brought these people, the autochthonous (indigenous) people of Georgia, to the very brink of extinction.

78 years have passed since all these people, who are the autochthonous (indigenous) people of Georgia, were forcibly resettled by Stalin's regime on the initiative of the Georgian authorities. As a result of their discriminatory policy, our people are settled in nine countries of the world and have turned into national minorities in these countries. They lost their historical homeland and found themselves fighting for survival.

In 1999, Georgia made an undertaking to return our people to their homeland. Having adopted a formal law on repatriation, making the document acceptance and repatriation procedures as difficult as possible, the Georgian authorities have nullified the efforts of all international organisations and of all peoples deported from Georgia on return to their homeland.

In 1998 Georgia, the legal successor of the Georgian SSR, adopted the Law “Concerning recognition of Georgian citizens as victims of political repression...”, which does not apply to peoples deported from its territory and living, at the time of the collapse of the USSR, outside Georgia. The Ahiska Turks have not been deported from their territories in the other eight countries. Therefore, these countries’ laws concerning rehabilitation do not apply to us.

This means that the Ahiska Turks are the only people in the post-Soviet era who have not yet been rehabilitated and returned to their historical homeland.

On this basis, we believe that democratic Georgia is obliged to adopt a law on the rehabilitation of peoples living outside Georgia and deported from its territory. This will allow us to find our homeland again and play a part in the economic recovery and prosperity of democratic Georgia.

We offer Georgia:

1. Extension of the Repatriation Law to include an indefinite period.
2. Amendment of the Repatriation Law to take account of reasonable, realistic procedures and conditions for return.
3. Adoption of a Georgian law “Concerning rehabilitation of deported Georgia peoples still outside its borders.”