



Lemkin Institute Statement at the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Session II (3pm-6pm)

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My colleague from the Lemkin Institute has previously documented and covered the extensive challenges facing the Karakalpak population in Uzbekistan in the first session of this Forum. She highlighted the ways Karakalpak people face a genocidal pattern of violations to their human rights, culture, identity, and existence. These are not individual, isolated cases. This is a targeted pattern of assault against the Karakalpak group by the state of Uzbekistan. Individuals, governments, and international organizations who work with Uzbekistan must be made aware of the nature of the persecution of the Karakalpak people, so that they can fashion their policies accordingly.

In line with the topic of our second session, Social and Economic Empowerment, I will highlight what we believe is the coordinated assault on the social and economic lives of the Karakalpak people by Uzbekistan authorities.

Karakalpakstan is Uzbekistan's poorest region, despite its wealth in hydrocarbons, which has so far benefitted only the central government in Tashkent. Bleak economic conditions in Karakalpakstan have forced hundreds of thousands of Karakalpak people to leave their homeland in search of economic opportunity. The poverty rate in Karakalpakstan is the highest in the nation at 27%, while bordering Uzbek towns commonly post yearly incomes 50% higher than their Karakalpakstan counterparts. 30% of the people emigrating from Uzbekistan to countries abroad are from Karakalpakstan. Nearly 20% of the region's households have family members working abroad. The neglect of Karakalpakstan's economic development, compounded by the ecological disaster of the disappearance of the Aral Sea, has amounted to the fracturing of the Karakalpak people throughout Central Asia and across the globe and has resulted in alarmingly negative health outcomes for people remaining in Karakalpakstan.

While economic stagnation, population dispersal, and negative health outcomes have been the consequence of economic neglect, the Uzbekistan state has also directly and actively targeted the social and economic wellbeing and cohesion of the Karakalpak people, using various methods, including political persecution, to undermine social bonds and disrupt economic development. Uzbekistan authorities prefer to place ethnic Uzbek officials within the government of Karakalpakstan, leading to economic policies that benefit the central state over the local economy. There are reports of ethnic Uzbeks being encouraged with offers of housing and high salaries to move to Karakalpakstan in order to shift the demographic balance in favor of the Uzbek ethnic group. Karakalpak women have been targeted in a discriminatory fashion with official policies of forced sterilization and forced abortion, undermining Karakalpak population

growth. Karakalpak activists have been targeted by Uzbek security services in order to silence dissent, including dissent from the Karakalpak diaspora, which has led to more intense out-migration of Karakalpaks from Karakalpakstan. Uzbekistan authorities continue to arbitrarily detain Karakalpak activists stemming from the 7 June 2022 protests, such as the prominent lawyer and community leader Dauletmurat Tajimuratov. Abroad, Uzbekistan maintains close ties with the security services in Kazakhstan, often collaborating with their neighbor state to harass and/or silence outspoken members of the Karakalpak diaspora there, forcing Karakalpaks to seek safety further abroad.

All of these policies have led to the weakening of social and economic dynamism among the Karakalpak people, which we believe is part of a pattern of structural genocide coordinated and supported by the central government authorities, who are pursuing a monoethnic nation-building project.

In this context of state repression, the Lemkin Institute hopes that international actors can place pressure on the government of Uzbekistan to:

- Adhere to the Constitution with reference to the sovereignty of the “Republic of Karakalpakstan” and the rights guaranteed therein;
- Allow for the self-determination of the Karakalpak people as held in the Constitution and enshrined in the UN Charter, while including ethnic Karakalpak officials in all decision making pertaining to Karakalpakstan;
- Affirm the rights of all minority populations in Uzbekistan, with the Karakalpak and Roma people being of principle concern, protecting the cultures, languages, and human rights of minority populations;
- Expand economic opportunities in Karakalpakstan by investing in modernized infrastructure, creating the conditions for domestic and international investment, and ensuring that the benefits of development are shared with the local economy – this must include robust and engaged attention paid to the ecological and economic disaster that is the retreat of the Aral Sea.