

Statement by Memorial Human Rights Centre
on the Verdict in the Trial of Akhtem Chiygoz

On 11 September 2017 the Supreme Court of Crimea pronounced judgment in the case of the deputy head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, Akhtem Chiygoz. The court sentenced Chiygoz, whose prosecution was one of several in the so-called “Case of 26 February,” to eight years in a general regime prison colony on charges under Article 212, Section 1, of the Russian Criminal Code (“Organization of mass disturbances”).

That day, 26 February 2014, outside the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Simferopol, clashes took place between participants in pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian rallies. Supporters of Ukraine, including representatives of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, were protesting against Crimea becoming a part of Russia, and sought to stop the holding of the session of the Supreme Soviet that could take this decision. That day, during the course of clashes outside the Supreme Soviet, two people died in the crush, and more than 30 were injured.

When the Russian authorities, following annexation of the peninsula, set in motion repressive measures against pro-Ukrainian activists in Crimea, Akhtem Chiygoz was the first person to be charged in the “Case of 26 February.” In particular, he was accused of developing and executing plans for mass disturbances. For this purpose, he allegedly “*sought out*” supporters of the Mejlis and instructed them to use force against supporters of Russian Unity by means of assaults and creating crushes. After this, these people entered the building of the Supreme Soviet where they “*shouted anti-government slogans*” and destroyed property valued at approximately 10,000 roubles.

Memorial Human Rights Centre considers the judgment handed down in the case of Akhtem Chiygoz unjust and unfounded. The cynical cruelty of the Russian court that issued such a harsh sentence - eight years in a general-regime prison colony – is outrageous in a case that demonstrates, both in essence and its details, widescale falsification of evidence during the investigation and the intentionally wrong classification of the material elements of the alleged offence.

The evidence of the guilt of Chiygoz amounted to practically nothing more than the testimonies of witnesses, either given in secret, or of parties that obviously lacked impartiality in the case.

The investigation was conducted in gross violation of international and Russian law. The materials of the case bear witness to the fact that the Russian investigation completely ignored the matter of Ukrainian sovereignty, not only after annexation, but also before. In this way, the Russian authorities have created merely the illusion of legality for a criminal prosecution with respect to events that happened on the territory of another country. Taking into account the fact that the circumstances of the passing of Crimea under the control of Russia in 2014 have all the characteristics of an occupation, Russia, in undertaking the criminal prosecution of Akhtem Chiygoz, is in violation of its obligations as an occupying power set out in the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (the Convention applies “to all cases of partial or total occupation of the territory of a High Contracting Party, even if the said occupation meets with no armed resistance”).

Finally, mention must be made of the selectivity of the criminal prosecution of Akhtem Chiygoz and other defendants in the “Case of 26 February.” Despite the fact that force was used by both sides in the conflict, only supporters of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars were prosecuted.

Memorial Human Rights Centre considers Akhtem Chiygoz to be a political prisoner and demands his immediate and unconditional release, and the termination of legal action against him.

More information about the case of Akhtem Chiygoz can be read [here](#).

This news item can be read on the website of Memorial Human Rights Centre.

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