



Lemkin Institute Statement at the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Session I: Challenges to Inclusion and Equality (10am - 1pm)

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The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities sets forth the responsibilities of all States to protect the rights and very existence of minorities within their respective territories. Protecting such rights entails protecting manifestations of identity within peoples' historical homelands.

Thank you. The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention would like to call attention to the violation of these minority rights in Uzbekistan with particular reference to the Karakalpak people. In fact, the Lemkin Institute believes that there is an ongoing structural genocide against the Karakalpaks in Uzbekistan.

The Karakalpak people are a distinct group in Uzbekistan with a distinct language and culture. They predominantly reside in a semi-autonomous sovereign republic called Karakalpakstan, which borders Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and consider themselves to be indigenous to the territory.

The human rights abuses Karakalpaks are experiencing closely follow a genocidal pattern. Using the Lemkin Institute's 10 Patterns of Genocide schema, we've identified evidence of three distinct patterns of genocide. The first pattern the Lemkin Institute has identified is the **denial and/or prevention of identity**. Here, the existence of an identity is actively and systematically denied or obstructed from manifesting itself within society through laws, decrees, and practices of groups in power. This denial can occur in many ways, including limiting the use of cultural practices and native languages. The second pattern of genocide that we have identified is the **commission of gross human rights violations and mass cultural destruction**. In this pattern group members face targeted harassment, humiliation, and harm based on their identities alongside cultural destruction, which includes the desecration and destruction of important cultural institutions and symbols of the targeted group. The third pattern that we have identified is **the destruction and/or appropriation of biological resources**. The destruction of biological resources intentionally and systematically prevents reproduction within the targeted group, which can include forced sterilizations and abortions.

In particular, we want to mention two specific fact patterns that exist within the larger framework of the persecution of the Karakalpak people in their indigenous homeland. The first is the official denial of use of the Karakalpak language. The Karakalpak language is not used on official documents or forms, which are all in Uzbek. Public signage is in Uzbek. Lessons in Karakalpak in schools have been replaced by lessons in Uzbek. Street names in the Karakalpakstan capital of Nukus are being changed from Karakalpak to

Uzbek, including streets dedicated to important Karakalpak historical and cultural figures. Furthermore, government posts in Karakalpakstan are being filled by ethnic Uzbeks, reinforcing the de facto Uzbek-only language policy of the central government.

Alongside this, there is evidence that Uzbekistan authorities are encouraging ethnic Uzbeks to move to Karakalpakstan while the government simultaneously seeks to reduce the population of Karakalpaks there. In particular, Uzbekistan has practiced Karakalpak population control through enforced sterilization and forced abortion. This common method of genocide has been well-documented in Karakalpakstan by the Expert Working Group, a human rights organization that used to operate in Uzbekistan, the United Nations Committee Against Torture, and an independent investigation conducted by the BBC.

Taken as a whole, this form of persecution amounts to a slow – or structural – genocide that is aimed at significantly destroying the Karakalpak group and identity while promoting the growth of the Uzbek group and identity and therefore the claims of the state to permanent control over this region.

The driving force behind this targeted destruction of Karakalpaks is post-Soviet chauvinist Uzbek nationalism, which has attempted, since Uzbekistan's independence in the 1990s, to forge a monoethnic state out of a very diverse population. While all minorities are targeted in this ethnonationalist project, the Karakalpaks face a particularly methodical form of genocidal persecution because of their sovereign claim to valuable land that is believed to hold the largest reserves of hydrocarbons in Uzbekistan. We are concerned that the future of Karakalpak identity is in jeopardy without coordinated international efforts to ensure its security.

The Lemkin Institute urges the international community to help shine a light on Karakalpak struggles and take measures to ensure the security and longevity of the Karakalpak language, culture, and identity. This is especially important as Central Asia becomes a renewed space of resource competition between the world's great powers.