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The central element of this book is a play “Crimea, 5am”. It was created by playwrights Natalia Vorozhbyt and Anastasiia Kosodii based on documentary materials collected by Crimean political scientist and public activist Lenora Dyulber. Dyulber spoke with the wives, relatives, and lawyers of political prisoners currently held in Russian prisons on trumped-up charges due to their active civil position. The play is part of the international project “Crimea, 5 am”, which aims to inform the general public about the numerous human rights violations in the temporarily occupied Crimea.



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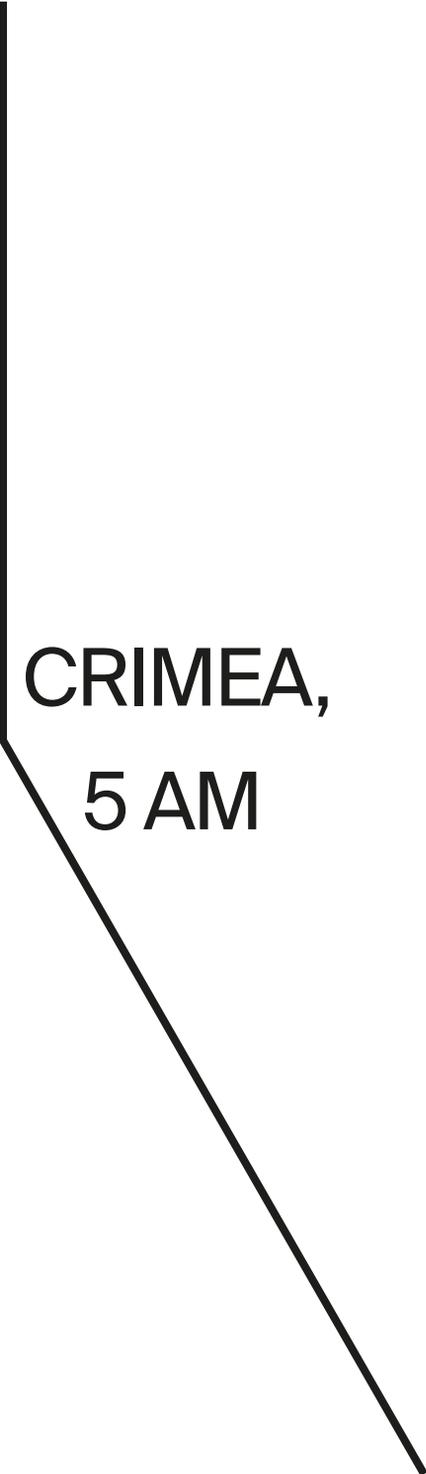


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CRIMEA,

5 AM

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Many dates in this book will not escape your attention. Most of them were tragic. They involved devastating consequences for individuals, families, groups of people, and the entire nation. The first of such dates is May 18th, 1944, which marked the beginning of the forced deportation of the Crimean Tatars from their ancestral homeland. The Soviet government resorted to slander and accused them of mass collaboration with the Nazis during WWII. As a result, hundreds of thousands of innocent people were taken from their homes, driven into freight cars, and sent far away. Almost half of them didn't survive the journey or died in the first years after the deportation.

The deportation was only recognised as an illegal and abominable act of violence almost forty years later. By the end of the 1980s, the Crimean Tatars gradually began coming back to Crimea. Before Ukraine declared its independence, they had already chosen their own representative body, not unlike a parliament — the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. Its main goal was to overcome the consequences of the Crimean Tatar genocide and reclaim the rights of the people in their ancestral homeland. The elected head of Mejlis was Mustafa Dzhemilev, a well-known dissident and political prisoner of the Soviet regime. He had remained in office for over twenty years before Refat Chubarov eventually took his place in late 2013.

At that very moment, a fundamental shift in the Ukrainian political order was taking place: the Revolution of Dignity led to the collapse of the presidential regime of Yanukovich. The Russian authorities took it for a coming storm, an immediate threat to their own imperial ambitions, and hit back by setting their military occupation plan for Crimea

in motion. At the end of February 2014, military men without insignia took over the Crimean parliament and government buildings. On March 16th, they held the notorious unconstitutional Crimean “referendum,” which declared that 97% of the population supposedly voted to join Russia.

For the indigenous population, this meant the enemy was once again knocking on the door and threatening the home they had just reclaimed and restored after decades of negligence. From early on, the Crimean Tatars have been at the vanguard of resistance to the Russian occupation: they held protests, refused to collaborate with the Russian occupation authorities, and did not recognise the results of the “referendum.” Before long, both Refat Chubarov and Mustafa Dzhemilev were banned from entering the peninsula. Upon court decision, the Mejlis was added to the list of extremist groups and banned altogether.

Meanwhile, a full-scale war against independent media was on the go. Ukrainian TV channels and radio stations were banned in Crimea, the first Crimean Tatar TV channel, ATR, was forced to move to the continental part of Ukraine, and numerous websites were brought down. From that moment on, the information accessible to the Crimeans was produced and served exclusively by the Russian propaganda machine.

Many average Crimeans or people from other regions could have remained in the dark as to the force and scale of the Crimean resistance movement against the occupants. However, severe restrictions to free speech led to the rapid development of citizen journalism in Crimea. Ordinary people who cared deeply about the current political events began posting materials about the abuse of power by the Russian occupation authorities on their social media, streaming during the

searches and mass arrests, interviewing the victims, making footage from the court hearings, etc. Most of them were Crimean Tatars.

The occupation authorities responded immediately: the civil journalists received constant threats, were put under severe psychological pressure, faced administrative and later criminal charges. They were persecuted on the basis of faith and nationality. The fabricated "case of Hizb ut-Tahrir" (an international Islamist political party that has not conducted a single terrorist attack since it was founded in 1953 but is nonetheless considered a terrorist group in Russia) had the most significant number of people arrested and/or sentenced. In Crimea, arrests in this "case" began in January 2015. People from various cities and towns had their homes searched by occupation officials and then were arrested and detained by the dozens. They are charged with violating Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("Organisation of A Terrorist Group and Involvement in a Such a Group"), which presupposes from ten years to lifetime detention in prison depending on which part of the article is incriminated.

In April 2015, the defendants' lawyers arranged a meeting with the victims' relatives in these politically charged cases. It was decided to hold such meetings every last Saturday of the month. Later they became known as the "Crimean Solidarity" meetings. The first time only 15 people showed up, the second time, there were 40, the following meetings gathered more than a hundred. Lawyers and relatives were later joined by civil activists, human rights advocates, legal advisors, independent journalists.

"Crimean Solidarity" naturally focused on the three main lines of work: social, legal, and informative. The

social aspect included, first and foremost, helping the families of the Crimean Tatar prisoners, as large families of the political prisoners families faced serious challenges. Some found themselves in need of financial assistance, others required moral support. Some needed a hand with finishing the house, others wanted to send a parcel over to the detention centre others had to accompany a relative to the hospital. The other two aspects had to do with the fact that the very activists who exposed the malpractice of mass searches and arrests would soon suffer persecution from the occupation regime. Lawyers from the “Crimean Solidarity” try their best to prepare those at high risk (namely, activists, journalists, bloggers) in advance by providing legal advice. They explain the protocol, talk about the dos and don’ts of house-checks and interrogations. Besides, they give human rights seminars where they specifically instruct people on how to present defence during administrative court hearings. Those who have completed the course are qualified to represent the activists’ interests in court. If the course chooses to ignore the arguments of the defence, they take appeals to the European Court of Human Rights.

This was a short summary of the tragic events. As a result, at this very moment, lots of unlawfully accused Crimean Tatars are kept in Russian prisons. Meanwhile, their friends, relatives, and like-minded citizens in Crimea are kept under pressure, in constant fear of arrest and incarceration. The whole world has heard their stories, but very little is actually known about the prisoners themselves, their families, the course of the persecutions, and the overall life of the Crimean Tatars under the Russian occupation

authorities. This unfortunate fact stands in the way of genuine empathy and personal interest in their stories and prevents us from pleading with their cause and eventually setting them free.

This state of affairs prompted us to initiate this art project and draw the attention of Ukrainian and international communities to the blatant violation of human rights on the temporarily occupied peninsula. The driving force behind the project was the Ukrainian Institute, which main goal is to reinforce Ukrainian political identity at home and internationally through cultural diplomacy. It is organised by “DollMen,” a Ukrainian theatre company founded by artist and director Dmytro Kostiumynskyi. It specialises in stage production and cultural event management.

The name “Crimea, 5 AM” was chosen because Russian security services tend to break into the homes of the activists precisely at dawn, forcing the windows and doors open. The project comprises three main components:

- a documentary stage performance of the play “Крим, п’ята ранку/Crimea, 5 AM” by Natalia Vorozhbyt, Anastasiia Kosodii and Albert Sardarian;
- this “Крим, п’ята ранку/Crimea, 5 AM” edition, which contains the script itself, personal data and biographies of the political prisoners, their quoted speeches from the court hearings and letters, and statistical data;
- “Крим, п’ята ранку/Crimea, 5 AM” website, which features interviews, written and photographic materials about each of the families that partake in the project.

The relatives of the ten prisoners made an immediate

contribution to the process of playwriting: they gave interviews using the documentary theatre technique with photo and video recording. Meanwhile, the playwrights and the director worked side by side with human rights advocates, released political prisoners, and those Crimean Tatars who left the occupied territory in due time. They made an effort to study the “prohibited” literature, which serves as the principal evidence against our main heroes in court. The recorded interviews form the basis for the storyline and the script.

The documentary performance “Крим, п’ята ранку/ Crimea, 5 AM” can be recreated in any venue, in theatrical as well as non-theatrical spaces so that the relevant issues it raises are accessible to diverse target audiences. It will not resemble a classical stage production and will be performed as a series of readings without dramatic realism or theatrical techniques.

The play will be read by actors and the so-called invited “moderators,” namely, artists, civil activists, politicians, public thinkers. The particular interpretations of the “moderators,” well-known and influential in their countries, will set the tone of the performance and apply the specific optics to the dramatic script. The overall context of the performance should make it abundantly clear that what is presented on stage is not dramatic fiction but the actual state of affairs in temporarily occupied Crimea.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



ALIM ALIEV DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE

“Server’s house is being raided!”. This was the first text message I received on a May morning in 2018. My friend’s house in Bakhchysarai was broken into early in the morning by armed Russian occupation officials. Server, a very bright and refined man, would later face absurd and unsubstantiated charges for terrorist activity and would be sentenced to 14 years in a maximum-security penal colony. International human rights organisations would identify him as a political prisoner of the Russian Federation.

We’ve been recently hearing stories, not unlike that of Server’s way too often in Crimea. A sad joke is going around the Crimean Tatars: “If you wake up on your own and not because your door was broken open, that means they won’t search your place today.” Fear is the

permanent state of mind of the Crimeans, but the free spirit and the sense of dignity overcome the fear. That's what happened to our main heroes, the group of Crimean citizen journalists who decided to shed light on the events on the peninsula and capture flagrant instances of human rights violations. Those are the same journalists who are currently kept behind bars by the Kremlin authorities while their friends, families, and all of us are waiting for them to come back.

After the principal work on the play had already been finished, we received another piece of bad news from temporarily occupied Crimea. A recent series of searches led to another five activists being arrested, including my friend and colleague from the "Avdet" newspaper Nariman Dzhelial. He is the First Deputy Head of Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, a journalist, a widely respected and probably the most influential spokesman of the free people of the peninsula. His arrest was hard to come to terms with. Therefore, our team decided to add Nariman's name and his address to the fellow citizens to this edition.

Our theatrical project is called "Крим, п'ята ранку/ Crimea, 5 AM". It is the time of the day when dark forces can show up at your doorstep while everybody is still asleep, turn everything upside down and take your father, son or husband to jail. At the time when my fellow countrymen are kept prisoners, we want to tell their stories because each of the political prisoners has had a remarkable, thrilling, turbulent personal history. Our project, therefore, is dedicated to making the voices of the unjustly accused Crimean citizen journalists heard through the voices of opinion leaders in Ukraine and worldwide.

I hope that Server and the rest of the Kremlin political prisoners will soon be released, and I am sure we will all meet once again in our native liberated city of Bakhchysarai!



NADIA SOKOLENKO
PERFORMING ARTS PROGRAMME MANAGER AT THE
UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE

The idea to bring to the audience the voices of the citizen journalists and their families from the temporarily occupied territories struck us about a year ago. Moreover, we wanted a play or performance to be distributed and brought to audiences in Ukraine and worldwide. The next step was to find artists who care deeply about these matters, then there was conceptual development, the writing itself, and tons of mundane but crucial tasks.

What triggered us to set the project in motion? Nothing, in particular, I guess. The temporary occupation of Crimea and the war in the East of Ukraine have lasted for so long. It's become impossible to stand idle.

A few years ago, I worked on another project created by Yara Arts Group called Дім — Ev — Home, which largely revolved around the Crimean Tatars' return home after the deportation in the early 1990s and their subsequent unavoidable migration after the Russian attempt of

annexation of Crimea. After everything they went through not only during the deportation itself but upon their coming back to their homeland, how they built their homes from scratch, I was outraged at the restrictions of rights and freedoms they had to suffer, as well as the constant threat of persecution, home-checks, and arrests. I admire the courage of these people, their fearlessness, and their strength of spirit. I wish more people learned about their fate, daily life, joys, and sorrows. Such particular knowledge brings us all together and consolidates the strength of the international community.



VERONIKA SKLIAROVA
PROJECT PRODUCER, THEATER EXPERT, CULTURAL
MANAGER

Everyone, well, most people, want to live by the sea. However, for the vast majority, this preference is a matter of being at home, of the sense of belonging to their community, their homeland. Upon my trips to Crimea in the years prior to the occupation, I could sense the

antagonism between those who claimed this land to be theirs. Later, in the years 2014-2015, I reflected extensively on the actual efforts undertaken by Ukraine to integrate Crimea and make it part of our shared cultural heritage. On how in all those years I remained nothing more than a tourist there, taking advantage of its natural marvels. Indeed, it is paradise on earth!

There's no denying that there's been a number of consolidating programs and cultural bridges: the festivals we organised in Kharkiv serve as a great example. We would often invite the people from "Karman" art centre, a theatre group from Simferopol. All in all, we tried to establish a cultural dialogue. However, most of those were, so to say, ad-hoc initiatives. The tragedy of the Crimean Tatars left me speechless. What did we fail to achieve? Could it have been achieved earlier?

I believe in the prospect of de-occupation in a future where we can be equal partners, especially in terms of cultural exchange. I am convinced that a project about human rights and citizen journalism that can simultaneously bring the world's attention to the actual events on the peninsula is of crucial significance. This way of restoring the balance matters to me personally because even if I cannot help the immediate situation, my work and efforts can help shed light upon the truth.

In my opinion, the problem of human rights is a hot topic in the whole world. We have recently witnessed a right-wing renaissance, the rise of right-wing ideologies. Nowadays, art, culture, and especially cultural diplomacy bear the task of exposing and addressing these new challenges and realities.

The first step in our project was to gather materials and conduct interviews with the victims of these constant searches and kidnappings. During the interview, one of

the women stated that the question of whether or not she should stay in Crimea made no sense to her. It was the matter of her identity, of being who she was. Such people and such words never fail to inspire me. It is a prominent example of how we, first of all, can and should remain human no matter what. And how we should remain true to ourselves. Otherwise, why would anything matter?

We are going to closely follow the stories of our heroes on the project's website and make updates. And I really hope we will soon post the following update: "All political prisoners have happily returned to their families."



DMYTRO KOSTIUMYNSKYI
PROJECT DIRECTOR, FOUNDER OF DOLLMEN THEATRE
COMPANY, ARTIST, ACTOR, PRODUCTION DESIGNER

I have never worked with documentary theatre. I have never dealt with the problems of political prisoners. Nonetheless, I had several personal reasons for joining the project.

First of all, I have a very close personal history with

the Crimean Tatars. Crimea was where I grew to be who I am now, as I spent my early life in Koktebel. My family was close friends with a Crimean Tatar family from Staryi Krym. We used to celebrate every holiday together, and I could see what they were going through. In fact, we helped them a lot because they had to start their life from scratch. This connection was later lost: in 2002, we moved, and the heads of both families died soon thereafter. After what happened in 2014, I found myself cut away from my childhood home altogether: it is beyond my reach, it is quite literally physically inaccessible.

The second instance was my rather unsettling experience with the performance of “Iphigenia in Tauris. Bride for the Terrorist”. In its own way, that project also dealt with the occupation of Crimea by means of dramatic theatre.

This initiative is yet another opportunity to express complex political issues through certain aspects of culture in an altogether new, groundbreaking way. Its vast potential and significance are clear, especially since the voices of those whose rights had been violated will now be heard not only in Ukraine but far beyond its borders.



ANASTASIIA KOSODII
PLAYWRIGHT, THEATRE MANAGER

I grew up in Zaporizhzhya, the city of factories, factory workers, and the glorious Cossack past. For us, Crimea used to seem a luxury holiday destination for those who were lucky enough to rise above going on vacation by the Azov sea in Kyrlyivka. In 2013 I finally managed to go to Simferopol and spent three whole days hiking just a stone's throw from the Qızıl Qoba. I was clueless, I didn't get the hang of it, and then, lo and behold, the war broke out just a few months later. I see Crimea, 5 am as a unique opportunity to go back in time and better understand the peninsula and what it was really like through the personal stories of the best Crimeans.

My main focus was to leave as much space for our heroes and their families to express themselves. Some dramatic pieces give the author full creative license and allow them to create a whole new fictional world within the text, to insert their own messages. Meanwhile, my principal task consists of framing our heroes' messages to

render them accessible to the audience and let them be heard till the very end.



NATALIA VOROZHBYT
PLAYWRIGHT, SCREENWRITER, DIRECTOR

The loss of Crimea is a personal loss for the majority of Ukrainians. It is no different for me. The blatant injustice of what happened hurts me. I miss Crimea, I don't even allow myself to think about it, but overall I can survive without it. There are people who cannot. The people who have spent centuries fighting for it, praying to have it back and losing it yet again. They hold onto it as if it were the very sense of their existence. I am talking about the Crimean Tatars. I could not refuse the offer to work on this topic. I, also, have my own land without which I could not survive, and, for the last eight years, they had been trying to take it away from me. I, also, am afraid to find myself in a hostile environment, to fall victim to political manipulations, which is exactly what happened to the Crimean Tatar political prisoners and their families. Indeed, fear and compassion were decisive in encouraging me to work on this play.

This play is closely based on the interviews with the

families of the prisoners as well as other documentary materials. Therefore, our task was to preserve authentic intonations and emotions, not of some abstract nameless prisoners and their relatives, but those of Tymur, Rustem, Mumine, Suria, Nariman, Aishe....

I want to state it loud and clear: at this very moment, they are suffering from grave injustice which is brought upon them by the Russian Federation and its particular representatives.



LENORA DYULBER
POLITICAL SCIENTIST, CIVIL ACTIVIST

It is hard to say if my “role” in the project merits the name. It began more or less just like any other research project: I had to prepare the relevant materials, talk to the respondents, and ask all the correct questions. It was only when I was looking through the pictures of those guys (I knew some of them prior to the arrests and

met others along the way) that I realised there would be nothing easy about it. My personal sentiments make it impossible for me to play the role of a researcher.

Those interviews were not easy. I found myself in their homes, surrounded by their families, saw their wives cry, and could hardly keep myself from crying with them. Talking to the children was the hardest part: their feelings and emotions were the most precious moments of these meetings. It is true, they went back to their lives, and yet their stories about everyday achievements at school gave away a feeling of anticipation for the day when dad would finally come back. Talking to the prisoners' parents was rather distressing as well. They protested against injustice but more than anything, these elderly people were afraid: afraid of never seeing their sons again.

And what about my personal motivation? Initially, I contented myself with devouring articles, reading about those experiences, about life under occupation... And yet, for the last seven years, I have formed a set of guiding principles, not the least of which is to be vocal about the problem and do everything within your abilities. It is crucial for us all to stand together.

My further motive to join in was to safeguard Crimea's ties to the continent. Even though we are physically distant, we can close this distance emotionally. Every joint action strengthens the societal bonds which keep us all together.

PLAY

CRIMEA,

5 AM

SCENE 1

Slides are displayed on the screen (or some alternative medium of the director's choice).

Slide 1

This is Veciye Qaşqa. When she was 10, she got deported from Crimea to Uzbekistan on Stalin's orders. It happened to all Crimean Tatars in 1944.

Slide 2

The year Veciye Qaşqa returned to Crimea was the year a man first landed on the Moon.

Slide 3

Veciye had lived in Crimea when the Soviet Union collapsed, and the other Crimean Tatars returned to the peninsula.

Slide 4

Veciye had lived in Crimea when the peninsula got occupied by the Russian troops in 2014.

Slide 5

Veciye died in Crimea when the Russian occupation enforcement arrested her in Simferopol in 2017. Her heart stopped.

SCENE 2

Slide 1

This is Reshat Ametov. He was born in Simferopol and admired Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine of nonviolent resistance.

Slide 2

On February 28th, 2014, Reshat was 39. He posted on his Facebook page:

RESHAT: Around Monday, I will go to the Council of Ministers. It will be a standing protest. I dare you to join me.

Slide 3

On March 3rd, 2014, he left his house without saying anything to his family. He had his ID and a card for receiving child benefits.

Slide 4

At noon his wife called him, but the number was unavailable.

Slide 5

Twelve days later, Reshat Ametov was found dead. His head was wrapped with duct tape, his eyes were poked out, and the handcuffs were found nearby. His death was caused by a stab wound to the eye.

Slide 6

On March 3rd Reshat Ametov took part in a peaceful protest against the temporary occupation of Crimea by the Russian troops. For an hour and a half he had stood in front of the Council of Ministers of Crimea. Three members of the so-called “self-defence units of Crimea” approached him, took him from the square, forced him into a car, and drove to an unknown location.

SCENE 3

Slide 1

This is the Kamianka area in Simferopol. On March 27th, 2019, it became a site of a so-called “anti-terrorist” operation: Russian occupation security forces surrounded the area to search the homes of those suspected to be involved with the Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Slide 2

Hizb ut-Tahrir is an international pan-Islamist political party. In 2003 it was declared a terrorist organisation and banned in Russia.

Slide 3

Since 2014, the Russian security has been locating more and more "members" of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Crimea.

Slide 4

They break into their self-built homes early in the morning, at 5, sometimes 6 AM.

Slide 5

The children of the “terrorists” are crying, their wives are hastily covering their heads with hijabs and in the meantime the occupation security officers are inspecting the bookshelves for any literature in Arabic.

Slide 6

Such books are considered solid evidence of someone’s involvement with the Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Slide 7

On March 27th, 2019, the atmosphere in the Kamianka area is heated. Russian occupation security forces clash with the Crimean Tatars. Several are arrested.

Slide 8

We learn about it not from the international media, not because the politicians decided to step in.

Slide 9

We have this footage thanks to the citizen journalists: regular Crimean Tatars with smartphones and immediate access to the Internet.

Slide 10

This play tells the story of the ten of them.

SUBTITLES 1

Seiran Saliev, born 1985 in Abinsk, Krasnodar Krai.

He moved back to Crimea with his family at the age of seven.

In 2003 he went to college in Simferopol to become a keyboard operator. He also has an incomplete degree in Turkish and Crimean Tatar Philology.

Was interested in the history of Crimea, worked as a tourist guide in Bakhchysarai during summer.

In 2014 Russia attempted an annexation of the Crimean peninsula. As a citizen journalist, Seiran began attending court hearings of the fabricated cases as well as visiting the search locations.

On January 26th, 2017, his apartment was searched for the first time. Both Seiran Saliev and his lawyer Emil Kurbedinov were arrested for 12 and 10 days respectively. That same year Sairan Saliev's apartment was searched for the second time.

On October 11th, 2017, Seiran Saliev as well five other Crimean Tatars were arrested on ill-founded "terrorism" charges.

On September 16th, 2020, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Seiran to 16 years in prison. The sentence hasn't as of yet taken effect: the defence has filed an appeal. Meanwhile, Seiran is kept in Detention Centre N°3 in Novocherkask, Rostov region, The Russian Federation.





BETROTHED

The tent, wedding gowns, fuzzy garlands, pictures...

MUMINE SALIEVA. He told me his wife had to be a beautiful singer. As a child, he was attending an amateur theatre courses and, well, he enjoys both dancing and singing. And I told him: “I could only sing to you after the wedding”.

SEIRAN SALIEV. Well, that was unfair, like, you can't actually sing.

MUMINE SALIEVA. Then you'll have to put up with that for the rest of your life.

My fellow student lived in the same dormitory as Seiran. We accidentally ran into each other in the doorway, just like that, when I was visiting her once, and he began apologising nervously, like, “I am so sorry, I didn't notice you.” He had a printed T-shirt on, it could have been “Casta” or “Prodigy”... Then in a matter of minutes our eyes locked, and he said to me:

SEIRAN SALIEV. If you ever need my help, I am here for you.

MUMINE SALIEVA. And me being a typical straight-A pupil, pretty proud of myself, like, you know, a real know-it-all, I was wondering, “How so? Like, he lives in a dormitory and all that, and all of a sudden, he is like that...”.

He made it a routine to wait for me after the lectures, walking me home... At first, it all seemed as if it were by accident.

SEIRAN SALIEV. Oh.

MUMINE SALIEVA. As-salamu alaykum.

SEIRAN SALIEV. And you...

MUMINE SALIEVA. It turns out...

SEIRAN SALIEV. Also study here, oh, please, let me walk you home, let me help you out.

MUMINE SALIEVA. And thus, little by little, our relationship developed. But the crucial thing was that he was Yalıboylu for me and, as it turned out, I was for him.

SINGER. I can't put it down right now, so I'll tell you. See, the Crimean Tatars comprise three sub-ethnic groups. There are the Noğays, that's the northern part of the peninsula, where they lived. Then there are the Tats from the central part of the peninsula, at the foot of the Crimean Mountains. And finally, there are the Yalıboylu, the Crimean Tatars who lived by the sea. These sub-ethnicities strictly speaking formed the basis of the Crimean Tatar nation, and its feeling of i-i-identity. All of them call themselves Crimean Tatars. But the custom to define your origin, where you come from, and, well, to get married within the group sort of persisted.

It's been harder to follow since 1944, of course, but the attitude is still there.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. I was a first-year student at the Department of Mathematics and IT of the Taurida National University.

SINGER. They now call it the Crimean Federal University.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. I moved into the dormitory here in Simferopol, on the third floor. And Remzi lived on the fourth. Even then, he was very active and sociable, and he'd often gather the students from the dormitory, and take them out on tours. They visited Mountain Demerdzhy, Mountain Chatyr-Dag, Scythian Neapolis, and whatnot. You see, back then, he was already a huge admirer of Crimean nature. I joined them at some point, and that's how we met.

It was only later that he told me everything, well, you know, we had a shower room in the basement, the whole dormitory would go down there to shower. And once, while he was walking down the stairs from the fourth floor, he just happened to hear a very sweet voice speaking Tatar on the staircase.

REMZI BEKIROV. I looked around to see who it was, you know, speaking such good Tatar, and saw this little girl, who turned out to be you.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. Back then I would call my anashka, my mum, every single day, and I had to flee to the staircases to escape the noise of the halls.

AMET SULEIMANOV. Well, I met her (or rather saw her) for the first time at our friends' wedding. I began asking around about you, like, how could I meet you, where you lived, and other details. I eventually located you — you lived at my brother-in-law's and the two of us happened to be really close. We were in the woodwork business together. That's how I paid him a visit one day and finally properly met you.

LILIA SULEIMANOVA. I actually remember it, the very first thing he asked upon meeting me was "Will you marry me?". I replied, "Well, this is supposed to be the closing line, not the opening one." He later admitted he had totally blanked on everything that night — except for the proposal line, apparently.

AISHE ASANOVA. I was still a schoolgirl, it seems, it was my 9th year, or perhaps 8th, I can't quite remember. And well, he came to teach at our school... Suleiman. He taught Tatar language and literature. We weren't formally acquainted, no, even though I knew we had a new teacher, and I was a very modest, serious girl, I had no interest in such things. He later told me:

SULEIMAN ASANOV. I spotted you in the crowd right

away... you were the most modest of them all.

AISHE ASANOVA. His mother taught at our school as well. I was part of the dancing group, and I remember her approaching me once:

SULEIMAN ASANOV'S MOTHER. You see, I need... My son is taking part in a competition, presenting traditional Crimean Tatar dancing, our national cuisine, and I would like, well... I'd like you to take part alongside him, to dance with him our traditional Crimean Tatar dance.

AISHE ASANOVA. That one time, I agreed... We got to know each other a bit better, but it was soon over. That's why I was so surprised when he showed up to my prom with an enormous bunch of flowers and made his intentions quite clear, in front of everybody, that, well, he liked me and wanted to spend his whole life with me, just like that... And so, a year later, I finished school, went to university, studied, and after some more studying, we eventually got married.

SUBTITLES 2

Tymur Ibrahimov, born 1985 in Yanhyiul, Republic of Uzbekistan.

Moved back to Crimea with his family at the age of six.

Tymur went to the university, the Department of Foreign Language Philology.

Since 2007, he had worked in computer repair and retail. He started his own business.

In November 2008, Tymur got married to Diliara.

They have four children - two sons and two daughters.

Tymur's father was killed by an unknown man when Tymur was about ten years old. That is how come Tymur

has always actively supported low-income families, especially those who had lost the breadwinner.

Since 2014, Tymur has been an avid citizen journalist. Thanks to his footage Ukrainian TV networks were able to show what happened in Crimea after the Russian occupation.

On October 2nd, 2017, Russian occupation security forces broke into Tymur's house. After having searched the place they arrested him on the charge of terrorism.

On September 16th, 2020, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Tymur to 17 years of prison. As of today the sentence hasn't taken effect because the defence had filed an appeal. At the moment, Tymur is kept in Detention Centre №3 in Novocherkask, Rostov oblast.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. It so happened that I couldn't go to university right after school... My father told me, "I won't be able to help you. Your only chance to afford an education is to find a job." And it so happened that my sister's husband recommended a café in the old town of Bakhchysarai called "Ashlama-Serai." I went there and saw Tymur. I got a job there and had worked for, well, four months, a season. Back then, I still had a really old cheap dumb phone, you know, with buttons and a black and white screen, though I didn't really care much. Well, and everybody else had those new, modern ones with colour screens, they were really expensive. And one day he said to me:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. Oh, hey, I've got a phone I could give to you, like, for the lowest price. Do you want it?

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. For the price of the cheapest black and white dumb phone, so to say.

And everybody in “Ashlama-Serai” was like, “Hey, I’ll take it,” but he persisted:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. No, no, wait, y’all, I offered it to her because, well, she doesn’t have one and I am kinda sorry for her.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Even though everybody figured it out straight away and kept saying:

EVERYBODY. Only she can get the phone for such a price, and it’s all for her.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. He also bought the most expensive ice cream, he loaded our fridge with it and then refused to eat it:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. Oh, I am just not in the mood for ice cream, you can have it all.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Lo and behold, he asked me... well, to have a chat with him. I was usually the one who paid the waiters, him as well, I tried to deal with everybody personally. And I immediately thought that something bad had happened, I must have made a mistake in the calculations or something... And yet he says:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. You see, it’s no joke, I’ve decided to get married.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. I wondered what all of it had to do with me and then I thought to myself that maybe he wanted some advice, to ask about this or that girl, whether I know her. Again, I was totally clueless, and then he... Well, he says to me:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. I’ve decided to get married and I ask you to marry me.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. I was quite literally shocked, I didn’t expect it in the slightest, and my initial reaction

was, “I’ll have to think about it.” Like, it came naturally to me... With this in mind, I came home and told my mum, “Well, mum, so and so, I got a marriage proposal.” Or rather, I actually said, “I am getting married,” just like that... And my dad was like:

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA’S FATHER. To whom?

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. And I tell him, “I am marrying Tymur.” He kept silent for a while and then said:

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA’S FATHER. He is a good fella.





NIKAH

SINGER. “Nikah” means “marriage” in Arabic, a legal contract between a man and a woman in Islamic family law. For it to be valid, certain conditions are to be met. The husband has to be an adult Muslim man who is not a “mahram,” that is, not a close relative.

SINGER (ELZARA SULEIMANOVA):

We were at home celebrating nikah

It was January, and it had just snowed

it was so lovely,

that memorable day, even though it was winter,

it seemed that winter made it all the more interesting,

and the snow,

and for me, as I remember it, it was, oh...

as if the happiest day of my

by then 19 years long life,

Like a fairytale...

Me, in a white dress, oh yes, I had a white dress,

then Ruslan arrived with...

he gave me flowers, white roses,

My betrothed...

He keeps saying how he glimpsed at me — and fell in love, how he found the right one — you know, to start a family with.

The stars aligned.

I am Muslim and I am aware that the husband

is the head of the family, and the wife submits to the husband, to what he says,

—

one has to obey...

MUMINE SALIEVA. I remember till this very day how we got married on September 3rd. We didn't have a proper honeymoon, anything of the sort, and then about two weeks later, we decided to pay a visit to his sister. Now imagine, I am getting ready in front of the mirror and, all of a sudden, he looks at me surprised and says:

SEIRAN SALIEV. What's up with this lipstick you are wearing? Now go and take it off.

MUMINE SALIEVA. And you see, I had ambitions of my own, I was young and was used to getting what I wanted, my parents thought the world in me and couldn't refuse me anything. So I refuse.

SEIRAN SALIEV. You have to obey your husband.

MUMINE SALIEVA. And I tell him that as a wife, I deserve fair treatment. The upshot is a confrontation. I refuse to give in, keep bringing up the arguments for my point. And so does he.

SEIRAN SALIEV. Well, then we aren't going anywhere.

MUMINE SALIEVA. Don't you get it? I've spent so much time getting ready and now what? I am supposed to take it all off?

SEIRAN SALIEV. No, we aren't going anywhere, you hear me? We are staying.

MUMINE SALIEVA. Fine, let it be so.

MUMINE SALIEVA. It happened again and again, especially in the first few years, because neither wanted to give in.

But Seiran has changed a lot since then, even more since our daughter was born. The birth of our girl seems to have greatly transformed him. There is now this softness, this tenderness about him, and, well, I certainly deserve credit for it. This softness is the product of Mumine's efforts

because she took hold of Seiran and spoiled him. (*Laughs*). But really, he took a lot from me, especially this softness and the ability to listen to others.

SINGER (ALIE ARIFMEMETOVA):

Our wedding took place in a greenhouse
on November 8th, 2014

it was warm, and we only wore light dresses
everything was decorated

he lifted the scarf during the dance Crimean Tatars have this dance called Yavluq avasi the dance with the scarf where the dancer has to lift the scarf dropped by the girl from the floor without touching the floor with his hands he has to lift it with his lips so Osman lifts the scarf and the wedding attendant says well Osman you now get all the money from under the scarf and have to buy your wife some chocolate he put the money into the pocket of his jacket and probably forgot I was once watching the wedding recordings and asked him hey listen where is my chocolate he then wondered where the money was it was in his jacket he took it and bought that chocolate

for me

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. Well, the wedding was... My mom got really sick after moving here, she had cancer, so the wedding was sad to say the least, because we all knew she was about to die, yeah, so there were no grand feelings, no wedding mood, like, I was getting married so that mom could see me... I was the first to get married in my family and so was he, like, so that the family could, so to say, witness the wedding.

What I liked about Rustem: from the first day on he told me the truth right away, just as it was. It so happened that the wedding was completely organised by my family,

because his parents had then literally just moved from Uzbekistan, his grandma could not afford it and he himself worked at the local market, sold fruit, vegetables, and he kept saying:

RUSTEM SHEIKHALIEV. I am what I am, and it just so happens that I have nothing to my name. You'll have to accept me just like I am.

SUBTITLES 3

Rustem Sheikhaliev, born 1979 in Samarkand, Republic of Uzbekistan.

Moved back to Crimea with his family at the age of fourteen.

After school, he went to the Technical High School № 26 to train as an electric and gas welder. He never pursued this profession.

In 1998 he went into trade, became a small businessman, and acquired a selling spot at the Simferopol Central Market, where he sold fruit and vegetables. He had spent over twenty years working at the market, had tons of loyal customers, and was well-known for his straight dealings. He acquired an official licence for the spot, always paid rent and taxes.

In 2001 he married Suria, the couple has three children.

Rustem took an active part in the social and civil life, helped with organising children's parties, saw after bulk-purchasing groceries, later worked as a cook's assistant.

After 2014 he began attending court hearings, gave assistance and support to the families of political prisoners, organised purchasing everything necessary to send over to his unjustly imprisoned compatriots in confinement.

In 2015 he became a citizen journalist, recorded photo and video footage with his phone camera and, thus, brought to light the persecution of the Crimean Tatars.

On March 27th, 2019, Rustem Sheikhaliev's house was searched. He was arrested by the Russian occupation security forces on the charge of violating Part Two of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("Involvement in a Terrorist Group"). Rustem is facing up to 20 years in prison.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. He never promised me everything under the sun, no, quite literally, he promised me nothing. When we got married, I just got along with it, though I'll get used to him just like he was... for the sake of mom... And then it turned out that all that, all those feelings come in the process, after you've lived together for some time. And now we've been together for 20 years, and he took the place of my mother, father, brother, and sister. When we talk on the phone, he always feels whether I am in the mood, always asks, "What happened? Now, tell me, something surely happened."

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Our wedding, well, it was small-scale, about sixty-seventy guests, quite a small duva. I got my dress from another girl, Lutfie Zudieva, you must know her. We had to spend heavily on the wedding and she offered me a hand, you know, to cut down the expenses:

LUTFIE ZUDIEVA. Here, have a look, why don't you take my dress?

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Back then we couldn't say no to such an offer, of course, I accepted the dress. The bottom was very plain and low-profile, but it also came with a marvellous chiffon wrap with roses, so pretty, as well as a scarf and a fez. The fez went extremely well with the

whole look, it was, like, so pretty.

LILIA SULEIMANOVA. You know, it was weird, it all happened so quickly, I didn't feel like I was in charge – it got going all by itself. I remember the day of nikiah, the very day of my wedding. My best friend, well, she suspected immediately I might get cold feet right before the ceremony. And she was like:

LILIA'S FRIEND. Lilia, you are sure, right? You won't back down at the last minute and say 'no'?

LILIA SULEIMANOVA. Indeed, I remember it perfectly. It felt like watching a film without taking any part in it, you know, just watching from the side...

From this point on the footage of their houses, their chronicles, Khalide Bekirova's teddy bear could be shown on screen.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. He's always done his best to guide me.

RUSLAN SULEIMANOV. It's nothing, don't worry, it's gonna be alright.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. Even when we had just gotten married, literally the day after... We lived in an apartment on the first floor and the owners, our friends, lived downstairs. Well, they came and said, "Hey, Ruslan, we'll drop by shortly for some chebureki," and I remember totally losing my head, like, I didn't know which way to jump... And Ruslan says:

RUSLAN SULEIMANOV. Hey, don't worry, don't panic.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. And now, thinking back, before I knew the chebureki were ready, we made them

together! I was frying them while he was preparing the meat, step by step, one by one, and then before I knew he was already washing the floor, all of that being the sign of how we have always paid attention to each other and have always been ready to give a hand. You see, this mutual attitude was there right from the very start, like, he would even help me with the cooking and then would jokingly say, “It was me who actually taught you to cook.”

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. On our eleventh wedding anniversary, Nikah, he sent me over a bouquet of roses and this teddy bear, like, from the detention centre. He told me, “It is, well, actually we call it Aiuv.”

SINGER. “Aiuv” means “bear” in Crimean Tatar.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA (*with the teddy bear*). He himself is just like that, like this bear. He sent it to me and said that it should keep me company and make up for his absence while he is away.

RUSLAN SULEIMANOV (*to all women*). It’s nothing, don’t worry, it’s gonna be alright.

SUBTITLES 4

Ruslan Suleimanov was born April 21st, 1983 in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In 1993 he moved to Crimea, and went on to attend school in Muromsk, Bilohirsk district, which he finished with honours in 2000. The same year he became a student of Taurida National University, Department of Physics of Magnetic Phenomena.

After graduation he worked as a software developer. In 2014 he quit his job due to his organisation closing down, and went on to work with children as a private physics tutor.

Married to Elzara, has three children.

Ruslan Suleimanov is a citizen journalist, “Crimean Solidarity” activist.

In February 2017, Ruslan Suleimanov was arrested near Marlen Mustafaiev’s house, convicted, and sentenced to 5 days of administrative detention, supposedly for organising an unsanctioned protest.

On October 15th, 2017, he took part in a one-man protest in support of the arrested Crimean Tatars, was once again convicted, and ordered to pay a fine of 10000 roubles.

On March 26th, 2019, the activist was detained at the administrative checkpoint Kalanchak by the Russian border patrol, they had kept him waiting for seven hours, and ruined his passport. On March 27th, 2019 he was arrested.

According to the verdict of the Kyiv District Court in Simferopol he was sentenced to arrest until May 15th, 2019. He was initially charged with violating Part One of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, but the investigation changed it to Part Two. He is facing up to 15 years in prison.

One can make a transition from this scene to the next through the depiction of a feast. The women and children are eating, while the men are not.





HOME

MAIIE MUSTAFAIEVA. It is always the same story with Crimean Tatars: the moment they have a son, they start thinking about getting a house of their own.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA (*with a teddy bear*). He didn't have any stable income at the time, nor did he have a car. Or a house for that matter. We moved into the place before the repairs were over – he had quite literally only finished this room and the corridor. We had to do it all together step by step, from assembling the furniture at night to pouring the floor, because hiring workers was beyond our means back then. We did everything together and it still took us eleven years to sort it out.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. You know, he always kept saying, “A big-big house, with a room for everyone,” namely, a house big enough to receive many guests and be able to put them up for the night. A yard of his own, a garden of his own, that sort of thing was not for him, but I wanted it so much, like, for example, a vegetable garden. I always said, “If I ever get to own a house and some land, I will be an avid gardener,” like, I don't see it as a burden... When it came to a fruit garden, it would most likely be apple, apricot, cherry trees, namely, those most loved by the children.

CHILD. Can we grow a watermelon?

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Sure, why not? As for the vegetables, I would go with the usual tomatoes, cucumbers, maybe bell peppers — that kind of thing.

CHILD. Potatoes...

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Sure, potatoes as well.

Yeah, my pilaf is his favourite dish (especially when I cook at my mum's, God knows why, the pilaf turns out perfect), he tells me, “I've never tried something like that before.” Another dish he likes to bring up is the plate of cabbage

rolls I made him after the wedding... They are everything for him...

AISHE ASANOVA. After the marriage he told me, “I want to have a place of my own”. He went on to buy an old house in Bakhchysarai and the first thing he did was to turn the basement into a museum. You see, he never missed a chance to buy some Crimean Tatar antiques. He bought everything he could find, he even bought me an old girdle, quşaq, wait, let me show you, it is made of pure silver and dates back over three centuries. Imagine, he told me, “This is for you.” You know, a truly unique thing.

MUMINE SALIEVA. It was a rare habit of Seiran, something not very common to other men, that he always waited till we finished eating at the table before even touching the food himself. Honestly, I’ve almost never witnessed anything of the sort before. He would sit there at the table and wait. And I kept telling him, begging him to eat something, like, “This dish is supposed to be served hot, and it is already growing colder.” Yet he insisted, “No, you should eat first.” He would wait until everybody finished their meal, then ask the children if they wanted another helping. Any time one of them said yes, he would first serve the child. And only after the meal was over, everybody had finished, and I was literally about to clean up the table he would begin his meal.

AISHE ASANOVA. Thinking back, initially, we didn’t even have a sofa, but only a soft corner with four chairs, and I remember how we would put them all together next to the corner, cover them with a blanket and pretend it was a real sofa. Yeah, I also remember, back then, we would watch our tiny “Photon” TV. *(Smiles.)* And someone would stand up to press the button every time to switch the channel, well, such was the way of things. And yet those moments were so sweet, like, we built it all together, all of it...

AISHE stands up and switches the channel.

SINGER. “Photon” was an old TV model produced in the 1970-1990s at the 50th USSR Anniversary Simferopol Television Plant. The plant had produced 13,4 million TV sets before finally shutting down in 1997. Colour TV sets had been available since 1991...

The TV turns on.

“PHOTON”: Entertaining TV-show is on, one can hear some jokes about Ukraine.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA (*talking over the “Photon”*). We went to live with his grandma. Well, her place left much to be desired, like, think about it, they had been deported, then came back — they weren’t well off. And he had a dream: to have a house of his own. His own home. We planned that the house will be finished and he would finally be able to stay at home, because ever since he was 13 and moved here, then finished school, went on to train as an electric and gas welder, he had studied by day and worked by night just to be able to afford clothes, because, as he said, “My grandparents are getting old, I would hate to hang around their necks.” Yeah, you see, he was like a galley slave, always working. He also worked at the market, selling fruit and vegetables. And that sort of business is, well, how to put it... It brings profit, of course, but a lot of it just goes to waste, has gone to waste over the years. And he was so honest, so fair in his dealings that he would always admit right away:

RUSTEM SHEIKHALIEV. See, this one was damaged by frost, it’s no good.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. He also had a routine: he would wake up at 5 AM, pray Namaz and go to work till, like, 7 or 7:30 PM. Especially since the Russian temporary occupation there has been so much traffic and the drive took forever. He would come at 7-7:30 PM and I would

wonder, “Why do you even come here, you are leaving early anyways... have your dinner at least, you see, we can’t even go out like normal people...”

Somebody finally turns the TV off and Suria continues with a softer voice.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. When we moved here in 2016, there were only three fully furnished areas, like, the kitchen, the living room and the bathroom, and that was it. We had nothing beside that. With the three kids. You know, when he was installing the doors... he paid for everything here, with his own hard-earned money, so when the children would slam the doors he would almost jump from nervousness, and cry “A-a!”

RUSTEM SHEIKHALIEV. (*gives a shriek from fear, as if catching air*): A-a! Careful, be careful!

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. We moved here in 2016, now it’s 2020, so he had only lived here for, like, how long? Three years, right? It’s been a year and a half since he was taken. Three years... He even says these days:

RUSTEM SHEIKHALIEV. I haven’t had the time to enjoy my own home...

SINGER (ALIE ARIFMEMETOVA):

when

I

got married the first thing

I noticed was

the forest

around me.

and every single day I told my husband one day to the one side, the next to the other, then other still

then
early
in the morning when the children were asleep and even
before we even had any children
we went there I don't
know
how to call it
well Osman called it a "balcony"
we went
opened the window
watched
the sunrise had coffee
the usual sunrise the usual coffee the husband is sitting
next to you just like that
you talk
then
he used to be beyond happy when I prepared buckwheat
porridge
why after all
no reason I just like it
that's why it was no big deal for me to treat him with a
meal
the usual buckwheat saved the day

MUMINE SALIEVA. He told me that his wife had to sing
beautifully. And then, when I sang to him, it was literally,
like, a week before he was arrested, he told me:

SEIRAN SALIEV You know, your voice is probably one of a kind. I would expect such a pleasant voice as yours to be matched only by that of the Prophet himself, but considering no one has ever heard him, yours must be the most beautiful.

MUMINE SALIEVA. And I thought to myself, “Well, now I’ve lived up to the second part of the promise.”

AISHE stands up and turns the “Photon” on yet again. This time, Russian TV is on, one can see the opening credits of the late-night bedtime story.

SINGER dims the light and goes on to speak in a mysterious tone:

SINGER. And now, my dear children, I am about to tell you... a Russian folk tale called “Satqın,” which means “corrupt” in God knows what language. In fact, it is not even a tale, but I’d rather not mention it just before bedtime.

I am referring to the case of the second Bakhchysarai group. The would-be accused were at the Mosque, among them there was a Latvian. He later reported that he had converted to Islam — some time before the events in question. By the time he entered the mosque he was loaded with recording devices. Now, he entered the mosque and recorded everybody. Actually, he himself gives comments.

They later used him as a secret witness, when they made up all that nonsense... This is the kind of nonsense you cannot disprove, because the judges refuse any questions that might expose his lies. They justify it by pointing out that such questioning might reveal his identity and compromise his safety. As a result, he can tell all kinds of lies and refuse to answer specific questions on the pretence of “not remembering.”

As a matter of fact, he has trouble with his Crimean residence registration, and the story goes that he is charged with a criminal offence back in Latvia. This allows the security services to keep him on the hook. We know his name, his personal data. Actually, the man is quite well-known in Bakhchysarai, and everybody prefers to avoid him like a leper. However, mind you, there were no threats or actual cases of physical violence against him.

And all these secret witnesses... Like, they move on from one case to the next. Take, for example, the person I've just told you about, he has already been involved in four Bakhchysarai cases as a secret witness, you know, the one who recorded the evidence and so on.

And now, my dear children, I will tell you how expert reports get faked:

Lets say, a group of Crimean Tatars is just sitting there and discussing something. Then one of them says, "I am going to do Namaz." Namaz is a prayer that should be done at a specific time of the day.

So he says, "I am going to do Namaz," literally meaning that he is about to pray. And yet the expert transcribes the sentence as "I am going to join Hamaz," namely, to join the ranks of a known terrorist group — you get the picture.

There was another case. We were sitting there, discussing the topic of love to God, and one of the participants asked, "Does anyone have any questions?." The "expert" turns it into "The enemy will be left in pieces" and so on. You see, "anyone" is miraculously transformed into "enemy." They are not subtle, they feel free to add their own words. And it happens all the time. Nonetheless, every single expert report was accepted by the court as solid valid evidence...

ДВЕРИ НЕ ПРИСЛОНЯТЬСЯ





ARRESTS

It's 5 am, everybody's asleep. All of a sudden, somebody starts banging on the door, the alarm goes off, etc.

SUBTITLES 5

Remzi Bekirov, born 1985 in Bekabad, Republic of Uzbekistan.

Moved back to Crimea with his parents in 1992, at the age of 7.

In 2002 he became a student of Taurida Vernadskyi University, Department of History. Remzi never pursued his chosen profession, as the teacher's salary turned out to be nothing to speak of. To make matters worse, the Russian temporary occupation made the teaching of "old," "orthodox" history literally impossible. He worked in construction instead.

In 2011 he married Khalide, the couple has three children.

In 2015 Remzi became a citizen journalist. He recorded footage of all the "high-impact" cases of the peninsula: the case of Veciye Qaşqa, the search in Kamianka, the searches in the "case" of Hizb ut-Tahrir.

His wife Khalide says: "during every search he was there, there are even pictures of his head sticking out from the crowd, with a phone in his hand".

On March 28th, 2019, Remzi Bekirov was arrested by the Russian security forces. He is connected to the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir and is charged with terrorism. He is facing from 15 to 20 years in prison.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. I was raised up by the car alarm suddenly going off. It was our car, the time was 5:55 am. I looked out of the window but didn't see anyone. I went

to the bathroom, and when I came back to the living room it was lit with bright searchlights from the window. And set against the searchlights, I could see the shadows of the men running, right here, on the drapes. Just like that, shadows running and running and running, and I was terrified at the thought of how many of them there must have been outside, and yet the running didn't seem to stop.

At that point I would normally wear a dress to bed, because we had been ready for something of the sort for a year and a half, for almost two years. Many of us, I mean the wives, would wear dresses to bed. Because that would be most dreadful, you see, if they had broken into the window, like, had broken the glass, gotten inside and seen us, for example, undressed.

And then I heard someone banging on the window. A dreadful sound. Because, you know, if you are not quick enough to open within seconds, they usually break the door down. Thank God, at that very moment my father got himself together and managed to let them in just in time, so the door was left intact.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. We heard somebody coming up the stairs, they were coming for us as well. Well, we are talking, like, 15 people, of course, one would hear such a crowd. And Tymur said:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. They are coming for us as well.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. So that morning there was a knock at the door. While he was on his way to the door, putting his shirt on along the way, I told him to hurry up, "Open it or they will break it... break down the door" — and, of course, that very second they began threatening us, they told us they would break the door in no time. Surely, he got the door quickly, let them in, and when they entered they saw how massive he

actually was... You know, the first thing they normally do upon breaking in is they punch you and force you to the ground, and yet there they were, standing and staring at him, until one of them said:

THEY. We won't get physical if you promise to play nice, okay?

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. Sure thing, very nice.

AISHE ASANOVA. They broke the door with a crowbar and before I could even raise my head I could already hear them upstairs shouting to my husband, "Down! Hands behind the back!" All that dreadful shouting woke up the children, they came out of the rooms and, well, saw their father lying on the ground, handcuffed.

I got dressed, joined them, and saw the following picture: the children were just standing there in tears while these men were holding their father on the ground and pointing guns at him. Like, of course, I got outraged:

"Now, get him up, are you blind? Don't you see how you are frightening the children? He is their father, the best father, and you dare to do... such things to him, make him suffer in front of them, make them suffer, because they have to watch it all."

RUSTEM SHEIKHALIEV. I wasn't afraid for myself that much in the first place, rather I was afraid they would break the door and the windows because then, well, how on earth were we supposed to fix them? Mind you, it was March out there, like, it was really cold. So I was in such a hurry to get the door largely so that they wouldn't force themselves in.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. By the time he went out they had already been standing there armed with rifles, and one of them shouted, "Hands behind the head!" the other screamed, "Hands in front of you!" the other

still commanded, “Hit the ground!” He kept calm and tried to reason with them, like, “Hey, wait a minute, guys, make up your minds, what is it exactly that I am supposed to do?” and they backed down, replying, “Alright, okay, we get it, you are reasonable, we won’t get physical, we’ll keep it down, just let us in.”

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. I ran to my parents straight away, woke them up, and then I ran to the bedroom to wake Server up. Server woke up. And, mind you, what a heavy sleeper he normally is! And yet, when I told him we had visitors, oh, you must have seen his face. Even though, like, he has always presented the image of courage, yeah, he was like that, very brave. But even though he had this moment of weakness, well, it’s hard to put into words, but, I guess, it happens to everybody: the moment of terror and trembling.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. First of all, we could call anybody to tell what was happening, they took our phones away. They followed their instructions, saying, “Don’t make a fuss about it, keep quiet, keep it together,” and they didn’t pause to take their shoes off and just went on to turn the place upside down, searching everything, messing with our things, looking for something... And at that point... how do I put it, well, my mom fainted, and at that moment their indifference and cold blood really showed and one of them commented, “Oh, look, now they are clowning around.” They knew of no mercy or compassion, I guess. And I slowly began to panic... I ran to fetch some ammonia, shouting on the way, “Open your eyes! Don’t you see she’s unwell?” And then, I suppose, it finally came to them, like, that a woman, an elderly woman still might faint. They later called the ambulance and all that, but at first they didn’t seem bothered.

They asked us to move to the parents' part of the house and later they brought Ruslan here, and I even asked them to allow me to stay, to witness the search in case they would attempt to place incriminating evidence somewhere... And that's what they eventually did, although they chose the other part of the house, where the parents lived, they planted, well, they "found" the books there, under the gas tank. And then we challenged them, like, "You know, actually our parents live here," but they didn't care, "See, you've been caught, Ruslan," and retrieved the books... They play, how do I put it... their own game, according to a script, yeah, just like that.

MUMINE SALIEVA. Thank God, I was at home.

On Wednesday morning they came to search our place. I was glad to be there at home at the moment. I thought to myself, like, what would happen if we had stayed in hospital for a few more days? Just before the arrest, Safieka and I had spent some time in hospital, she suffered from otitis.

We were discharged from the hospital on Tuesday evening and, well, we arrived home and I left all the bags standing in the hall unpacked, a lot of them, we had been away for about a week and a half. Just like that, packages, duffle bags... I thought I would unpack our things the next day. Yeah, the next day, namely, on Wednesday.

And yet I am so glad to have been at home. Because I know how much it mattered to him, how much it mattered that I was able to see him off. That I was, so to say, "there" at the moment. When he was already about to leave, I told him: it'll be okay. It's gonna be alright, I am telling you, don't worry.

SUBTITLES 6

Server Mustafaiev was born in 1986 in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The family soon moved back to Crimea, to Bakhchysarai.

In 2002 Server graduated from high school and became a student of Bakhchysarai building-trade college at the National Agricultural University.

In 2006 he graduated from college with honours (Associate's degree in Operating Gas Supply Equipment and Systems).

In the years 2006-2012 he used to work as a salesman and later as a manager in mobile phone outlets. Since 2014 and until 2018 he had been a controlling co-owner of the "Dolche" bakery chain.

In the years 2006-2012 he had also been studying at Kyiv National University and received a Master's degree in Heat and Gas Supply and Ventilation.

In 2009 Server got married to Maie. They have four children.

He was actively engaged in civil activism in Bakhchysarai. He would help organise children's parties, public events, and provide support to low-income families.

In 2014 he was one of the originators of the "Crimean Solidarity" movement, and has been its coordinator ever since. The movement focuses on providing legal aid, financial support and information to the families of Crimean political prisoners and of all those Crimean Tatars, who were kidnapped or went missing.

On May 21st, 2018 at about 7 AM the Russian occupation officials began searching his house and the search took

about three hours. They retrieved several papers and electronic devices. Server Mustafaiev was not allowed to contact his lawyer during the search and was arrested immediately afterwards.

As a result of the closed hearing, the Kyiv District Court decided to detain Server on the charges of his “Involvement in a Terrorist Group” according to Article 205.5.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

He was eventually sentenced by the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don to spend 14 years in prison. The verdict has not as of now taken effect as the appeal is still being considered.

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. We had just had our child back then, she was 3,5 months old. And at 6 AM, yeah, at 6 AM, or rather 5:55 AM, we heard some knocking, well, rather there was some noise. It was, like, really loud. I went out of my room, you know, we had a hall and in the hall there was a glass door. And I saw some shadow figures behind the door. Just like that! I saw those shadow figures behind the door and I knew they came for us. And a strange thought crossed my mind, I thought, “Well, it’s Ramadan, how could they come at such a time? And even worse — on Monday”.

The investigator made himself comfortable in the kitchen.

And, well, he was sitting there, you know, his appearance was, so to say, dark. And I turned to him, saying, “You know, you really look like a Crimean Tatar”.

INVESTIGATOR. I am not Crimean Tatar!

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. You know, with such petty disdain. And I repeated that, well, “You just look like that.” He was silent for a while, sitting there... And then

I come to the window and open the curtain, you know, our window faces the street, the road. And I come and open the curtain, imagine, just like that, to have a look at the street. And he says to me:

INVESTIGATOR. Close the curtains!

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. And I wonder, “Now, what’s wrong?”

INVESTIGATOR. We don’t need to draw unnecessary attention, like, from people.

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. And I object that, like, is it forbidden, don’t I have a right to look outside. “Have a look for yourself, see how many people have gathered, yeah, it must be the talk of the town, namely, that you came to us.”

INVESTIGATOR. Close the curtains!

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. What a nerve! Of course, they rummaged through every room and examined every scrap of paper. Those with the word “Muslim” on them or some phrases from Quran were of utmost importance, so they studied them meticulously, one by one...

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. The children were woken up by all the clamour of the officers, they were yelling and screaming and cursing all over the place. The boys took it more or less calmly and to no surprise, cause I had been preparing them for that day for a year at least. I would tell them that if it ever happened that armed masked men broke into our home, they didn’t need to fear them in the least, as those men were little more than cowards.

However, the younger daughter, five years of age at the time, or even four, obviously got frightened. Imagine,

she was still half-asleep, she barely opened her eyes and had to witness all that: strange men with rifles, wearing kirza boots. And mind you, it was spring, so there was dirt all over them. To make matters worse, some of them had skulls printed on the face masks, quite literally, the upper and lower jawbone printed in detail. And I insisted, I kept asking them to take them off, as if it were not obvious that it was further scaring the poor children. To no effect, no, they kept them on till the very end.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. As to our eldest son, his room was the nearest, which is why they probably thought it was our bedroom and, like, began sneaking around, flashing their torches — of course the boy got scared. Well, yes, he is a grownup boy, but still, he got frightened to death, ran to us and said, “The robbers broke in.”

And the boy was quite literally right: those were actual robbers, who robbed our family of the nearest and dearest person, of the man who took care of us...

AISHE ASANOVA. The children have rabbits, they are kept outside. You’d ask why? Well, one of the sons just said one day, “I want a rabbit,” and right off the bat Suleiman bought two rabbits, the cages, all the necessary stuff, arranged everything, you know, he reasoned, it would teach the children to love animals and to take care about somebody from early on.

And these men, I remember, were sniffing around, looking for something... like, they even set the rabbits free so that they could rummage the cages, God knows what they expected to find there... And I remember, the children kept crying because they couldn’t catch them, the rabbits, imagine, they couldn’t catch them for three whole days to put them back into the cage.

ZULFIE SHEIKHALIEVA (*daughter*). I remember, the

man told us...

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. Oh, yeah, there was one, he tried playing the nice cop, while another one never let us go, so we were sitting there, you see, and that nice one told her, “Hey, don’t be afraid... nothing bad’s going on, it’s all good, all good.” And she... she replied, “What’s good about it? You came, that by itself means nothing good is happening.”

ZULFIE SHEIKHALIEVA. That gigantic man sat on a chair with his gi-iagantic rifle. He didn’t let go of us. I had no idea there were people outside, I thought nobody knew, so when I was finally let outside I was surprised to see so many people, they were standing there, shouting... All the neighbours gathered, some people I’d never seen before, well, everybody.

ALL WOMEN TOGETHER, AS IF IT WERE A SPELL:
Every burden brings alleviation.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Fifteen people entered at once, they showed the warrant straight away, which said... well, namely, that he was facing from 20 years to a life sentence in prison. And so they began searching the living room here, examined our computer top to bottom, then took his phone and afterwards they slowly, step by step, moved to the hall, the kitchen, rummaged through the freezer of all things, the microwave, they got their hands on every mug, every bowl... When asked what on earth it was they were looking for, they said it was about literature, weapons and so on... When they finally reached the bedroom, they turned their attention to the children’s backpacks, investigating every page of the record books, the notebooks, inquiring about the different stampings, and I had to explain, “Well, you see, they attend different schools, the boy goes to school N^o 4 and the girls go to N^o5,” and so one.

INVESTIGATOR. Aren't the children supposed to be leaving for school? You usually send them to school at this hour, right? Indeed, your daughters get there on their own.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. And it so happened that he looked through her record book and said:

INVESTIGATOR. So what, your daughter is an A-student, isn't she?

INVESTIGATOR turns to the children:

INVESTIGATOR. What study groups did you attend?

CHILD. Gymnastics.

INVESTIGATOR. Any others? You study Arabic, don't you?

CHILD. Yes.

INVESTIGATOR. Do you like gymnastics?

CHILD 2. I have one Arabic class. The one where we study Sīrah[1] ...

INVESTIGATOR. Could you perhaps tell us more about the difference? Just in case somebody doesn't know what it all means.

CHILD. Well, we study Sīrah, we learn about the different prophets, their deeds, for example, their dominions. And with Ibrahim-odzha we read the Sīrah, correct the mistakes...

INVESTIGATOR. What struck you the most?

CHILD. The lives of the prophets...

INVESTIGATOR. You don't remember? What about you? Who's your favourite prophet?

CHILD 2. My favourite prophet is Suleiman.

INVESTIGATOR. Hm, Suleiman. And why is that so?

CHILD 2. Because he loves animals.

INVESTIGATOR. Loves animals...

CHILD. As a matter of fact, I like Muhammad, because he was truthful, that's why they called him Al Amin.

INVESTIGATOR. And what kind of animals do you like?

CHILD 2. Tigers.

INVESTIGATOR. Tigers? Is that because they are strong? Or because of their luscious fur?

CHILD. And I like rabbits, they are cute and fluffy.

INVESTIGATOR. They are also very fast runners.

CHILD. Yes, and very high jumpers.

INVESTIGATOR. High jumpers, indeed. Now, do you like school? What's your favourite subject?

CHILD. Maths, we've got the kindest teacher.

INVESTIGATOR. Oh, I see, you prefer kind teachers. And what else do you like?

CHILD. Russian as well! And literature, we've got Russian literature...

CHILD 2. I like all the subjects. I am the best at tables in my class.

INVESTIGATOR. Oh, you are, aren't you?

CHILD 2. Yes, we had this game once, where we had to give an answer in 2 seconds... In short, everybody else failed and I won.

INVESTIGATOR. Wow, you've beaten them all?

CHILD 2. Well, we are A-students.

INVESTIGATOR. I see, yeah, I can see that you're

A-students, right... And what about PE? You like it?

CHILD. Yes, playing the ball...

INVESTIGATOR. Soccer, you like soccer! Come on, a girl who likes soccer! How so?

CHILD. We girls sometimes go play on the field against the boys, as a team.

INVESTIGATOR. And who wins? Girls again?

CHILD 2. Depends. If there are no older boys, then yes, we win, against them, however, we lose.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. They went on to empty the bags and scattered the toys around on the floor, and I wondered, "Now, what do you expect to find there? Inside the toys?" And they said:

THEY. What if you hid something inside, who knows, what if you thought we wouldn't check there?

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. Well, they didn't make a complete mess, didn't check everything. Like, back home, they didn't scatter the things all over the place, made no attempt to plant something, just took those books over there and, well, he also had that CD... He had performed Hajj twice, and he kept all the pictures on that CD. Well, there were also these two books, namely, "The History of the Prophets" and "The Meadows of the Righteous," and it was, namely, all about these, they are sort of considered extremist materials and, that said, illegal. Just like that

INVESTIGATOR. Close the curtains!

EXCERPTS FROM THE "EXTREMIST" LITERATURE DISPLAYED ON THE CURTAINS:

The true justice of the Quran would never sacrifice the life of a single innocent for the sake of the entire

humanity. In terms of courage as well as in the eyes of Justice, people are equal among themselves. Self-love may drive a human being to destroy everything that stands in the way of his ambition; so that he would destroy the entire world with all people if only he had the means to it. Fear and weakness increase the outward influence. Actual good can never be sacrificed for the sake of imagined evil.

Civilisation, brought and ordered by the Sharia of Ahmad (peace and blessings be upon him) is the following: it is founded not by force, but by truth, its causes are justice and balance. Its goal is not profit, but virtue, which leads to fellowship and amity.

Its point of unity is not nationalism, but instead the religious, local and class bond, which leads to global fraternity, peaceful coexistence and the most necessary defence against foreign invaders. Its law of life is not that of struggle, but that of mutual aid, which gives rise to unity and solidarity. It substitutes fancy with the path of truth, which brings humanity towards progress and spiritual growth.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. The attesting witnesses were kept in the doorway, just standing. I turned to them and asked, “You are witnesses, right, you are supposed to witness something, aren’t you? Now, look, the officer might plant something during the search, right now, and you won’t take any notice of it.” After that the inspector says:

INSPECTOR. Come in here, please.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Namely, at that moment, it suddenly struck him that he had overlooked that aspect. It was after had already moved to the balcony that

Tymur, standing in the kitchen, said:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. I need to call my lawyer.

INVESTIGATOR. Well, I don't see your lawyer here at the gate, so what's the point? Like, if he were here, very well, we'd even let him in. Now, take it easy, call whoever you want. I couldn't care less.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. And so he called Emil Kurbedinov, who told Tymur:

EMIL KURBEDINOV. If nothing was retrieved, like, if they found nothing, you can sign it without problems.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. That is to say, if nothing is added. So he signed the paper, and, you see, there, on the balcony, there was one of the offices with a good view point onto the street, the road, he had a hidden camera on him and kept trying to capture the people on the street from the curtain, namely, who, how many, etc. And they kept whispering among themselves, like, so-and-so many people, such-and-such a car arrived and whatnot. Eventually the investigator snapped at him:

INVESTIGATOR. Get lost, you hear me, keep it low, you don't want to get noticed and have people talk, do you?

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. And that's how it went...

Besides, when the investigator was finishing the search record, the rest of the bunch made themselves comfortable on the couch, right here, and were playing on their phones. Just like that, sitting and enjoying themselves.

The investigator stood up and turned the "Photon" on. Russian KVN is airing, and the Crimean team is on stage. The Federal Security officers ease up and begin to laugh.

"PHOTON":

— Good evening. Today Crimea officially decided to rejoin the Major League as 98% of the team members voted in favour of it.

— Wait, now, when did we vote?

— Well, the vote hasn't taken place yet, we only know the results.

— Oh...

What sort of game is KVN anyway? One has more chances to make it into the subjects of the Russian Federation, than into the final.

[Song]

PUTIN (*actor playing Putin*): Hullo. Hi, my dear Crimeans. Alim, Rustik... Andron, Anton, Sasha, Enchik. Hi, my dear jury. Hi, my dear viewers. Everybody here loves KVN. So do I. I remember back in my student days we wouldn't miss a single episode. We wrote down literally every joke. Yeah, it was our homework, so to say.

Well, Crimeans, how can I help you, after all?

CRIMEANS: [*uncomfortably*] We're good, thanks.

PUTIN: What do I hear? Come on, I am here because of you.

CRIMEANS: Actually, come to think of it, it's rather we are here because of you.

PUTIN: Funny thing, yeah. But you do have some kind of dream, don't you?

CRIMEANS: Well, we dream of making it to the Final, but we'll do just fine without your favours.

PUTIN: Now that's the way to go! Dear jury, have you

heard them? Crimea has to make it to the Final, but without my favours, is that understood? Will you see to it? Americans have failed before. Alright. See ya. Happy birthday, KVN!

DILIARA stands up and turns the TV off.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. There was no real hostility, no, toward the end the investigator himself came up to me and said:

INVESTIGATOR. Go pack him some food and water, sandwiches or whatnot, all the necessary things, comfortable clothes, because he is not coming back soon. No, he is not coming back, mind you, so he'll need some food, water, etc. It's very important.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. I packed him sandwiches, a bottle of water, a change of clothes, even slippers... But they didn't take it, the package, they just left it. Just like that, and when they were walking him out (I myself had forgotten about the package by then)... Some days later we managed to send it over, after all. However, he told me during the visit they had actually had a proper meal at the detention centre. Surprisingly enough, they were offered tandoori samsa, and he said, "Meat elial, the agents immediately said 'elial,'" namely, 'it's nothing, don't worry'. They also gave them some water and, well, that was all there was to it.

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. I've been happy with you. Like, we've lived together for all these years, and I have no bone to pick, no.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. You see, the truth is, we have no idea, if it's the end or just the beginning, or... In such moments one cannot tell for sure, and what is left for a wife? All she wants to hear is her husband's razlikh, those crucial words.

MUMINE SALIEVA. It came to me that the only possible way to more or less maintain one's health in those circumstances would be to work out. So I said to him, "Hey, don't forget to exercise." And he said, "Okay." He was about to leave, when I added, "If something was wrong, you know, like, ever, I am very sorry, forgive me," but he replied, "What are you talking about? I am happy with you."

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. When mother asked to let her say goodbye to her own son, they assured her, "Yes, yes, of course, you'll have time for that," but then, after the search, they were all leaving when I came here, hoping to see Ruslan, that they would somehow bring him to us, you know, one last time... We missed the moment he was gone, had no idea when or where, and one of the officers told me, "They must have already taken him by now, the investigation goes on."

LEMARA MEMEDEMINOVA. The little ones cried their eyes out. But then again, you see, it was the second search, I suppose, they must have expected him to come back... The scene would repeat itself again and again: every time the door opened, they would run to have a look... it lasted several months, that thing with the door... Even when someone came for a visit, like, relatives, I would always tell them to be quiet, "Don't make any noise, otherwise the children will take off running."

ZULFIE SHEIKHALIEVA. He told me he loved me and also ordered me not to cry. (*the voice is soft and trembling*) Yeah, he would always bring me dolls, sweets, you know, these very pretty L.O.L. dolls, he would always bring them. He also brought home a cake every Friday, either a raspberry or a caramel one... Or he would buy my favourite cakes. Eclairs.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. Our eldest son remained calm throughout the whole thing, it was only later, after the search, that he seemed, like, hostile, or rather nervous... He later said, “They took him away, and with babaka they took away all our joy.”

ALL WOMEN TOGETHER, AS IF IT WERE A SPELL:
Every burden brings alleviation.

NARIMAN MEMEDEMNOV. I ran to the door, wanted to get it, so that they wouldn't break in with force, wouldn't break the door, so I reached the door and yelled, “Don't break in, I'll open it.” But the door didn't give in, you see, the lock must have suffered damage already, when they tried to break it and, well... I could hear them cursing like crazy... in reply. They wrenched the door, got inside, threw me on the ground, handcuffed — and that was it. The rest of it went smoothly, nobody raised hell, it was all civilised... Let's say, they were, like, really insistent about the warrant, the search and so on. They spent a lot of time just writing things down, namely, there wasn't much actual searching going on. And at long last they rejoiced, no, that's the wrong word... they triumphed. They found my Ukrainian passport, right here, on the shelf.

SINGER (SURIA): And when they took him away... I...
it was as if I knew that he was leaving,
but at the same time knew, that it all wouldn't last,
it would be over and he would be back, yes,
it could not last long, no, not that long,
that long is could not possibly last,
so when they asked me to bid him farewell, I refused:
“We won't say farewells, you will be back.”

And when the next morning
I was collecting things, because he left
with empty hands, I gave him nothing,
they told me, “Get his things!
Only necessities!” I refused:
“I won’t, I won’t get him anything,
I won’t, he’ll come back, he is about to be back” —
and I was so sure, it couldn’t be true, no...
it could not possibly have happened.
And when they were walking him, imagine,
I didn’t cry, I haven’t shed a tear, no,
only after they drove him away could I break down into
tears, because I was attached, I was attached to him that
much.
ALL WOMEN TOGETHER, AS IF IT WERE A SPELL:
Every burden brings alleviation.

SUBTITLES

The case of Hizb ut-Tahrir

The 1st Sevastopol group

Ruslan Zeitullaiev — arrested on January 23rd, 2015

Rustem Vaitov — arrested on January 23rd, 2015

Nuri Prymov — arrested on January 23rd, 2015

Ferat Seifullaiev — arrested on April 2nd, 2015

Yalta group

Muslim Aliev — arrested on February 11th, 2016

Emir-Usein Kuku — arrested on February 11th, 2016

Vadym Siruk — arrested on February 11th, 2016

Inver Bekirov — arrested on February 11th, 2016

Refat Alimov — arrested on April 18th, 2016

Arsen Dzhepparov — arrested on April 18th, 2016

1st Bakhchysarai group

Enver Mamutov — arrested on May 12th, 2016

Rustem Abiltarov — arrested on May 12th, 2016

Zevri Abseitov — arrested on May 12th, 2016

Remzi Memetov — arrested on May 12th, 2016

1st Simferopol group

Teimur Abdullaiev — arrested on October 12th, 2016

Uzeir Abdullaiev — arrested on October 12th, 2016

Emil Dzemadenov — arrested on October 12th, 2016

Rustem Ismailov — arrested on October 12th, 2016

Aider Saledinov — arrested on October 12th, 2016

2nd Simferopol group

Enver Ametov — arrested on March 27th, 2019

Tofik Abdulhaziev — arrested on March 27th, 2019

Seitveli Seitabdiev — arrested on March 27th, 2019

Rustem Seitkhalilov — arrested on March 27th, 2019

Akim Bekirov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Farkhod Bazarov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Server Gaziev — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Seiran Murtaza — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Riza Izetov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Erfan Osmanov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Ruslan Suleimanov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Rustem Sheikhaliev — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Alim Karimov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Medzhyt Abdurakhmanov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Yashar Muiedinov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Bilial Adilov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Dzhemil Hafarov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Izzet Abdullaiev — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Asan Yanikov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Shaban Umerov — arrested on March 27th, 2019
Osman Arifmemetov — arrested on March 28th, 2019
Remzi Bekirov — arrested on March 28th, 2019
Vladlen Abdulkadyrov — arrested on March 28th, 2019
Raim Aivazov — arrested on March 28th, 2019
Eskender Suleimanov — arrested on June 10th, 2019

Alushta group
Ruslan Nagaiev — arrested on June 10th, 2019
Eldar Kantemirov — arrested on June 10th, 2019

Ruslan Mesutov — arrested on June 10th, 2019

Lenur Khalilov — arrested on June 10th, 2019

2nd Bakhchysarai group

Suleiman Asanov — arrested on October 11th, 2017

Seiran Saliev — arrested on October 11th, 2017

Tymur Ibrahimov — arrested on October 11th, 2017

Server Zekiriaiev — arrested on October 11th, 2017

Ernes Ametov — arrested on October 11th, 2017

Memet Belialov — arrested on October 11th, 2017

Server Mustafaiev — arrested on May 21st, 2018

Edem Smailov — arrested on May 21st, 2018

Ali (Oleg) Fedorov — arrested on February 17th, 2021

Ernest Ibrahimov — arrested on February 17th, 2021

2nd Sevastopol group

Enver Seitosmanov — arrested on May 10th, 2018

Chervonohvardiysk group

Eskender Abdulhaliev — arrested on February 14th, 2019

Rustem Emiruseinov — arrested on February 14th, 2019

Arsen Abhairov — arrested on February 14th, 2019

3rd Bakhchysarai group

Osman Seitumerov — arrested on March 11th, 2020

Seitumer Seitumerov — arrested on March 11th, 2020

(he is de facto free, as he left Crimea just in time and stays in Kyiv, de jure, however, he is wanted by occupation authorities in Crimea)

Rustem Seitmemetov — arrested on March 11th, 2020

Amet Suliemanov — arrested on March 11th, 2020
(home detention)

4th Bakhchysarai group

Oleksandr Sizikov — arrested on July 7th, 2020 (home detention)

Seiran Khairedinov — arrested on July 7th, 2020

Alim Sufianov — arrested on July 7th, 2020





COURTS
AND
PRISONS

SUBTITLES 7

Suleiman Asanov, born 1977 in Bekabad, Republic of Uzbekistan.

Moved back to Crimea with his parents in the 1980s.

His birth name was Marlen (Marx + Lenin), but he changed it later.

He got a degree in Turkish and Crimean Tatar Philology to become a teacher.

In 1999-2003, he taught the Crimean Tatar language and literature in Holubynka high school. During his classes, he would use illustrative examples from Crimean Tatar history.

In 2002 he was named the “Teacher of the Year.” It was the same year he married Aishe. The couple has four children.

Suleiman Asanov founded a caravanserai “Salaçıq” in Bakhchysarai — a cultural-ethnographic leisure centre, for travelers and visitors.

Since the Russian temporary occupation of Crimea, he has actively supported the families of the political prisoners. He attended all the politically charged trials. Besides, he published numerous videos of the searches on his YouTube channel.

On October 12th, 2017, Suleiman Asanov's house was searched, followed by his arrest on the charges of involvement in terrorist activity.

On September 16th, 2020, Suleiman was sentenced to 19 years in a high-security prison. The defence has filed an appeal.

AISHE ASANOVA. I was there to hear the verdict. To

tell the truth, I couldn't hear the whole speech out, I mean, the closing lines. I kept trying to catch Suleiman's eye in that bloody fish tank, I mean, I even got a stitch in my leg, I could not tell why, but, indeed, I must have been trying to stand on my tiptoes, to get up higher. To have a glimpse of him behind all those men, what do you call them, like, escort?

... When the prosecutor demanded 20 years for him, I prepared myself for the worst: right, 20 years, no less. The thought lingered in my mind, it cannot possibly be less, there is no justice in the world, but still... I hoped for God's mercy, oh, I did... And I still hope against all hope, hope for a miracle, for a miracle from Allah. Allah will turn the clock back and we'll wake up, just as we did back in 2014, because, actually, we've done nothing — just woke up in another reality, it all happened at the drop of a hat... So maybe, just maybe, it will happen once again, they will let them go, as if all of it were a dream as if Russians were never here... Because injustice... Justice must gain the upper hand, right? And injustice must disappear off the face of the earth.

He saw me cry, he knows me as the palm of his hand, like, how I am... well, (voice trembling) very vulnerable, how... (sobs) My dad always tells me, "You must have been the first in line when Allah gave away tears." (She smiles through tears, after finishing the phrase she sobs once again)

AISHE stands up and turns the "Photon" on to calm down and dry her eyes. On the screen the Crimean KVN team in Russia goes ahead with the jokes.

"Photon": Good evening. Please, give a warm welcome to our Crimean team. We are the only Russians who judge 2020 successful. According to the official numbers, 10 million Russians visited Crimea this year.

And by the way, it is the first year when the official numbers actually have some bearing on reality.

— Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

— No big deal, we are from Crimea, the viewers are on our side.

— How come you are so sure? Some of them might as well dislike us.

— Listen here, who cares if they like us, the cash keeps flowing and that's that.

— Finally, it's time to dot the i's.

— Are you out of your mind? It's been 6 years since we no longer dot the i's.

LEMARA turns the TV off.

SUBTITLES 8

Nariman Memedeminov, citizen journalist, media coordinator of "Crimean Solidarity." Born May 7th, 1983, in Leninsk, Republic of Uzbekistan.

In 1991 his family moved back to Crimea, to Frontove, Sevastopol district, where Nariman finished high school.

In 2008 he graduated from Ternopil National Economics University with a degree in International Economics.

He married Lamara in 2005, their first daughter was born in 2007. Their two sons were born in 2010 and 2014, respectively.

Since 2014 he has been actively engaged in human rights advocacy and has suffered from numerous repressions.

In 2016 his home was searched, and the security officers attempted to plant prohibited literature there.

In 2017 he was charged with holding an unauthorised rally and ordered by court to pay a fine of 20000 rubles, just because he had documented the search in the Seidamet Mustafaiev's (another activist) house in Bakhchysarai. He received numerous threats but persisted in carrying out his duty.

On March 22nd, 2018, his house in Kholmovka, Bakhchysarai district was searched. As a result, Nariman Memedeminov was arrested on the charges of violating Part Two of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Article 205.5, note — “Public Calls for Committing Terrorist Activity, Public Justification or Propaganda of Terrorism”).

He was sentenced to 2 years in prison and 6 months in a colony settlement. The sentence was passed on October 2nd, 2019.

Memedeminov served the full sentence and was released on September 21st, 2020.

LEMARA MEMEDEMINOVA. Nariman has always fascinated me during these court proceedings, as far as I remember, he would always hear out the witnesses, knew exactly what was going on, could ask tons of questions, debate them at this or that point... In short, I was sick and tired of it, you know, how could one take any of that farce seriously, let alone engage in it! Because, you know, all of it was pure madness... Nonetheless, he was adamant to prove his innocence, and this sentence, 2,5 years, well, in the end, it was a miracle. Of course, we should give credit to our lawyers, now doubt, but also to Nariman himself, as the outcome largely comes down to how you show yourself during these hearings.

AISHE ASANOVA. When I asked him about his time in prison, like, what he did there, he said, “I go for walks, we’re allowed to go out once a day.” “What do you see there during the walks?” I wondered, and he said, “Nothing. It’s all walls and large space. Tall walls.” “And the sky? Do you ever see the sky?,” and to that he replied, “Oh, the sky? I do see a little square through the bars.” He then said, “You know, yesterday I could feel the sun touch my face and I just stood there, in the sun.”

INVESTIGATOR. Close the curtains!

NARIMAN MEMEDEMNOV. A Muslim in prison... it’s harder for him, you see... because he knows he has to perform certain rituals. It is not a burden, not at all... because, well, you must have heard a common saying about our religion, like, that Islam was given to people to make their lives easier, not harder. And yet, one has to perform the rituals. Like, imagine, I have to pray with the TV on, well, what is there left for me to do? I have to either pray with it on, or escape the sound with the help of earplugs, or attempt to explain, “Hey, listen, could you please turn it off for a while?”

“PHOTON”

[The Crimean team are working a crossword puzzle]

— President before Putin...

— Hm... Let me think...

— Well, there was one.

— Yeah, he was there and then it was all over.

— Yes...

— Yanukovych!

— Exactly.

— Futuristic poet Volodymyr Volodymyrovych...

- I know nothing of the futurists, but there is one Volodymyr Volodymyrovych — Putin.
- No, see, Putin has 5 letters, we need 10.
- So what now? Write it down twice.
- Like, how? Putinputin?
- Yes.
- Is it even allowed?
- Of course, more than twice would be prohibited.

Nariman puts in the earplugs. Prays.

PRISONERS: “Oh, he’s praying. Turn the TV down, don’t you see, the man is praying. You’ll turn it back afterwards”

Somebody turns the TV down.

NARIMAN MEMEDEMINOV. Let’s say, it can be like that.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. I could only visit him about six or seven times in three years. They must suffer from, like, great information deprivation, cause their first question is always, “News, now tell me all the latest news,” and they don’t mean just neighbours, no, like, friends, relatives, marriages, births and whatnot, but, most importantly, actual information: the Ukraine-Russia negotiations, the world affairs, international politics... That whole recent deal with water in Crimea, that was also a hot topic.

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. How? What happened? Did it all dry out? What exactly?

INVESTIGATOR. Close the curtains!

NARIMAN MEMEDEMINOV. I read Homer... when

I was locked inside. Well, I don't get where all the excitement comes from, but yeah. I finally read "The Master and Margarita," but it was clear to me by the third page that it was... well, it's my personal opinion, mind you, but it was... (*about to curse*) downright sheer nonsense. Like, it's not to my taste, it eats away at you, it's just weird. Now what, that cat, I don't know, flying witches and whatnot — what the hell is that supposed to mean?

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. They literally gave us no more than five minutes, he was still in Rostov at the time. He asked all about the children, the house, the parents, all the details. And meanwhile I caught myself thinking about his hands — they were pale white. I was used to his always being outdoors, working, you know, he worked in construction, which is why his hands had always been rough, tanned. And then came the detention, first three month, then six, then nine month in a detention centre. His hands had gotten white and soft, like those of a woman, and that struck me as most unusual.

NARIMAN MEMEDEMNOV. It might sound a bit crude or perhaps too explicit... but I genuinely missed having, you know, a separate toilet. Well, I... it baffles me for some reason, I just can't make sense of it, you know, of the whole construction. The toilet in the cell is in plain view... It has no doors whatsoever. Of course, it's not like any of us wanted to put up with it: we would hang something around it, try to cover it...

And yet people are not deaf, they can hear everything. Every cell I've ever stayed in was exactly the same and it kept frustrating me. I would think to myself, "Yeah, same here," and then immediately wonder, "And what were you expecting?"

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. We've been applying for a visit for a year and a half and we've gathered a heap of written refusals by now. We have a legal right for two visits every month. They are probably still expecting them to confess their "involvement in terrorist activity". To admit that they are, indeed, terrorists. To plead guilty. If at least one of them gave in and pleaded guilty, it would give free rein to Russian security services. It would seem to finally confirm the existence of Crimean Tatar terrorists.

ALIE ARIFMEMETOVA. It was only later that I learned how violent the arrest had been, you know, how Osman was beaten up, hit over the head and eventually passed out. They managed to bring him about with some ammonia and one of them asked, "Hey, are you mad, you could have killed him," only to hear the other reply, "So what? That's still better than 20 years behind bars if you ask me." At that point I wondered if there was anything human left in these men.

AMET SULEIMANOV. That's right, FSS, well, those who work for it, don't seem to have a heart at all. They are machines. Like, we can have different thoughts, disagreements about one and the same thing, while they are merely brainwashed. They have an algorithm to follow and that's it. Like, okay, I see how it all comes from training. But what is human life to these men, what are numerous lives, prison sentences and so on? Nothing. In their eyes these things count for nothing.

LAWYER. Oh, Amet, and remember how he came to you after the search to say sorry?

AMET SULEIMANOV. I suppose it was all a trick to get a sample of my voice. There's nothing human about them, literally nothing. And even if by sheer accident something is left, it gets squeezed out by routine.

Take one example: every single week, sometimes two or three times, locals from the FSIN (Federal Penitentiary Service) pay me a visit. Early on they weren't all that talkative, they just checked on me, kept their distance, no dialogue ever occurred. It goes like this: they come with a camera, check if I am at home, we go on to fill in the papers, and they leave. And well, for the last couple of months, I don't know, the ice has broken or something and he felt that he could finally ease up and strike up a conversation. So he's been telling me all kinds of stuff about, like, his problems at work and whatnot. In those moments you see how they are all merely cogs in the great repressive machine, for whom there's no escape.

Let's say, there is a housing program. They give you a place after, say, 3 years of service, and after ten years of loyal service the place is finally yours. His reasoning is clear: what else can he do? He wants to get married, for all I know, have a home — so he accepts the offer. Therefore, he gets to have his own place to leave at the price of all the orders he gets to obey rigorously. On the one hand — his lovely wife and, say, two kids, who need a home, on the other — this random stranger he has to arrest and convict.

One year of service counts for two or three, so they can expect a quick retirement. In short, this is how the state keeps them by its side. It is futile to strike a conversation and expect real empathy from them, it's beyond their power. They are machines. Completely insensitive. For them, nothing matters but the order to obey and the decree to put into effect.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. It's frustrating to see, you know, read in the media, how murderers, assaulters, pedophiles get no more than 7-8 years for such severe crimes, and you know they deserve it... While in our case, they are thrown into jail for their beliefs,

convictions, for their perspective — it's absurd, we've always been told, since nursery, how important it is to defend your views, to think for yourself... And what's become of it now? You get such sentences for the simple fact that you dare speak the truth, for your own point of view, your own beliefs and your right to express them...? Why? For what? Is he a murderer? A thief? What did he stand for? Not for theft or murder, that's for sure. We've been living in this country, so what, did we not obey its laws? Did we not pay for the public services? We pay for the water, the light, the gas, we do not, have never stolen a thing, he's always paid for everything with his hard-earned money, never took a penny he didn't earn... What's become of our life these days...

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. They are perfectly aware of this farce, of course, the all get it, the fake witnesses who testified against them in court, all those lies, they were obvious, it all surfaced by the end... let's say, even the judge, even the witness himself could see what a preposterous lie it was. The judge even said:

JUDGE: I get it, these guys on trial here, they are all very nice people, good citizens and they're all innocent.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. He said it himself, the judge. When our witnesses testified, and, mind you, there were about 35-40 witnesses for each of our men, the judge didn't even hear them all out, he just said straight away...

[A child is fiddling around, cries]

JUDGE. I get it, they are all innocent, all very nice people, good citizens, but it's just not enough. That's it.

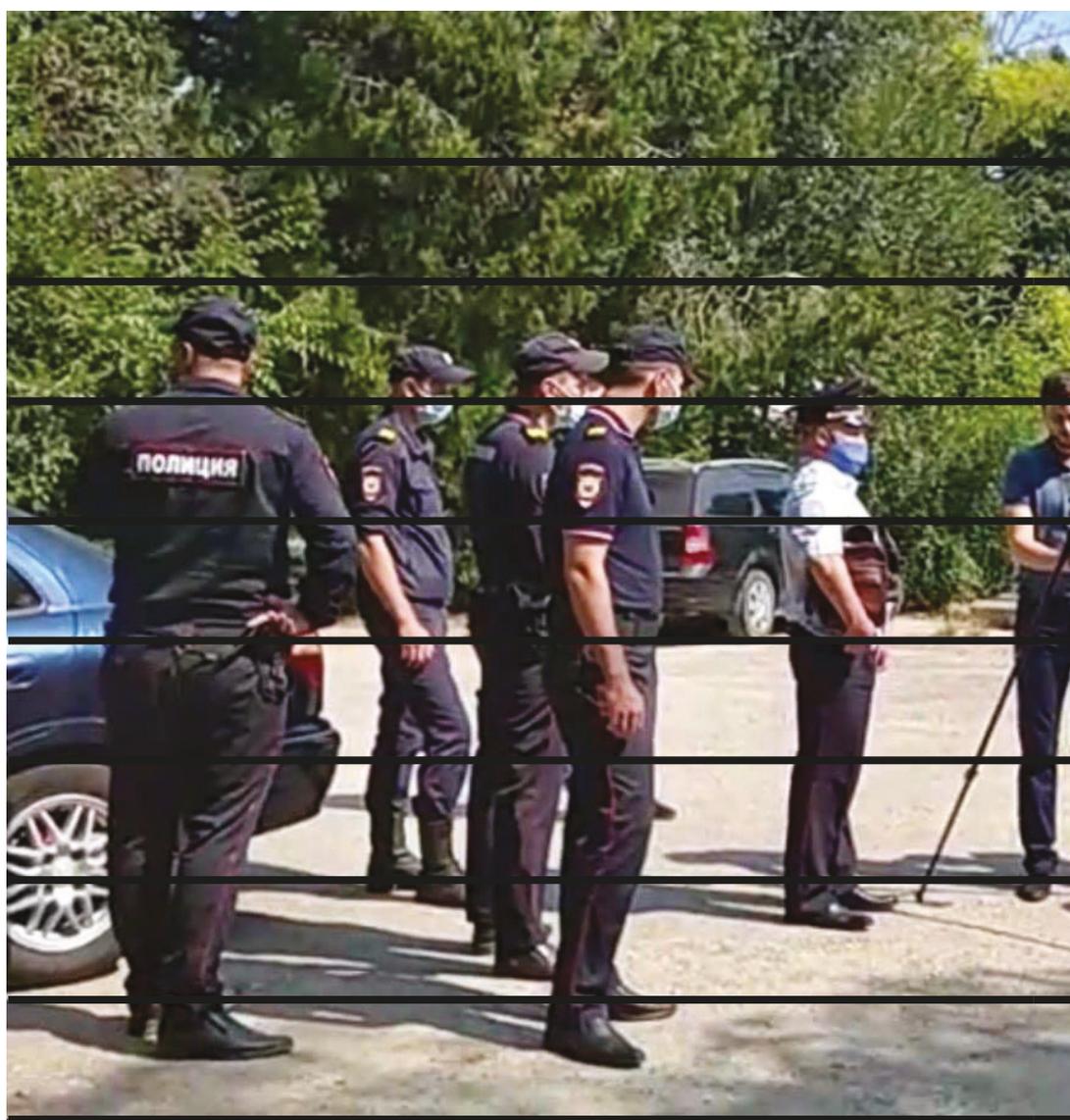
Close the curtains.

QUOTES FROM PROHIBITED LITERATURE ON THE CURTAINS:

Common trouble stems from the mistakes of the majority. Misfortune is the conclusion of a crime and the beginning of salvage.

The path of weakness commands the necessity of four things: absolute poverty, absolute weakness, absolute elation, and absolute gratitude, my dear brother!

The essence does NOT lie. The pit's tendency to grow says, "I will come up and bring fruit," which speaks the truth. An egg has a tendency to life, it says, "I will grow into a chicken," and by the grace of Allah, it speaks the truth. A handful of water says with its freezing potential, "I will take more space." Even solid iron cannot contradict it. The truth of its words shatters iron into pieces. These tendencies are manifestations of the creative voluntary commands, and are their reflections.





ACTIVISTS

ALIE ARIFMEMETOVA. He is a teacher of Mathematics and IT...

SUBTITLES 9

Osman Arifmemetov, born August 28th, 1985 in Tashkent district.

In 1990 he moved back to Bakhchysarai, Crimea, with his family and graduated from school in 2002.

In 2007 he received a degree in Mathematics at Taurida Vernadsky National University.

In 2011-2015, he worked as a software developer, maths tutor, trained children for their exams and taught them basic software skills.

Since 2015 he has been active as a citizen journalist and activist of "Crimean Solidarity", bringing light to the constant searches, investigations, court hearings. Besides, he helped send off parcels to unjustly arrested Crimean Tatars kept at the detention centre.

His three children were waiting for him at home.

Osman Arifmemetov was one of the pioneers of citizen journalism in Crimea. Two years ago, there was a time when he had to stream on the run while pursuing a blue-black-out security service minibus. In this car they kept Belial Adilov, father of eight children, who was kidnapped right after the court hearing. Both Osman and Belial Adilov are detained as a result of the mass searches, which took place on March 27th, 2019.

It was him again who took footage of the search in Tymur Ibrahimov's apartment on October 11th, 2017, where they turned the place upside down in search of religious literature. Tymur's ten year old child was there the whole time to witness it.

On March 27th, 2019, his own place was searched. On March 28th, 2019 he was sentenced to arrest until May 15th, 2019, by the Kyiv District Court on the charges of violating Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. He is facing up to 20 years in prison.

ALIE ARIFMEMETOVA. I remember he told me about one of the students. He said, “When I first came to him, it was clear that he couldn’t care less about any of it, I mean, maths, geometry or arithmetics. I had no idea how to approach him. One day I told him that we were NASA researchers for the day and we had to calculate the exact trajectory of the Martian rover. That we had to accomplish it no matter what, we had under 45 minutes and so on, otherwise the bosses would come to check the work and.... He asked, “So what, I’ll be fired?” I told him that no, not fired, but his bonus would certainly be revoked. It wasn’t my intention to overwhelm him with all the exercises straight away, I gave him a hand more often than not. All he had to do by the end was to substitute the numbers and get the correct result. Meanwhile, there were 5 minutes left and, of course, he couldn’t finish in time. So he asked, “Now there are the bosses?” And I told him, like, “Hey, they really fancied that coffee machine around the corner and stopped for a cup,” namely, that we finished just in time.”

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. Yeah, Remzi has got a degree as well, but he’s never had a chance to teach history because, well, first of all, the salary of a schoolteacher is nothing to write home about. Lunch money, honestly. He had to take a shot at construction to win some money. Besides, he would always go on about how he couldn’t teach history in the given circumstances, in a school system where historical truth is mixed with tons of lies. He told me he would lie to the faces of all those

kids just because he was instructed to present certain topics in a certain light.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. At the market... it was a very demanding job, it required a special approach to the clients, and he has attracted so many loyal customers throughout the years, parents would come with their kids, and our own kids grew before their eyes. These clients came year after year to purchase items for bottling, and he would always tell them which ones would not last the winter, could tell boiling potatoes from frying potatoes, could tell if the cabbage would do for pickling, and so on... His arrest shocked the entire market. Right before they took him away, our son came out to say goodbye, and Rustem told him, "Well, it's your turn to hold the fort, son, from now on it's your responsibility." Back then he was in his second year of college, studying merchandise. Without thinking twice he took his father's place at the market. However, he failed. As I have mentioned, my husband has a very special, individual approach, he could accommodate everyone.... "Lady, oh please, could I help you, let me give you a hand here." The younger generation is different in this respect.... They are, so to say, in a hurry.... So he keeps saying, "No hands, please, don't touch it, I've just made it look marketable, no, you will disturb it, let me give you another one," and so on... In the end, it scared everybody away. He lasted till December, and then we closed shop.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. He was passionate about photography, making videos, it was a hobby of his. His pictures were great, really high quality, many people admire them, but he... he would just reply:

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV. I merely happen to like it, that's all.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. It used to be different, until 2014, you know, back then he would make home videos, shoot the guys in the parking lot, he would also take pictures of nature, like, of the bees and butterflies on flowers, just like that. It all changed in 2015 and began making footage of what was going on in Crimea. That is, all the searches, court hearings, “Crimean Solidarity” meetings.

NARIMAN MEMEDEMNOV. Here’s an example: I went and took a video of somebody helping out a prisoner’s family, like, basic stuff, they would retake the child to the hospital, help them hang the wallpaper, fix the plumbing, send off the parcels to the detention centre and so on... And in the end, everybody involved was at risk: those who took videos, those who helped, those who did anything at all.

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. He got into human rights advocacy. He kept saying, “Sooner or later, it might happen, they will take me as well.” Especially after 2014, with the rise of those countless searches, arrests, it began to seem unavoidable. Sooner or later every single activist would be put behind bars.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. For all that, he showed no fear, he would say, “What must be, will be. You may try to escape it, but if it must be, it will catch up on you.” If I tried to suggest something, like, “Maybe we should leave as well, don’t you think? They might come for us as well,” he persisted, “Where would we go? Like, did we come back here for nothing, to leave just like that, at a whistle...”

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. We sat down once and I told him, “Server, it remains the case that, well, you can be arrested and taken away at any moment now. Listen, why don’t we leave?” And then he said, “First of all,

Crimea is our motherland, we've lived here and we will go on living here in the future. And nobody will drive us away. It's our home, right? Why do I have to leave? I am helping people, did I wrong anyone that I am now forced to leave?" It was clear to me that any discussion was pointless.

Everybody is silent for a while. Meanwhile we can be viewing photos and videos made by the Crimean Tatar activists. Finally we see a close-up of Muhammad's work ("handicraft").





PARENTS

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. Muhammad doesn't talk much, like, I used to think it was almost out of some kind of indifference or something.... But then he made this cutout. Frankly speaking, I was shocked. He told me, "See, this tree represents our family, look, here are Salahuddin, Muhammad, Khalide, Safie." "Where's dad?" I asked him, because, you know, his absence pained me. Muhammad told me, "Here, this is his shadow, but he's not in the picture?," and I wondered, "Why so, he is family after all?" And then he explained, "There, right now he is behind bars, the FSS officers form this chain here that holds him. And these here are the rest of the emdzheks kept in prisons. See, these are their own trees, their families, each one of them is lacking an apple. Like, their families are also waiting for them." By the time he finished his cutout, there were 64 of such families, and the number is growing.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. For as long as I remember, we've never had a fancy foreign car, so to say, all he had was a "Kopeika". Now, his "Kopeika" always shined like a new pin and made everybody around jealous. They would say, "Now, what a nice car!" Keeping it all clean and tidy required daily effort, he would go so far as wiping it with a cloth after every passenger. People used to joke:

PEOPLE. Oh, right, it's Tymur's car. Is shoe protection a must as well?

CHILD. And I remember how... We had a yellow car, right? I remember how we drove babashka's car into the river.

LAWYER. Was it a kind of joke?

CHILD. No, like, for real, right into the river. It was great fun...

LAWYER. What else do you remember about babashka?

CHILD. We used to go to the lake.

LAWYER. Is it somewhere around here?

CHILD. Yeah, it's over there, by the bridge. We also used to go swimming in the river or even go to the sea. When we went to the lake, we would jump off the rocks right into the water.

LAWYER. What's your dream?

CHILD 2. I wish babashka would come back home. And I wish to finish reading the Quran.

CHILD. I wish to go to the sea. Last time we couldn't because of the virus.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Tymur's father was a mechanic, so when he was a child, he would play around a lot and, well, he was once playing, most likely with a hammer, and those flakes of metal... he got them in his eye. He was five, maybe six at the time... We've been together for eleven years now, and honestly, I didn't have a clue about his eye implant. It was only after his arrest that he had to ask me for some medicine to keep his eye hydrated, you see, it tends to get very dry and such insanitary conditions are very dangerous... That's how I found out. I asked his mother, "So what, he has an implant?" And she replied:

MOTHER. Yes.

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. Even the girls told me:

GIRLS. You've lived with the man for all these years and somehow you still had no idea?!

DILIARA IBRAHIMOVA. And I replied, "You see, he gave no sign of it, he never showed that something was..."

GIRLS. And did you know his father was murdered right in front of his eyes?

TYMUR IBRAHIMOV.

It was late at night and it just so happened
that our dog ran away into the night,
a large dog, indeed,
and my father went out into the streets
to catch it and bring it back
before it would bite somebody.

And on his way, he just happened
to stumble into two drunks,
the first quietly walked by, it seemed nothing could go
wrong, and yet the second...

You see, he only wanted to ask,
“Have you seen a dog around here?”

At that very moment, he was stabbed with a knife,
like, this kind of tragic coincidence cost him his life.

The drunk stabbed him and, well, he then likely headed
on to wherever he was going.

Meanwhile, I went out to the streets, you know, to call
my father, to check on him,

because it seemed he had been gone for ages.

So, at that very moment, well,

he just happened to...

in my arms...

SUBTITLES 10

Amet Suleimanov was a “Crimean Solidarity” streamer in Bakhchysarai.

In October 2017 he was arrested for recording the actions of the security service near the house of Seiran Saliev, another “Crimean Solidarity” activist, whose place was being searched by FSS agents that very moment.

A case was launched against Suleimanov on the charges of violating Article 20.2.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, he was ordered to pay a fine of 15000 rubles.

On March 11th, 2020 Amet Suleimanov’s house was searched and he himself was arrested. The very next day, on March 12th, 2020 the Kyiv District Court in Simferopol passed a decision on the measure of restraint. Andrii Dolhopolov, judge of the Kyiv District Court, granted the request of the FSS investigator in Crimea and sentenced Amet to home detention.

It was the first home detention sentence in the case of “Hizb ut-Tahrir” in Crimea. Unfortunately, the professional qualities of Amet’s lawyer had next to nothing to do with the verdict. Amet suffers from a severe heart condition and his staying in a detention centre would pose a direct threat to his life.

Amet is charged with violating Part Two of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (“Involvement in a Terrorist Organisation”). He is facing up to 20 years in prison.

AMET SULEIMANOV. Right, I have a heart issue. The man who wrote, namely, filled in the detention report, he was quite shocked. He glanced over at me with

concern and asked, “Man, how are you even still alive?” There was quite an impressive list of conditions.

The hearing was scheduled for around 4 PM. The cars drove into the courtyard and they kept us waiting inside.

And at some point the lawyer came out in the yard and called me, “Amet, come here.” I noticed how cheerful she was, she had a radiant smile.

She said, “Look, Amet, the investigator pleads for home detention for you.” The accusation is no joke and home detention seemed out of question, it has never happened before, and I thought to myself, well, if even Edem-agma Bekirov, who lost a leg, had diabetes, went to prison... if he went to prison, I stood no chance.

They told us the prison van would come within 2-3 hours, that means, we would be soon taken to the detention centre. And that’s a whole different story. And even if they let me go home that day I knew that for those around me there was no going back.

The lawyers brought us food. We unpacked whatever they brought us and began to eat. I still lacked the courage to tell them.

Imagine, the three of them are eating while I am standing aloof.

Then Rustem-agma, the oldest of us, asked, “What are you doing there?”

“Rustem-agma, I am not hungry,” I said.

“How so?” he kept asking. “You haven’t eaten in a while, just like me, and for now we have food, later, in the detention centre, it will be a whole other story. They won’t let us have this food.”

The truth was at the tip of my tongue but I couldn’t say it.

But then, “Aghalar, you see, I’ve got something to tell you: I was sentenced to home detention.”

They all stood up to hug me, completely forgetting about the food. He said, “We are so happy for you, that they let you home.”

“But all of you are going to prison while I am coming home.”

It wasn’t guilt that I was feeling, no, there was no guilt. I knew of their innocence, well, not like “knew,” I was just totally sure of it, they were innocent just like me. And I would come home to my family, embrace my kids, like, be with my family. And even though they were no less innocent than I was, they wouldn’t be able to do that. And the look on their faces when I was leaving, I don’t know, it was beyond words.

My wife was expecting, and I told them, “Fellas, listen, I wanna tell you something: we are having our fourth child and we haven’t yet decided on the name. God willing, I will call our son after the four of us, he is to be born in a month, In sha’Allah, and I will call him Seitosman, after the accused Seitumer Seitumerov, Rustem Seitmemetov and Osman.”

“This newborn child will be the symbol of our freedom and will guard it in the future.”

ALL WOMEN TOGETHER, AS IF IT WERE A SPELL:
Every burden brings alleviation.

SINGER. No, it doesn’t. It doesn’t! I will now tell (sing) you about Musa, the youngest son of Ruslan and Elzara, who had once gone missing, who had been looked for by thousands, and who eventually died because his mother was left all alone with the three children...

The youngest, oh, the youngest child,

wasn't he also the sweetest,
they took him away when the boy
was no more than a year and nine,
he would only, like, babble his first words,
and when he walked, he was three,
a whole other child indeed,
I even wrote in letters to him,
"He does this, he does that,"
he'd be very surprised, Ruslan,
he'd say, "No way!,"
just like that.

Musa himself was a very bright boy,
so...

he saw none of it, of course,
and his pain, and they fact
they wouldn't let him go,
no matter how the lawyers begged,
they wouldn't let him attend the funeral,
to see him at least once, for the last time.

Yeah....

ALL WOMEN TOGETHER, AS IF IT WERE A SPELL:
So does every burden bring alleviation?

AMET SULEIMANOV. After that it took me about
two month to get it together. There was, I don't know,
a certain anxiety, as if, as if they could come back any
minute now or something. I have this bracelet on my leg,
this little one, and it feels as if it were around my neck

instead, and it suffocates me.

I keep coming back to those moments, remembering every tiniest detail from the night of the search, like, how they broke in and so on. I remember where each of them stood, what they were talking about, how they tried to toss in books, and provoked us with questions. And every time I remember all that, you know, I panic.

There's no motivation. My brain keeps going to other places. You know how it goes, we try to do everything to the best of our abilities, so that it lasts us for a while, like, for 150 years, right? And now, I begin to fix something outside and catch myself thinking: is it even worth it? Like, how long will I stay here? One learns to see things differently, see, as if none of it belongs to you. And, you know, none of it even matters to you, cause when they came for me I knew already, from the other searches, that it could so happen that I wouldn't see my children for years, if not in courtrooms. I knew it. When I returned the next day, well, they brought me late at night, and the children hugged me, they just stuck to me like glue. We've been sleeping together ever since.

“PHOTON”:

We're sure that we'll make it to the next round. Because, well, what would it be like, if an average Russian turns on the TV to hear Oleksandr Vasyliovych say “Crimea is leaving us”? That would be weird, right?

Oh, does it mean the jury will give us all 5's?

No, all 5's would be too much. 100% always looks a bit suspicious, that's how they explained it 6 years ago. Someone has to give a 4. The question is: who? Who would risk his own reputation of an unbiased judge? Who would dare underestimate Crimea live on Channel One? Oh, dear judges, I wouldn't wanna be you right now.

(Putin) May the best win tonight! I have a present for the winning region, I promise them a new reconstructed esplanade in Yalta!

At this moment something must happen to “Photon.”

رمضان

Рамадан айы во мубарек



”Воистину, да каже
тмлчостью
облеаае.”



Касту



йы хайыр
ок олсун



идоё

унаем



RETURN

ALIE ARIFMEMETOVA. Well, I live in the moment and, I guess, it is what it is. You think through all the options. The children have grown already. When he asks yet again, “When do you think they will let us go?” I reply, “Oh, I am expecting you for coffee every day.”

Even now he writes to me about how much he misses my coffee. That’s curious... You see, he didn’t drink coffee at all when we got married. I was obsessed with coffee and he would only drink black tea. I preferred green. And now we both grew to love my coffee.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. My dreams came true, I guess. Ever since I can remember, I have had this image in my head, like, I don’t know why, that a girl should get married. And my dream as a little girl was to find my Prince Charming and marry him. And somehow I ended up marrying the man of my dreams. Our family life turned out exactly like I wanted, indeed, it was a dream come true. I was never much into this whole “lavish life in some gigantic mansion” thing, you know, that kind of stuff mattered little to me.... I was rather eager to find that one special person in my life, namely, somebody close, a true friend.... And Ruslan became all of this and so much more to me. Well, this is probably all I’ve ever wanted.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. He was taken with the idea of performing Hajj and going to Turkey. You see, he had shown us almost every corner of the peninsula by then. Before this whole affair with the searches and court hearings, he would just take us everywhere in his car. He enjoyed walking us through the caves all over Crimea, to Qizil Qoba, for instance. We would often go to the waterfalls, the sea, and the mountains – he wanted to introduce us to the wonderful Crimean nature. And, well, his lifelong dream was to show me the world, something beyond just Crimea. For as long

as I remember, I've always been making rounds here, really... In thirty years, I have never left the peninsula. I've been neither to Ukraine nor to Russia, just Crimea. Well, I've been to Rostov now, but it doesn't count, it was after he had already been arrested.

Same with my daughter Safie, she was already four, I guess, when they took Remzi. She once told me such a thing:

SAFIE BEKIROVA. Mom, I hope my husband will be just like dad, just so nice and kind.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. My dear, it'll be very hard to find you a husband just like dad, because he is, like, EXTREMELY nice. Where will we find such a one? But we'll surely try! She then said:

SAFIE BEKIROVA. I won't stay in Crimea after I get married, we'll leave.

KHALIDE BEKIROVA. Why would you say such things? Your dad and I stayed here against all odds, we decided to stay. To that she replied:

SAFIE BEKIROVA. I don't want my husband to be arrested, like dad was.

MAIE MUSTAFAIEVA. When he is released... The first thing... oh, I don't even know what one does on such occasions... Well, I guess, we'll just hug each other tightly, as a family. With the kids, that's most important... I can never forget how Server used to come back from work and they would have a race of sorts, like, who'd be the first to jump on him. I would always think, "And what about me?" I was always out of the picture, sort of, it was a pity... I guess, to hug each other properly, that's what I want....

VENERA MUSTAFAIEVA (Server's mother): Oh, so do I... oh, I will probably break down, I will cry... Oh, I

guess, I will cry so that everybody hears that Server is back.

LAWYER. So, In sha'Allah, he will come back. What is the first thing you would like to do with him?

MUHAMMAD. I don't know. How should I know?

LAWYER. Well, what comes to your head right now? Imagine babaka were right here with you, what would you do together? Where would you go, I don't know...

MUHAMMAD. We wouldn't do anything, I guess... What can you do now? Nothing, really, why? You really can't do anything in autumn. No, like, tell me, what can we do? In winter, well, that would be different...

LAWYER. What do you want to be when you grow up? A physicist maybe, like your father?

MUHAMMAD. A physicist... I don't really know.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. Hey, you enjoy cooking, don't you?

MUHAMMAD. Meh, I don't know, I am not sure I have ever cooked anything. Anyway, it doesn't matter, I don't wanna be a cook. I have no idea who I wanna be, there's plenty of time for that.

LAWYER. I see, it's just that you don't want to work at all, right?

MUHAMMAD. No, it's rather... it doesn't matter what you do, it just has to be... Well, first of all, there are jobs I absolutely refuse to do. I don't wanna work in healthcare, because that is too difficult... I don't wanna be a firefighter, nor do I wanna work in construction.... What other jobs are there? No, I will never be a house builder, that's for sure, like, can you imagine that? I would have to build entire houses...

ASIE. You could be a policeman.

MUHAMMAD. No, like, think about it, it takes ages to build a house – and for what money?

LAWYER. And what about you, Asie? Who do you wanna be?

ASIE. Nothing.

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. Come on, what do you like? I remember, you said something like hairdresser...

ASIE. No! Nothing.

LAWYER. So what, a driver maybe?

ASIE. Nope.

LAWYER. A driver no? An artist then?

ASIE. No, I don't wanna do anything.

LAWYER. Again no? Hey, and whose board is this? Yours, right?

ASIE. Yeah.

LAWYER. And what do you use it for? Drawing or doing numbers?

ASIE. I draw.

LAWYER. What were you drawing then?

ASIE. Nothing.

LAWYER. So you'll be an artist, after all, right?

ASIE. No.

LAWYER (*to Muhammad*). So you'll be neither a firefighter, nor a house builder, nor a doctor...

MUHAMMAD. I am not sure, I don't know what I'll do.

LAWYER. Okay, and what will you buy with your first paycheque?

MUHAMMAD. Well, first of all... If I still don't have one by the time I graduate, then... I don't know, the first paycheque... If nothing changes... It also depends on the salary, you know, but it must be at least... Well, I guess I'll get myself a phone. You can't get by without one these days, right? I'll have to make calls and what not...

ASIE. A monkey.

MUHAMMAD. Monkeys are expensive.

LAWYER. Besides, you'd have to look after it, take care of it, and even train it. Do you know anything about monkey training?

ASIE. No. Even better, I'd buy two monkeys.

LAWYER. Why do you need so many?

ASIE. Well, they will climb trees, like that...

LAWYER. It's not like I am seeing many trees around.

ASIE. They could also climb the poles and the houses.

MUHAMMAD. Yeah, I will buy a phone. And then...

LAWYER. Will you buy something for Asie?

MUHAMMAD. Well, if... Yeah, I'll buy her something, I guess. No, I'd rather give her money – then you'll go by something for yourself.

ASIE. No, I don't need it.... Keep your money to yourself.

MUHAMMAD. How do you expect to have your own money if you insist you don't wanna do anything? How are you going to earn it?

ASIE. During Bayram.

LAWYER. Oh, you are going to collect money during holidays?

MUHAMMAD. It will last you for a while and then what? You'll spend it all and have nothing left again.

ASIE. Then I don't need any money.

MUHAMMAD. And where's the food coming from? How are we going to afford things without money? No, really, how can you buy everything you need?

ELZARA SULEIMANOVA. (*Pause*) I could start my own business, like, be of some use... I actually really fancy psychology and even though I am 31, I believe it's never too late. I like learning about people's problems and helping them overcome them. But again, as I said, I probably need Ruslan for that (laughs), his support. Like, for example, I've recently told him about my failed driver's test, I was all broody because of it, and he said, "Take your time, you hear me, take your time, you'll manage it, calm down."

LEMARA MEMEDEMINOVA. I grew stronger, more independent. It's no big deal for me to pull off everyday tasks, like running the household or dealing with some paperwork. Back then I used to be all at sea. I was overwhelmed, because Nariman used to do that stuff for me. Now I am much stronger, I would say, even rougher at times.

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. We want to live here, in our Crimea, drink our Crimean Tatar coffee, keep our old traditions... That's our dream, cause, you know, when we moved back here we didn't even have a chance to travel around Crimea, to see all its beauty... Yeah, to get a sight of it, to revel in every moment, that's what we want...

He would always say: every burden brings alleviation.

ZULFIE. He loved me... and "Sneakers".

SURIA SHEIKHALIEVA. It's hard to swallow, but still, you put the numbers together, like, what if he gets 15 years? Then she'll be that much older, I will be as well... I just sit there, doing the numbers, see, our eldest will

be almost forty by then... So what, does it even matter anymore?

ZULFIE. No. And I like to imagine babashka will come back like that: he'll call anashka and ask us to go somewhere, like, it'll be some large airport, let's say, in Kyiv, and aghashkas and babashka will come down from the plane. Anashka will come with a bunch of balloons and the rest of us will draw posters, and I can almost see myself running over to babashka, jumping at him... He will say, "Wow, you grew up quite a bit!" (*Laughs*)

The women stand up and form a passage, waiting for their men to come back.

LEMARA MEMEDEMINOVA. When he was coming back, and we knew it, that he was back, the whole family was fainting for him — those were unforgettable, very emotional moments, I could hardly believe it, like, that he was back... And the little ones, oh, they were beyond happy... Our children... it's as if they were still waiting for him. They are totally different, so calm and reasonable, I can only wonder. You'd think, now that Nariman came back, the kids will go on being kids, arguing, fighting with each other and so on. None of that: since he came back home, everything is silent.

NARIMAN MEMEDEMINOV. So, when I was finally out, well, got into the car, like, we were out, on our way... On our way home (*laughs*), and it took ages, I don't know, 20 minutes seemed like ages. One has to get himself together. And we'd been on the way for half an hour... And I still wasn't there, it was still as if... It's like I had been released, yes, but not yet... I guess, in my head, I wasn't, I wasn't even in the car.

Lots of people had been waiting, when we finally arrived... I was walking through the crowd, thinking, well, I must be going somewhere... I mean, (*laughs*)

somewhere among that sea of faces there was my family waiting for me. Yeah, the crowd formed a passage and I thought, “Well, it must mean something, it’s organised, they would have stopped me by now, called me, they must be somewhere over there.”

Eventually my youngest ran towards me, then the middle one, the rest of them followed, my daughter, wife, mother, sister — all of them.

We then hugged and kissed each other, surrounded by that never ending crowd, tons of people, most of them strangers, but still, a very nice welcome... I only wished I hadn’t been the only one released.

LEMARA MEMEDEMINOVA. We wish all the men would just come home, cause even while I was waiting for Nariman, there were all these women standing behind me, and... And I wished, (*her voice is trembling*) I wished they had released them all at once... because I love their wives, we’ve become very close. You know, they would call me before he was released, we had a kind of countdown:

WIVES. Lemarka, three days left, two days left!

LEMARA MEMEDEMINOVA. And I told them, “Girls, I can’t believe it,” really, I told them I wouldn’t believe it until I saw it with my own eyes, saw him, he was still so far away... And I still could not believe it. They were so happy for me. But, of course, behind my back, when they thought I wasn’t looking, they would cry.

ABOUT THE HEROES



SERVER MUSTAFAIEV

Human rights advocate and coordinator of “Crimean Solidarity”

Date of birth: May 5th, 1986

Occupation: engineer, private entrepreneur

Marital status: married to Maie Mustafaieva, four children

Date of arrest: May 21st, 2018

Charged with: Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Involvement in a Terrorist Group”

Status: sentenced to 14 years in a maximum-security penal colony

Excerpt from the last court speech, September 10th, 2020:

I am a citizen of Ukraine, a political prisoner, a prisoner of conscience. The whole international community recognises me as such in numerous resolutions even though you refuse to admit it and attach it to the case files.

The very same international resolutions and declarations

recognise that Crimea is Ukrainian territory and proclaim Russia an occupant. Our case falls under the Fourth Geneva Convention, and we have been trying to bring this to the attention of the aggressor country and its henchmen, namely, the prosecution office, the FSS, and the courts of the Russian Federation.

I am a Muslim, and Islamic culture, traditions, and way of life are crucial to the sense of identity of the Crimean Tatars.

As much as our readiness to stand for ourselves and speak up in the face of injustice does not sit well with Russia, as much our resistance to the Russian Federation as an aggressor bothers you, we have never been and never will be your slaves and servants.

Our religion and the culture, tradition, and political will shaped by it served as the grounds for our persecution and arrests. You blindly and stubbornly refuse to acknowledge and accept it. Some things matter to me, for all of us. Human life, justice, the ability to look your children in the eyes without shame, to look in the mirror without disgust, the feeling of pride for your pure, peaceful religion, your people, and your choice belong to our values. The unconditional battle against evil, tyranny, and injustice, regardless of rewards and punishments and whether your enemies outnumber your friends, belongs to our values. These are the values of our people, of every single prisoner today. Our identities are not shaped by money, standing, or social status. Rather, we are who we are thanks to our actions and our willingness to sacrifice comfort for the sake of what is good, righteous, and just. Sometimes to even sacrifice our freedom and lives.

When we saw this new threat coming in 2014, it was obvious that the wave of repressions would last for decades, and no one would be spared. The most active

and vocal will be the first in line, then the rest of the population, and finally, even the traitors and collaborators would be swallowed. Therefore, we decided to speak up.

It is essential for me and the other prisoners of conscience that Ukraine and the whole world take steps towards understanding the events in Crimea and take a consistent and systematic stand against the injustice. Resistance is our modus vivendi because the kind of life that Russia thrusts down our throats erases our identity, threatens to abolish our nation from the face of the earth. Thus, if we still wish to hold on to our history, culture, language, and our Islamic identity as the cornerstone of our nationality, we have no other choice.



TYMUR IBRAHIMOV

Citizen journalist, “Crimean Solidarity” activist

Date of birth: January 25th, 1985

Occupation: degree in English and Ukrainian philology, private entrepreneur

Marital status: married to Diliara Ibrahimova, four children

Date of arrest: October 11th, 2017

Charged with: Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Involvement in a Terrorist Group,” Part 1 of Article 30, Article 278 of the Penal Code — “Actions Aimed at a Forceful Seizure of Power”

Status: sentenced to 17 years in a maximum-security penal colony

Excerpt from the last court speech on the day of the verdict:

...Courts and judges do the cover-up job for the secret services and assist them in every way possible in the task of eliminating the dissidents. These kangaroo courts put up a muppet show, they make fun of the presumed equality of the parties and whatnot. Never in my life have I seen such nauseating hypocrisy. The present court is no exception: we have seen enough of its blatant corruption during this year of investigation. I, Ibrahimov Tymur Izetovich, am a father of four children, a visually disabled person, a righteous Muslim, and a family man, and this is my last word in this court. That is to say, the trial is nearly over, and we will soon have a taste of what the judges cooked up for us.

I have spent the last three years of my life in subhuman living conditions in various detention facilities, away from my family and friends. Today the prosecutor has requested a sentence of 20 years of maximum security plus two years in prison. And for what? I am no junky, no murderer, no assaulter — why punish me so hard? I can't wrap my head around it! I am a Muslim, and, like any other Muslim, I wish to leave by the Islamic canon. It is a matter of personal belief, I wouldn't dream of imposing them on others. I pray, fast, I have performed Hajj, my whole family lives according to Islam. I have lived with my wife in peace and harmony for ten years. We are

strangers to alcoholism and drug abuse, fraud and theft, infidelity, and other scumbaggery. It is all completely foreign to us, to our set of mind and our lives. Despite all this, the Russian Federation perceives me and the others here as a permanent threat. We are persecuted just because we are active Muslim citizens who always come to rescue those in trouble. Before 2014, we didn't think such blatant slander was even possible. Russian brought terrorism to Crimea because the Russian state is the ultimate terrorist. So what we have here is that Crimean Tatars of today still suffer persecution just like our ancestors. Nothing has changed except they used to condemn us as traitors back then. Today we are condemned as terrorists.

A simple chat in a Mosque can put you in jail for up to twenty-one years. I am not a nationalist, and I am not prejudiced towards other nations. I believe a person is defined by their intelligence rather than the colour of their skin or their country of origin. I do not hate other religions, it is strictly forbidden in Islam. I am not afraid of your sentences. The only just sentence is that pronounced by the Almighty Allah. I do not consider myself guilty and, therefore, don't confess my guilt. Well, there is nothing to confess, and I have no intention to play along with the concoctions of the investigators and the prosecutor.

I demand you to put an end to this rigged trial and immediately cease persecuting our people and us. Leave us be for once! What the hell do you want from us? You've been shedding innocent blood here for over two centuries now. I demand that all of us are immediately released from the courtroom and offered a due refund for every minute in custody. Even though it probably can't be made up for. You have nothing to offer to make up for taking away the fathers of the families and for the

tears shed by mothers and wives. Leave Islam alone and mind your own business.



SEIRAN SALIEV

Citizen journalist, “Crimean Solidarity” activist

Date of birth: November 4th, 1985

Occupation: degree in Turkish and Crimean Tatar Philology, tourist guide

Marital status: married to Mumine SALIEVA, four children

Date of arrest: October 11th, 2017

Charged with: Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Involvement in a Terrorist Group”

Status: sentenced to 16 years in a maximum-security penal colony

Excerpt from the last court speech, September 10th, 2020:

“The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Indeed, falsehood is bound to vanish.” (Surah 17, Āyah 81)

My seven mates and I have spent the last three years in Russian captivity for our active citizenship, for daring to speak up in the face of the authorities' corruption and unlawful treatment of our people. The charges of terrorism have nothing to do with us, we are faithful Muslims, and as such, we renounce all terror, very much unlike the state which sentences us to decades in jail.

Ibn al-Qayyim, a famous Islamic theologian, said in his book *Manazil-u Sa'ireen* ("Stations of the Seekers"): "The sense of being watched by the Almighty and the fear of God are the foundation of satisfactory conduct of humans. If the fear of God and the feeling of being watched by Him in their inner and outer conduct are lacking in their hearts, no order and no physical force can ever guarantee their abiding by the law. The state can resort to terror, but it is beyond its power to assign a watchman to every person to ensure compliance with the order. Cultivation and the sense of purification of human souls are indispensable."

Islam regulates interpersonal relationships on the principles of harmony and transparency, regardless of their religious beliefs, nationality, and skin colour. It makes all sense in the world that every Muslim wants a Caliphate. I am not necessarily talking about the pseudo-Caliphate of the IS, but first and foremost about the state founded by the Prophet in the glorious city of Medina, where Christians, Jews, and worshipers of idols all lived in peace and harmony among Muslims. And that was so because that state was founded on a firm spiritual basis. Imagine, these thoughts alone were enough to have us thrown into torture chambers.

This sums up the unfortunate state of affairs in today's Russia, which as of yet has learnt nothing from its mistakes throughout history. To quote one of the books I came across in the detention centre by Russian

lawyers Matuzov and Malk, “the prevailing totalitarian ideological party rule in Russia has led to the spread of such complexes and stereotypes as terror, fear of responsibility, passivity, apathy, conformism, grovelling, mindless observation of orders — almost out of habit, just to be on the safe side. These convictions are pervasive in the public consciousness and shape the everyday philosophy of the many.”

We were accused solely because we refused to blend in with the crowd, to accept the role of sheepish mankurts. This criminal case of ours is without victims, without a civil claimant, or even a civil defendant.

And yet, my Crimean Tatar people are a part of the global Islamic community, and as such, we are invincible and do not tolerate injustice towards ourselves and others. I want to end my speech by thanking my proud people, Ukraine, and the international community, for their moral support, publicity, and material assistance, as well as for helping out our families. May Allah bless you and give you peace and prosperity.



AMET SULEIMANOV

Citizen journalist, “Crimean Solidarity” streamer

Date of birth: October 25th, 1984

Occupation: carpenter, sales manager

Marital status: married to Lilia Liumanova (Suleimanova), four children

Date of arrest: March 11th, 2020

Charged with: Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Involvement in a Terrorist Group,” up to 20 years in prison.

Status: placed under home-detention

Excerpt from Amet’s court speech in the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don on April 27th, 2020. Amet comments on the interrogation of the witness, namely, Mykola Artykbaev, a former SSU officer who joined the ranks of the Russian FSS in 2014:

Agent Artykbaev slandered everybody connected to the case of the 3rd Bakhchysarai group. His accusations are founded on the testimonies of the two secret witnesses, Osmanov and Kerimov, whose testimonies in court do not even match the records of their previous interviews. They follow Artykbaev from one case to the next, he keeps them on a short leash because they’ve had their run-ins with the law and will now testify anything at his whistle.

During the interrogation, Seitumer [another defendant in the case of the 3rd Bakhchysarai group — ed.] asked, “How could you possibly know that I held a meeting to discuss prohibited topics?” Artykbaev replied that he found excerpts from his speech on prohibited websites, which led him to the “obvious” conclusion. It didn’t even occur to him to check other websites, even though the lecture revolved around historical topics and is easily accessible on the Internet. It turns out, delivering a lecture is a crime these days.

The agent himself is clueless about the terminology in question. When Seitumer asked him about the meaning of the word “sohbet,” Artykbaev claimed it was a term exclusively used by the members of Hizb ut-Tahrir for their party gatherings. That’s ludicrous. The word is common to the everyday vocabulary of all Turkish-speaking people and stands for “conversation” rather than “meeting.” It was confirmed by our interpreter Saledinov. Are they going to arrest the whole Turkish-speaking world for using it?

During the investigation, Artykbaev repeatedly claimed that the imam of the Tahtali-Jami had been sent away from the mosque for the sohbet to take place. He supposedly received this information from the acting district imam Seitveli Ibrahimov. However, the acting imam of the Tahtali-Jami Mosque, Ruslan Akhmedzhanov, excluded any possibility of prohibited meetings being held at the mosque. Seitveli Ibrahimov added that there had been no cases of disagreement within the mosques, and sending somebody away would be quite unthinkable.

Furthermore, Artykbaev claimed to have recognised our voices in the recording, even though we had never met. The experts themselves could not confidently attribute the voices in the recording, and yet Artykbaev had no trouble doing it.

They curtail our freedom, humiliate our families and the entire Crimean Tatar people. But remember, for the Crimean Tatars, terrorism has always been and will always be out of the question. There have been over a hundred investigations on the charges of terrorism since Russia occupied the peninsula in 2014. What do the secret services have against us? Artykbaev’s miserable attempts to accuse us, the body of evidence which crumbles down with every minute, and the so-

called predictable pattern of the crime. And yet, their subjective conclusions may cost us decades in prison. Therefore, I ask the court to hold every false witness accountable.



OSMAN ARIFMEMETOV

Citizen journalist, “Crimean Solidarity” activist

Date of birth: August 28th, 1985

Occupation: Math and IT teacher

Marital status: married to Alie Arifmemetova, two children

Date of arrest: March 28th, 2019

Charged with: Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Involvement in a Terrorist Group”

Status: under arrest in a detention facility in Rostov oblast

Text of the appeal, which Osman Arifmemetov asked to attach to the court materials as his “last words” during the hearing of the High Court of Crimea on August 10th, 2020, after the prolongation of his arrest:

Today I am put on trial unjustly: not because I am a

criminal, but due to the criminal laws imposed on the Crimeans in 2014. Russia explicitly abuses its anti-extremism and counter-terrorism laws by putting on politically and religiously motivated staged trials against citizen journalists, activists, and human rights advocates (many of them Crimean Tatar) in order to cement the atmosphere of terror in Crimea. Their war on “evil” has itself turned into evil.

The charges pressed against me can be explained by my active participation in civil society as well as my work as a citizen journalist. This fact was recognised by the international community and captured in the numerous resolutions of various international organisations. Citizen journalists in Crimea are being persecuted based on our national and religious identity. They are going after the entire Crimean Tatar people in the course of the war against ideological dissidence. How else could they arrest people for their words, books, personal opinions?

This could further aggravate the situation and bring a more numerous and violent wave of repressions. We had seen it happen in 1944 when the whole community was banished in a single day.

To achieve this, the Russian security makes backroom deals with the crooked judges, ready to violate both internal and international legal regulations endorsed by the Russian Federation. You “appoint” us as terrorists and treat us as such, even though no act of terror on our part has ever taken place.

The FSS Headquarters have officially stated that there are no reported data about terrorist attacks on behalf of Hizb ut-Tahrir with which I am supposedly involved. Alas! The day will come when those implicated in political repressions and the persecution of activists will

be “appointed” guilty for following private, informal orders.



SULEIMAN (MARLEN) ASANOV

Citizen journalist, “Crimean Solidarity” volunteer

Date of birth: March 2nd, 1977

Occupation: degree in Philology, teacher of Turkish and Crimean Tatar language and literature; restaurant owner

Marital status: married to Aishe Asanova, four children

Date of arrest: October 11th, 2017

Charged with: Part 1of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Organising a Terrorist Group”

Status: sentenced to 19 years in a maximum-security penal colony

Excerpt from the last court speech, September 10th, 2020:

My speech will highlight all the double standards, lies, fraudulence, and slander we have been subjected to during this period. I had a chance to read many books from the detention centre library, and I will quote them extensively to prove my innocence and the political motive behind this case. We, the defendants in the case, consider ourselves innocent, while those who filed the cases against us are guilty of crimes against humanity.

It shouldn't be surprising, given their predecessors were eager to spread terror and anarchy in the name of revolution.

They framed us for Article 278 — seizure of power. And yet, who has seized all the institutions, state buildings, and military bases in Crimea? Blaming us means dodging the question. It was the work of the Russian security services, and Putin himself had long since acknowledged it. We are not blind to the fact that the remaking of world order is in full swing, but we will not tolerate any false accusations. The Crimean Tatars and the Muslims of the peninsula came back here around thirty years ago, and there hasn't been a single terrorist attack since then. The first act of terror took place in Kerch after the Russian occupation, and the perpetrator was neither Muslim nor Crimean Tatar. One may wonder, WHO brought terrorism to Crimea: Crimean Tatars or the unwelcome masters?

Vilification of Islam is a lingering problem, and we fell victims to this preposterous propaganda. We are accused of planning to build a Caliphate-state and oppress nations and religions, yet this interpretation is purely subjective and does not do us justice.

I will now address the judges of today with the words of Mikhail Lermontov:

You, greedy crowd, all gathered by the throne,
The foes of Freedom, Genius, and Repute!
You hunker in the shadows of the law,
And tie the tongues of tribunal and justice!...
And yet, you, pets of vice, there is the Court of God!
The dreadful court which lies ahead of you;
The court, which can't be bribed with gold,
Which knows you through and through.

This once your slander goes to waste:

It won't salvage you.

We hold on to our freedom even in chains, whereas you choose to serve your masters.

I would like to thank my wife, parents, my lawyers, Ukraine, and the whole international community for their help and support in these challenging times.

Ours is the truth. God Almighty will set things straight. In conclusion, I would like to quote one of the Āyahs from Quran (Surah 5, Āyah 8): “O believers! Stand firm for Allah and bear true testimony. Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice. Be just! That is closer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what you do.”



NARIMAN MEMEDEMİNOV

Citizen journalist, “Crimean Solidarity” volunteer

Date of birth: May 7th, 1983

Occupation: economist

Marital status: married to Lemara Memedeminova, three children

Date of arrest: March, 22nd, 2018

Charged with: Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Public Calls for Committing Terrorist Activity via the Internet”

Status: free (released from prison on September 21st, 2020, after having served the full sentence — 2 years and 6 months in a colony settlement

Excerpt from the last court speech before hearing the verdict, October 1st, 2019:

The indigenous people of Crimea — the Crimean Tatars — once again fell victim to the totalitarian regime, where military and security services hold all branches of power on a short leash.

But this is sheer nonsense: these people had been living here for decades, and then all of a sudden, they turned into terrorists and violent extremists overnight. Suddenly they began posing a threat to state security... For the record, they became a threat to the state security right after the armed forces had put an end to any security whatsoever...

The trouble is that I ought to address the court which wilfully refused to hear me. The statues of the goddess of justice Themis always depict Lady Justice with her eyes closed, which is supposed to symbolise her objectivity and impartiality. In this case, however, Themis decided to wear earplugs on top of that. Strange, right? Earplugs are normally supposed to protect you from unwanted noise, whereas Russian Themis wears them to guard herself against the words of truth and justice.

No wonder the authorities, the government structures, the public prosecutor, and their ilk cannot wrap their enlightened heads around it: “Like, why can’t you just stay at home? What on earth makes you crowd the

courtrooms and protest in front of buildings? Why all these banners, all these protests? Why do you raise the money for these families? Why all these coins?”* They fail to see that it is our nature, the way we are. Whenever one of us is in trouble, we all feel out of place, this is called solidarity... This is what I call unity!

As far as I am concerned, I am grateful to Allah Almighty for the strength because not even once was I ashamed of my father, grandfather, and my whole people, when they were unjustly accused. I have always known it was nonsense.

Therefore, “I, Memedeminov Nariman Ibrahimovich, born May 7th, am a political prisoner, a citizen of Ukraine, the son of the Crimean Tatar people. I am a journalist, father of three beautiful children, a loved husband, and a son. And by the grace of Allah, let this word be the latest, but not the last!”

** The point at issue is the so-called “Crimean Marathon” fundraising campaign, which was organised by the “Crimean Solidarity” to collect money for the activists who had been ordered by the court to pay large fines. The organisers accepted donations exclusively in 10-ruble coins, which would later be used to fill large buckets. The buckets in their turn were to be brought to the respective institutions to cover the fines. The campaign was carried out in two steps and they managed to collect about 3 million rubles as a whole.*



REMZI BEKIROV

Citizen journalist, «Crimean Solidarity» activist

Date of birth: February 20th, 1985

Occupation: historian, tourist guide

Marital status: married to Khalide Bekirova, three children

Date of arrest: March 28th, 2019

Charged with: Part 1 of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — «Organising a Terrorist Group,» from 15 to 20 years or life in prison

Status: under arrest in a detention facility in Rostov oblast

Excerpt from Remzi Bekirov's letter to the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine and his colleagues:

My dear fellow journalists! I, Remzi Bekirov, «Crimean Solidarity» citizen journalist, have been recently informed by my lawyer that my colleagues and I had received an award. We are very pleased to hear that our efforts to shed light on the events in Crimea received such high praises. We are immensely grateful! Not that long ago, it didn't even occur to me that one day I would join your ranks and become a journalist.

As a matter of fact, I have received a History degree from the Taurida Vernadsky National University. I was initially driven to citizen journalism by necessity rather than choice: the need to protect the Crimeans in the face of the coming onslaught back in 2014. It was clear that independent objective coverage of the events on the peninsula was the only effective countermeasure against the propaganda of the pro-government Crimean media. Publicity was our only chance to reduce the number of searches and arrests, even though it was beyond our power to stop them. I believed it could even prevent future cases of persecution.

You are well aware that freedom of speech in today's Crimea is very limited. Independent media outlets have been shut down, journalists have been subjected to house-checks and arrests. Many of my colleagues moved to continental Ukraine out of hopelessness and desperation. And can I see their point? To add insult to injury, the pro-Russian media play to their masters' script and present their viewers with the image of peace and prosperity on the peninsula.

The efforts of citizen journalists and 4-5 professional journalists from Ukraine to this day make for the only reliable source of information about Crimea in terms of respect for human rights. Although I am currently under arrest, my fellow «Crimean Solidarity» activists keep covering the latest events. We are talking about arrests, house-checks, court hearings, etc. They keep informing the world about what is going on despite being constrained and persecuted by public authorities. I sincerely hope for your future support for my colleagues, and I believe I can be sure of it. Your joint support and readiness to broadcast the events on the peninsula in Ukraine will secure the future of our cause.

I was deeply moved by your kind words of encouragement

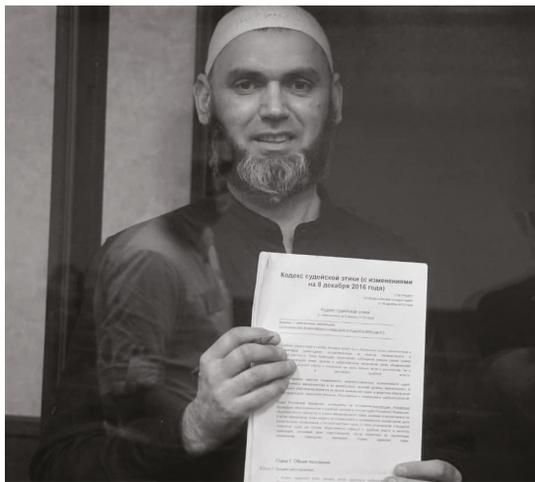
for my fellow citizen journalist Nariman Memedeminov. We can never know for sure, but I suspect it was the tremendous public response to his case that forced the Russian court to go with a relatively «short» (yet equally unjust) sentence of 2,5 years in a settlement colony.

With all that said, I encourage you to organise a special media group to bring together all media outlets interested in covering the current events in the occupied territories. You should work out a strategy to raise public awareness, serve as a mediator and provide assistance to the international outlets operating in Crimea and Donbas.

Sincerely,

Remzi Bekirov

your fellow citizen journalist



RUSTEM SHEIKHALIEV

Citizen journalist, «Crimean Solidarity» activist

Date of birth: June 22nd, 1979

Occupation: private entrepreneur in retail

Marital status: married to Suria Sheikhalieva, three children

Date of arrest: March 27th, 2019

Charged with: Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — «Public Calls for Committing Terrorist Activity via the Internet»

Status: under arrest in a detention facility in Rostov oblast

Excerpt from Rustem Sheikhaliiev's letter from prison:

For more than 20 months now, I have been unduly detained along with 24 other Crimean Muslims. Throughout this whole time, they keep extending the detention period upon every investigator's request and end up breaking their own laws.

I know nothing of clandestine life. I have always been out in public. I worked in the open air rather than in an office. I have spent the last 20 years working at the market in plain view of thousands of people to whom I talked every day. I have nothing to hide, and my detention is highly inappropriate.

I had plenty of time to reflect on my past, on this whole affair. I remember unwelcome guests breaking into my house early in the morning and behaving like masters: prying everything and turning the place upside down. They handcuffed me and watched my every step. I remember saying goodbye to my family, to my parents. I didn't yet know it was the last time I would ever see my father. He died when I was away, and I wasn't even allowed to come to the funeral.

Let's have a brief look at the incarceration conditions. It is suffocating in summer and freezing in winter, and there is no ventilation. The light is very dim, which torments you in its own way — it is supposed to «break» you. I

was initially lucky enough to have a bed. There are never enough of them, and the prisoners end up sleeping in turns. I had to experience it later after they transferred me to another cell.

I have certain health issues, and one may wonder, «How is anybody supposed to live in such conditions?» The administration of the facility takes no notice of our complaints about the unserviceable heating, all the fungus, mould, etc. They disregard our requests to send for a doctor, and proper medical treatment is obviously out of the question.

This is the kind of misery a devout Muslim finds himself in. My only hope is for the Lord of the Worlds Allah (the Holy and Great). Praise be to Him, for we Muslims are fearless and invincible.

I would like to thank you for your encouragement. Your letters are very supportive, comforting, and empowering. They truly give me a sense of belonging to this dzhemaat. May Allah bless you and grant you a place in Heaven!

Respectfully yours,
Rustem Dinar-oğlu



RUSLAN SULEIMANOV

Citizen journalist, «Crimean Solidarity» streamer

Date of birth: April 21st, 1983

Occupation: Physics teacher, software developer

Marital status: married to Elzara Suleimanova, three children

Date of arrest: March 28th, 2019

Charged with: Part 1 of Article 205.5 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — «Organising a Terrorist Group and Involvement in Such a Group,» from 15 to 20 years or life in prison

Status: under arrest in a detention facility in Rostov oblast

Excerpt from Rustem Sheikhaliiev's letter from prison, published on July 10th, 2021:

I, Suleimanov Ruslan Serverovich, was born on April 21st, 1983, in the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, where my family lived after the displacement. I went to primary school № 2 there. In 1993 my family moved to Sinne (Tanaheldi) village in the Bilhorod district of Crimea.

Back then, rural life used to be particularly fraught with financial difficulties. Bearing in mind the hardships of my parents, I decided to focus on my education. In 2000, given my fascination with STEM subjects, I graduated from high school with honours and pursued a degree in Physics at the Taurida National University. From the third year on, I worked part-time as a laboratory assistant at the Taurida Ecology Institute. I got married in 2004, and just two years later, our son Ali was born. Unfortunately, that marriage did not last. I received my Specialist degree in 2005 with an average grade of 4,75. By the end of my studies, I managed to obtain some land in Strohonivka village in Simferopol district and my university friends Remzi and Osman (who also happen to face criminal charges today). Thus, we became neighbours, among other things. I then started building the house with the help of my brother Eskander, who is currently under investigation as well.

I married my current wife in 2009, and we've had three children: Muhammad was born in 2009, Asie in 2014, and Musa in 2017. To my deepest regret, I lost my youngest son when I was in prison. The day they arrested me was the last time I ever saw him. I hadn't had the chance to attend the funeral or even visit the grave before I was eventually displaced to Rostov oblast.

In the early days of political repressions, I could not stand on the sidelines. It was a matter of my upbringing, and I simply could not in all conscience ignore the struggles of my people. I felt the physical necessity to be present on search sites, to make this lawlessness known to the public — how else could we resist it? I've been charged with two administrative offences along the way: the first was for unwarranted presence on the search site, the second — for a standing protest. Eventually, I became one of the defendants in the case of «the Simferopol 25» and

have been detained since March 27th, 2019.

My people practice Islam, which is an integral aspect of our culture. We are complete strangers to terrorism and extremism. We tend to create rather than destroy, and, therefore, these accusations don't hold water. This is quite obvious to our persecutors and the wider public alike because we have always been open and transparent about our lives. You know, such things have happened to my people before. The sole difference is that in 1944 they called us traitors and collaborators before eventually subjecting us to the trauma of forced displacement. Upon returning to Crimea, we didn't have a chance to properly settle because persecution and repressions soon made a sharp comeback. We know no peace. My grandparents and great-grandparents were deported, my parents were born in deportation, I myself was born in deportation, and today, after so many years, I am banished again. It sounds absurd, but such is life.

I hope this political onslaught will soon be over, and parents will reunite with their sons, children with fathers, and wives with husbands. I know the day will come when my people finally find peace in their native land to practice Islam and preserve our culture without fear and persecution. This way, we will someday give the world many great scholars and scientists. I believe in the triumph of justice.



NARIMAN DZELIAL

First Deputy Head of Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, Head of the Information Analysis Department

Date of birth: April 27th, 1980

Occupation: political scientist, journalist, lecturer

Marital status: married to Leviza Dzhelial, four children

Date of arrest: September 4th, 2021

Charged with: Part 1 of Article 281 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation — “Sabotage”, from 15 to 20 years in prison

Status: under arrest in a detention facility in Simferopol

We had to add his story to the book when the editing process was already in full swing. Nariman Dzhelial is a remarkable figure of the contemporary Crimean Tatar national movement. He consistently provided invaluable data on the house-checks and arrests on the occupied peninsula, was extensively engaged in social life, actively supported “Crimean Solidarity” initiatives, and took charge of delivering the parcels for the Ukrainian sailors captured in the Kerch Strait in late 2019 to the “Lefortovo” Detention Centre in Moscow. Even

though Dzhelial resided in Crimea, he would always try to join political events in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. At the end of April, he attended the “Crimea Platform” international summit organised by Ukrainian authorities to find the means to bring the occupation of Crimea to an end and bring the attention of the international community to the Crimean question. Soon after returning from the capital, however, the man who fought for the rights and freedoms of his compatriots was himself suddenly arrested and put behind bars.

This is how it went. Yet another wave of arrests fell on August 3rd and 4th. The Russian security took Nariman to an undisclosed location. In the meantime, four other people mysteriously disappeared: the two cousins Asan and Amet Akhmetov, Shevket Useinov, and Eldar Odamanov. It later turned out that some of them were arrested in connection to the supposedly intentional gas pipeline explosion in Perevalne village, near Simferopol, on August 23rd. Nariman Dzhelial, Asan Akhmetov, and Amet Akhmetov were accused of “sabotage.” The FSS claims that “the act of sabotage was organised by the Intelligence Headquarters of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.” There are no other sources to confirm whether the pipeline was damaged and whether there even was an explosion in the first place.

This arrest provoked an explosion of public anger: Nariman was not only well known as a journalist, lecturer, human rights advocate, politician, and the First Deputy Head of Mejlis but was more than anything a symbol, the embodiment of liberated Crimea. The very same day, the prisoners’ relatives, activists, and other outraged citizens protested against unconstitutional searches and arrests in front of the FSS building in Simferopol. More than fifty protesters were reported arrested. They were forced into buses, brought to

various police stations, and interrogated without the presence of lawyers. All of them were charged with Article 20.6.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences — “Failure to Meet the Demands of Rules Regarding Prevention and Liquidation of Emergency Situations.”

Nariman is currently kept under arrest in a detention facility. The Kyiv District Court of Simferopol sentenced him to two months of detention until November 4th, 2021.

Nariman Dzhelial’s statement, published by his lawyer Mykola Polozov on September 11th, 2021:

Dear friends!

My arrest came on the heels of the Crimea Platform, where I was honoured to take the stage in front of other highly esteemed participants and like-minded friends. This fact proves yet again the petty, vindictive nature of the Russian authorities.

They are as ready as ever to banish and isolate those who persist in their fight for democratic values and freedoms in the name of their people and country.

This turn of events did not catch me by surprise, and I will follow the lead of the older brothers by refusing to back down. I will keep fighting with all the means available to me as a prisoner.

While they were searching my house, one of the agents casually mentioned to me, “You fight with words, which is much more dangerous.”

I can still fight. My word is with me. My word is with you!

Don’t give up! Don’t slow down! Don’t waste time!

My people!

Don’t trust those who blame the victim for the violence!

They will surely tell you it was all my fault, that I was “asking for it,” instead of staying at home with my family.

We cannot afford to stay at home.

My people! Eight years ago, you elected me to represent your interests. You honoured me with this high office and immense responsibility, and I cannot back down in the face of it.

I chose this path for a reason, and there is no coming back. My loving wife, my dear friends, my whole people, and the entire world stand by my side. No bars can ever change that.

Don't lose your heart!

Don't let my arrest discourage and frighten you because that is exactly what they are waiting for.

Our ancestors proudly carried the sky blue flag with a golden tamga in the past. And we should follow in their footsteps!

AFTERWORD

According to the human rights activists from “CrimeaSOS,” there have been 44 cases of forced disappearances in the temporary occupied Crimea. 19 of those people were later found free and alive, 3 others were arrested, one was extradited. 6 were found dead. The fate of 15 people is to this day unknown, 11 of them being Crimean Tatars.

According to the Crimean human rights group, 114 people were arrested as a result of political and religious persecutions in temporary occupied Crimea. Ten of them are located within the peninsula, and the others were transported to the colonies and detention centres in Russia. 41 people have already received from 5 to 19 years in prison, depending on the article of the Penal Code. The rest are still awaiting their sentences in detention centres. Most of them are Crimean Tatars, the indigenous people of Ukraine.

The above-mentioned data is valid at the time of the book release. Even in the final weeks of editing, we kept receiving information about new waves of house-checks and arrests.

The number of innocent people sentenced to decades in prison will keep growing, even though they have never committed, prepared, or even planned any terrorist attacks whatsoever. That is obvious from the fact that more and more arrests over these accusations are taking place every year.

Photo of Anastasiia Kosodii by Esra Rotthoff

Photo of Nadia Sokolenko and Alim Aliev by Valentyn Kuzan

Photo of Veronika Skliarova by Pavlo Dorogoy

Photo of a henna painting by Bohdan Poshyvailo

Photo “Courts and Prisons” by Rustem Kamialiev

Photo “Activists” by Zair Smedlya

Portraits of Nariman Dzhelial and Seiran Saliev by Anton Naumliuk

Portrait of Rustem Sheikhaliev by Kulamet Ibrahimov

Portrait of Osman Arifmemetov by Ali Seitablaev

Portrait of Nariman Memedeminov by Tymur Ibrahimov

Portraits of Amet Suleimanov, Tymur Ibrahimov, Server Mustafaiev courtesy of family archive

Portraits of Remzi Bekirov, Suleiman (Marlen) Asanov, and Rulan Suleimanov courtesy of “Crimean Solidarity”

CRIMEA, 5 AM

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CRIMEA
PLATFORM

