

URGENT ACTION

CRIMEAN TATAR LEADERS RELEASED

Crimean Tatar leaders Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chygoz, both sentenced to prison by the de facto authorities in Russian-occupied Crimea, were taken to an airport and flown to Turkey on 25 October. On 27 October they arrived in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

On 25 October, Russian security services took Crimean Tatar leader **Ilmi Umerov** from hospital, where he was undergoing planned treatment, and simultaneously took another Crimean Tatar leader, **Akhtem Chygoz**, from the detention centre where he had been held since January 2015, and brought them to Simferopol airport. Both men were flown to Turkey, without an official explanation, and set free. Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chygoz arrived in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, on 27 October. Upon return, Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chygoz vowed to return to their homeland, Crimea, which has been occupied by Russia since February 2014. They both currently remain in Kyiv.

Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chygoz are deputy heads of the Crimean Tatar community's representative body barred by the Russian authorities as "extremist", the Mejlis. Both men are known as vocal critics of the Russian occupation of Crimea. Ilmi Umerov was sentenced to two years in jail on 27 September, following a sham trial, for his criticism of the Russian occupation of Crimea, but was not yet remanded while awaiting an appeal hearing in his case. Akhtem Chygoz was sentenced to eight years in jail on 11 September, after spending more than two years in detention, on trumped-up charges of purportedly organising mass disturbances in 2014. He was a prisoner of conscience, as was Ilmi Umerov during his forcible placement, in August-September 2016, in a psychiatric institution "for examination" as part of the criminal proceedings against him.

The Crimean Tatar community and the Mejlis have been targets of political persecution by the Russian authorities since the beginning of the occupation of Crimea. For more information see Amnesty International's report, *Crimea: In the dark- the silencing of dissent*: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/5330/2016/en/>.

Amnesty International warmly welcomes the news of Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chygoz's release and recognises it as a positive step but is concerned about the conditions of their release, which remain unclear. Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chygoz's have been targeted solely for the peaceful exercise of their freedoms of expression and association and their release should be unconditional, and they must be immediately allowed to return to Crimea and freely express their views without fear of being prosecuted.

The de facto authorities in Crimea must stop this relentless suppression of dissent, immediately and unconditionally free all prisoners of conscience, and end the policy of prosecution and exile of their critics from Crimea.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the third update of UA 205/16. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/7271/2017/en/

Further information on UA: 205/16 Index EUR 50/7430/2017 Issue Date: 10 November 2017

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