



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
XX August 2023

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

## **The impact of the war in Ukraine on Indigenous Peoples in Russia and Ukraine / EMRIP Thematic Study on “The impact of militarization on the rights of Indigenous Peoples” (A/HRC/EMRIP/2023/2)**

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 33/25, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples decided, at its 15th session, held in July 2022, to prepare a thematic study on the impact of militarisation on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/HRC/EMRIP/2023/2).

The Society for Threatened Peoples and the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR) appreciate EMRIP’s decision to address an issue that is of paramount importance to Indigenous peoples affected by war, armed violence and militarization worldwide. Since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, this topic has become even more salient to the human rights situation of Indigenous peoples in both countries.

Consequently, the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR) responded to EMRIP’s call for submissions to prepare the thematic study on the impact of militarisation on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, however, the well documented evidence contained in this submission was not reflected in the thematic study, which was adopted by the EMRIP during its recent 16th session in July 2023 and which is due to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council during its 54th session.

The International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR) was founded by Indigenous rights defenders in temporary exile who had to flee Russia to escape reprisals and persecution.

It’s widely known that since 2012, the government of the Russian Federation has enacted laws that drastically limit the work of organizations engaged in activities deemed political by the Government. In this shrinking space, it is nearly impossible for Indigenous Peoples activists and organizations to operate and to defend their rights. Many of them had to leave the country because of criminalisation, repressions or intimidations from authorities or extractive businesses. After the start of the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian legislation became even more repressive. Human rights activists that speak up risk imprisonment for up to 10 or even 20 years due to new draconian laws. The critical Indigenous voices fear persecution and can no longer effectively stand up for their rights and publicly criticize the Government, its proxy organizations, and crony extractive businesses.

Today we consider the ICIPR as virtually the only voice of Indigenous minority peoples from Russia unconstrained by the state censorship and repression. We are therefore taken by surprise and disappointment that the Expert Mechanism on Indigenous Rights, preparing the thematic study, has ignored ICIPR information as well as information of the Crimean Tatar Resource Centre, while including information provided by the Russian Federation and other stakeholders controlled by or associated with the Russian government.

The International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia and the Society for Threatened Peoples are deeply troubled noticing how the study is in effect downplaying the impact of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine on Indigenous Peoples of both Russia and Ukraine. The submission by the ICIPR to EMRIP as well as many other reputable sources and the United Nations themselves, highlight the disproportionate number of casualties suffered by ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples, which threatens to plunge these peoples into demographic emergencies.

Indigenous peoples in Russia are impacted very directly and brutally by the war as they are highly disproportionately being conscripted into the army compared with the titular

population of Russia. A soldier drafted into the war from Buryatia is about 75 times more likely to die in Ukraine than a resident of Moscow. Examples of Indigenous villages in the remote regions of Khabarovsk Krai, Chukotka, Tyva and Yakutia illustrate drafting campaigns with disproportionate mobilization and casualties within Indigenous communities. However, the Russian Government does not publish reliable data on fallen soldiers and doesn't publish disaggregated statistics on Indigenous Peoples' share in its reports.

Evidence is rife, that the Russian government is deliberately targeting marginalized groups with promises of high salaries without providing them adequate information about what to expect. The study also fully ignores the well-documented fact that many Indigenous Peoples representatives attempted to avoid forced mobilization into the Russian army, some of them by hiding in the forests, others by leaving the country. Furthermore, the study fails to refer to Crimea as an illegally annexed territory and ignores the forced drafting of Crimean Indigenous peoples, the Crimean Tatars, Krymchaks and Karaites into the Russian army, where they are forced to be complicit in the crime of aggression against their countrymen and women.

Besides the drafting campaign and direct military casualties, there are many other direct and indirect impacts of the war on Indigenous communities in Russia. Among the impacts are socioeconomic consequences with drastic consequences for remote and marginalized Indigenous communities. There are other examples of the economic influence of the war on Indigenous communities. For example, Indigenous hunters in Siberia were unable to sell peltries, while fur hunting is the basis of their traditional economies. The cause of the problem is that Russia has lost access to the European fur auctions, which were the primary consumers of Russia's furs.

Additionally, since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, sanctions by Western governments were quickly followed by foreign businesses choosing to leave the Russian market. Using the "wartime" and sanctions pretext, Russian authorities and mining businesses are subsequently lowering environmental standards in the country to "support the Russian economy". One of the most dangerous tendencies is the intentional shrinking of the State Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA) requirements. The weakening of the SEIAs' procedures led to formalizing public hearings, now the almost only approach for local communities, including Indigenous ones, to participate in decision-making regarding new development projects on their communal lands.

The Government continues its destructive campaign to expel from the country independent human rights, environmental and expert organizations that, in the past, have provided invaluable assistance to Indigenous communities in defending their rights to lands, resources, and self-determination. As a result, the overwhelming majority of Russia's Indigenous population lost access to independent sources of information except for the government ones, while Indigenous communities lost the opportunity to apply for help from independent media and human rights organizations.

During the EMRIP's 16th session, Indigenous representatives from both Russia and Ukraine repeatedly expressed their outrage at the omissions of the study. However, during the concluding meeting of the 16th session, the adoption of the study was announced for presenting at the 54th Session of the Human Rights Council to our knowledge without changes.

Given the abundance of documentation on the impact of the war on Indigenous peoples in Russia and Ukraine, inaction on the highlighted issues is casting doubt on EMRIP's independence and impartiality, which in our view constitutes a grave reputational risk for the UN's unique indigenous-led body, trusted by hundreds of millions of Indigenous peoples from around the world, whose significance can therefore hardly be overstated.

We believe that independent experts should be involved in the preparation of such documents, including for critical evaluation of materials submitted by states, NGOs and

other stakeholders, as well as taking into account conflicts of interest that may arise in their preparation.

We also ask EMRIP to introduce a practice of publishing all submissions prepared by States, NGOs and other stakeholders for thematic studies for which EMRIP announces official calls for submissions. That approach will be consistent with the long-established practice of the UN Treaty Bodies. This step would increase the transparency and impartiality of the decisions made by EMRIP. If EMRIP already uses this practice, we ask EMRIP to send us the link to published submissions prepared by stakeholders, including States, for the thematic study on the impact of militarisation on the rights of Indigenous peoples (A/HRC/EMRIP/2023/2).

ICIPR calls upon the members of the United Nations Human Rights Council to ask the EMRIP to conduct a comprehensive review of all sources of information, including submissions made by ICIPR and the Crimean Tatar Resource Center in order to include relevant, trustworthy information in the thematic study. We request the EMRIP to correct the factual errors contained in the current version of the study in relation to the impact of the war on Indigenous Peoples in Russia and Ukraine and to specifically include information on the documented evidence of violations of Indigenous peoples' rights in connection with the war.

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