

Other valuable insights were provided by Crimean Tatar youth representatives, who spoke frankly about the assimilatory pressures faced by their peers. These pressures are due to the absence of an appropriate educational/cultural infrastructure to serve the needs of the Crimean Tatar population, and the highly disruptive process of resettlement. The language and culture of the Crimean Tatars were maintained, even in the difficult conditions of exile in Central Asia, because of the cohesiveness of traditional extended families. However, many of these extended families have been broken up during the process of resettlement in Crimea. In addition, the very high levels of unemployment among the returnees, and limited career opportunities for their children, have greatly demoralized the Crimean Tatars and have contributed to an increase in social pathologies in their communities.

The difficulties faced by the indigenous Karaite and Krymchak minorities of Crimea were also a topic of discussion. For example, the relatively small Karaite community has inherited a fascinating historical legacy in Crimea. The remaining members of this minority are strongly committed to preserving this legacy, and have shown great sophistication in using e-mail networks to maintain contacts among the scattered members of their community. They are very eager to take advantage of the experience of other small ethnic groups which have successfully resisted assimilation.

Formal and informal meetings with the representatives of various ethnic communities provided the members of the Canadian team with additional valuable insights. Of special importance was an unprecedented three-hour meeting with Mustafa Dzhemilev. Mustafa Dzhemilev is the Chairman of the Mejlis, a plenipotentiary body which speaks for Crimean Tatars between sessions of the Kurultai, a representative assembly of the Crimean Tatar people. The Kurultai and Mejlis are controversial institutions because in some respects they act as rivals to the official parliamentary institutions of the autonomous Crimean republic. However, the Kurultai and the leaders of the Mejlis have a great deal of authority among the Crimean Tatars, and these institutions have succeeded in maintaining a high degree of unity and discipline in the Crimean Tatar movement. After describing the aims and strategy of the movement he heads, Mustafa Dzhemilev participated in an intensive question and answer session which clarified some of the dynamics of the current political situation in Crimea.

Two members of the Canadian team also met with Ilmi Umerov, at the time the Vice-Prime Minister of the Crimean government (several weeks after this meeting he was replaced by Lenur Arifov). During a lengthy conversation he was very frank in describing and criticizing certain trends within the Crimean Tatar movement, and certain policies of the Crimean government. Lenur Arifov, who at the time of our seminars chaired the Standing Committee on Nationality Affairs and Deported Peoples of the Parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, was also very helpful in answering any and all questions which arose during the seminars in both Kyiv and Crimea.