

Repressed Peoples Demand Justice

Author: [Alexander Dzadoiev](#)

The legacy of Stalin's deportations continues to divide communities in the North Caucasus

Ethnic leaders across southern Russia have accused the Kremlin of building a new "tsarist" empire which rides roughshod over the rights of its minority peoples.

Delegates at the recent Congress of Repressed Peoples concluded that the Russian government had failed to honour a law passed in 1991 to protect their rights.

And they threatened to appeal to international human rights organisations unless urgent action was taken to implement the legislation.

Held in the Ingush town of Magas, the Congress of Repressed Peoples brought together representatives from the Balkar, Ingush and Chechen peoples as well as leaders of the Meskhetian, Crimean Tartar, Korean and German communities in Russia.

All these groups suffered at the hands of the Stalinist government which, in 1944, accused ethnic minorities from the Ukraine and North Caucasus of collaborating with the Nazis and deported them en masse to Central Asia.

Although the repressed peoples were rehabilitated by Nikita Khrushchev in 1957 and allowed to return home, many found that their former homes and territories had been occupied by other ethnic groups.

The Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples passed by Boris Yeltsin's government in April 1991 was aimed at redressing the balance.

However, Yeltsin's failure to implement the letter of the law undoubtedly sowed the seeds of ethnic violence in Dagestan, Chechnya and North Ossetia which was the first republic to see armed conflict in 1992.

The congress was opened by Ingush president Ruslan Aushev who told delegates that the event had met with strong opposition not just from the Russian authorities but also from local administrations in Kabardino-Balkaria, Kalmykia and Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

A Karachai delegation had been detained in neighbouring Kabardino-Balkaria then sent back to Cherkessk whilst the Kalmyk delegates had been refused permission to make the trip at all.

"The attitude of the federal authorities to the congress is indicative of their attitude to the problems of repressed peoples as a whole," said President Aushev.

The Moscow government was represented at the congress by Ruslan Tatiev, a specialist on the Ingush-Ossetian conflict, and Vitaly Smirnov, head of the Directorate for the Repatriation of Refugees.

The congress was organised around two lectures. The first, entitled "The Tenth Anniversary of the Federal Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples", was read by Ruslan Pliev, chairman of the Ingush People's Assembly.

The second -- "From the Russian Empire and the USSR to the Russian Federation" - was presented by Svetlana Alieva, an ethnic Balkar and a member of the International Human Rights Assembly.

Pliev described the 1991 law as "a step forward" but the government's failure to implement it as "two steps back".

He blamed the failure of the legislation on the "criminal inactivity" of the federal authorities, the stubborn resistance of local regimes and the absence of a national policy in the Russian Federation.

Pliev focused on current relations between North Ossetia and Ingushetia where 30,000 Ingush refugees have been waiting for eight years to return to their homes in the Prigorodny region.

"The Ingush people will always achieve their goals by peaceful political means," said Pliev. "And they continue to fight for the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples together with other repressed peoples across the Federation."

Svetlana Alieva said that the Kremlin was intent on creating a Russian empire in the tsarist mould - "an empire which became a prison for entire peoples," she added.

Alieva called on the delegates to demand that the federal authorities implement all the articles of the 1991 law - including an undertaking to return ethnic territories to dispossessed peoples.

The lectures sparked a series of heated representations from the floor.

Rasul Djappuev, chairman of the State Council of Balkaria, claimed that not only had the Balkars been refused the right to establish an autonomous republic in the early 1990s, but they had also been unable to reclaim territories appropriated after the deportations of 1944.

Representatives from Meskhetian peoples said they had been prevented from returning to their ethnic homelands in Georgia after the deportations. And the Crimean Tatars who managed to return home after 191,000 were deported to the Urals and Uzbekistan in 1944 complained of constant civil rights abuse from the Ukrainian authorities.

Gugo Vormsbekher, vice-president of Russia's German community, told delegates that more than two million Germans had left Russia after the Kremlin refused to grant them an ethnic republic in Povolzhya.

At the end of the congress, delegates voted to make a series of official appeals to President Vladimir Putin, the State Duma and the Russian media. The appeals focused on the need to review the 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples and to arrange meetings between ethnic leaders and government ministers.

They also appealed to the government to finance the repatriation of the Crimean Tartars and the

Meskhethians to their historic homeland and restore their civil rights as citizens of the Ukraine and Georgia respectively.

An official statement released at the end of the congress concluded, "Civil accord and the friendship of the Russian peoples are our greatest concern. We believe that full restoration of the rights and freedoms of the repressed peoples will lay down a solid foundation for this friendship as well as the development and prosperity of our federal state."

Alexander Dzadziev is an independent journalist based in North Ossetia while Erik Batuev is a Moscow-based expert on post-Soviet conflicts

Location: [Caucasus](#)
[Central Asia](#)
[Uzbekistan](#)
[Turkmenistan](#)

Focus: [Caucasus](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/repressed-peoples-demand-justice>