

Russia Boycotts 'Odious' UN Meeting on Crimea

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Dzhemilev, pictured in Kiev on March 15, told the Security Council that Crimean Tatars were preparing for a referendum on greater autonomy.

A Crimean Tatar envoy addressed the UN Security Council during a closed-door meeting that Russia boycotted as a "propaganda show" with "odious personalities."

"The permanent mission of the Russian Federation considers as inappropriate the organization by a member of the Security Council of an 'Arria-formula' meeting 'on the human rights and media freedom situation' in Crimea, the Russian Federation," Russia's UN mission said in a statement to other UN delegations.

An "Arria" meeting is an informal gathering of Security Council members. The meetings are usually on divisive topics, such as Russia's recent annexation of the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine, a move that has met with wide condemnation.

"We categorically refuse to associate with the Security Council the propaganda show sponsored by Lithuania and involving odious personalities," the statement said, adding that the meeting "undermines the Security Council's reputation."

"Quite naturally, the Russian delegation will ignore this tasteless undertaking," it said.

China and Rwanda also stayed away from the Lithuania-organized meeting.

Lithuania's deputy UN ambassador Rita Kazragiene dismissed the Russian criticism, saying it "is the right of any Security Council member to raise awareness, or to raise concerns, related to any situation."

Kazragiene said that most nations do not accept the Russian position that Crimea is now part of Russia. She said most believe "that the autonomous republic of Crimea is still part of Ukraine and the referendum was illegal, and there is support for Ukraine's territorial integrity."

After the UN General Assembly passed a resolution last week condemning the Russian annexation of Crimea in a 100-11 vote, Kazragien said that the closed meeting was needed to give diplomats an opportunity to hear the concerns of Crimeans.

Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev told the Security Council on Monday that members of his community were preparing for a referendum on greater autonomy, Kazragien said. He was joined at the meeting by Crimean journalist Valentyna Samar, head of the Board of the Information Press Center in Crimea's capital, Simferopol, and chief editor of the Center of Journalistic Investigation.

Dzhemilev spoke with President Vladimir Putin by phone on March 12 and urged him not to violate Ukraine's territorial integrity by annexing Crimea. Putin told him that Russia would respect the rights of Crimean Tatars, Dzhemilev later said on Ekho Moskvyy radio.

Soviet dictator Josef Stalin deported Crimean Tatars en masse to Central Asia in 1944, accusing them of collaborating with Nazi Germany, and many died during the forced exile. They started returning to the peninsula after the easing of the Soviet restrictions in the late 1980s and now make up around 12 percent of Crimea's population.

China's UN mission did not respond to a request for comment on why it did not attend Monday's meeting. Rwanda's deputy ambassador said his country did not boycott the meeting. "We had important meetings to prepare commemorative events for April 2014," he said, referring to 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

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