

2 Crimean Tatars Kidnapped Under Mysterious Circumstances

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Federal investigators have opened a criminal case into the abduction of two Crimean Tatar residents, as the father of one of the purported victims referred to the crime as an "attack against the Crimean Tatar community."

The victims were not identified in a statement released Tuesday by the Crimean branch of the Investigative Committee. But Abdureshit Dzhepparov, a Crimean Tatar activist based in mainland Russia's Amur region, told journalists that the victims included his 19-year-old son and 23-year-old nephew.

Witnesses reported seeing a group of unknown men force the victims — identified by the activist as Islam Dzhepparov and Islam Dzhevdet — into a vehicle before driving off with them Saturday evening, Radio Liberty reported.

"I don't want the same thing to happen again. I want people here to live with certainty that

there won't be men walking from house to house, abducting people, so that people don't live in fear. Nobody who came today has a guarantee that the same thing won't happen to them," Dzhepparov said in comments to Radio Liberty.

Dzhepparov linked the abduction to what he described as a wider crackdown on the peninsula's ethnic minority community.

"Our fault is that we are Crimean Tatars, Muslims, I don't see any other motive. They want to scare us, to drive us into a corner," Dzhepparov was cited as saying.

Members of the Crimean Tatar community have clashed with the new authorities since Russia's annexation of the peninsula in March, a move that many of them refused to recognize.

Mustafa Dzhemilev, the former leader of the Mejlis, the ethnic community's highest executive body, has warned since being banned from Crimea in the spring that the Tatars would face a wave of discrimination. Dzhemilev himself was barred by prosecutors from returning home for five years for having allegedly shown signs of extremism.

Refat Chubarov, the current leader of the Mejlis, has echoed Dzhemilev's warnings, having also been banned from the peninsula for allegedly showing signs of extremism.

The news of the young men's abduction follows reports of several raids on properties belonging to the Mejlis.

Last week, members of the Mejlis and an affiliated charitable organization were forced to evacuate their offices in Simferopol after a court ordered a freeze on their assets, Ukrainian media reported.

Several Tatar leaders' homes were also reportedly searched, with police seizing extremist literature and firearms, according to local news site Ukranews.ua.

In May, four other members of the Crimean Tatar community were reported missing, with their relatives claiming they were taken by Russian special forces, online news site Newsru.com reported. Their whereabouts are still unknown.

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