



UNITED NATIONS SUBMISSION

**The Circassian Nation:
An Urgent Question of Survival
and International Protection**

*Human Rights Briefing and Recommendations
for International Action*

**Submitted by
International Circassian Political Committee (ICPC)**

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www.icpc-circassia.org | contact@icpc-circassia.org

1. Purpose and Approach

Purpose. This report explains why the situation of the Circassian people is no longer only a minority-rights question. It concerns the survival of a distinct Indigenous nation in its ancestral homeland. It examines how continuing repression, forced assimilation, demographic intervention, linguistic decline and the suppression of national consciousness are destroying the foundations of Circassian collective existence.

Approach. The report brings together international standards, findings of international bodies and direct information from Circassian representatives. Its central conclusion is clear: Russian rule is destroying the conditions required for the Circassian nation to preserve its identity, language and collective existence in its ancestral homeland.

2. Executive Summary

- Circassians are an Indigenous people of the North-West Caucasus with their own language, culture, history and national identity. Their global population is estimated at five to nine million, while approximately one million remain in their ancestral homeland.
- The worldwide Circassian diaspora is the continuing consequence of the Circassian Genocide and the Russian Empire's mass expulsion of the surviving population in 1864.
- Russia deliberately divides one Circassian nation into Adyghe, Cherkess, Kabardian and Shapsugh categories and divides its homeland among three republics. These republics cannot independently determine their education, language or cultural policies and therefore do not provide meaningful self-government.
- Circassian-language education has been systematically reduced from eight compulsory hours per week twenty years ago to one elective hour today, placing transmission of the language to future generations in grave danger.
- The Russian state suppresses independent historical research, promotes distorted accounts of Circassian history and keeps important archaeological artefacts far from their homeland. This separates Circassians from their historical memory and cultural heritage.
- Peaceful national advocacy is labelled as separatism, extremism or Islamic terrorism. Russian pressure has also forced many mainstream diaspora organizations into silence, further weakening independent Circassian representation internationally.
- Killings, disappearances, torture allegations and the withholding of bodies have left Circassian families without truth, justice or effective protection. The reported torture and death of Nurdin Karaf illustrates the urgent need for independent international investigation.
- Circassian young people face forced conscription, coercion to sign military contracts, threats against their families and indefinite military service in the war against Ukraine. Regional poverty is also used to push young people towards military service presented as voluntary.

- State-directed settlement is altering the demographic structure of Circassia without the free and informed participation of its Indigenous people, while diaspora Circassians continue to face serious barriers to returning to their homeland.
- Taken together, Russification, language loss, historical erasure, administrative fragmentation, repression, demographic intervention and forced conscription threaten the continued existence of Circassians as a distinct people. These conditions demonstrate the urgent need for effective international protection and a peaceful, internationally supervised process through which the Circassian people can freely determine their political future.
- The United Nations must monitor these violations, investigate killings and disappearances, protect Circassian language and culture, and provide Circassians and other stateless Indigenous nations with an effective voice in decisions affecting their existence, homeland and future.

3. A nation dispersed by force

Circassians have their own language, culture, historical memory, social traditions and aesthetic heritage. They are Indigenous to Circassia in the North-West Caucasus. The nineteenth-century Circassian Genocide, mass killings and forced displacement committed by the Russian Empire produced a diaspora now concentrated in Türkiye, the Middle East, Europe and North America. The majority of Circassians live outside their homeland today because most of the surviving population was forcibly expelled in 1864.

The Circassian population is estimated at five to nine million worldwide, with approximately one million living in the ancestral homeland. Exact figures are difficult to establish because Russian censuses divide Circassians into separate official categories and many diaspora countries do not collect detailed ethnic population data. The central fact is clear: most of the Circassian nation lives outside its homeland as a continuing consequence of genocide and forced exile.

4. From physical expulsion to the erosion of identity

The nineteenth-century destruction removed Circassians from most of their homeland. The present danger is the gradual destruction of their ability to continue as a distinct people. Systematic Russification operates through language loss, centralized education, administrative division, political fear and the weakening of independent national institutions.

Today, the methods have changed, but the threat to national existence continues. Forced assimilation and cultural destruction are combined with coercive mobilization, unresolved killings, disappearances and the suppression of collective organization. Together, these practices create a direct and growing danger to the continued existence of the Circassian nation. The international community must act before this destruction becomes irreversible.

5. Three republics and the appearance of autonomy

As a deliberate policy, Russia treats the names Adyghe, Cherkess, Kabardian and Shapsugh as if they referred to separate ethnic peoples. In reality, these communities

speak the same language—with regional dialects—and are integral parts of one Circassian nation. Their homeland is divided among the Republic of Adygea, the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic and the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, together with the smaller Shapsugh villages in Krasnodar region.

The existence of three republics is presented as proof that Circassians enjoy autonomy. In practice, Circassians cannot determine even their own education curricula. Their common national identity and flag are not officially recognized across all three republics. Administrative borders and state restrictions prevent them from building common institutions and organizing freely across their homeland. This deliberate fragmentation weakens Circassian political and cultural unity.

Meaningful autonomy must be measured by actual decision-making power: control over education, language policy, cultural institutions, local development, political organization and the use of national symbols. Administrative borders alone do not provide self-government.

6. The progressive removal of Circassian from education

Mother-tongue education has been systematically weakened as part of the continuing process of Russification. Twenty years ago, Circassian-language education was compulsory and provided for eight hours per week. It was gradually reduced, later became elective and was most recently cut from two hours to only one hour per week.

The result is straightforward: a Circassian child can complete school without learning the language of his or her own people. Language transmission then depends almost entirely on families already living under social and economic pressure. This is not merely an education-policy dispute. A language that is removed from ordinary education is gradually removed from public life, employment and the future of the nation.

7. Historical erasure and control of Circassian heritage

The distortion of Circassian history has remained an instrument of Russian rule from the Tsarist period to the present. In 1937, books were burned and Circassian intellectuals were executed under Stalin. In 2022, Russian security forces raided the homes and offices of academics studying Circassian history and seized their books, documents and research materials. Meanwhile, publications containing unfounded claims about Circassians receive institutional support, including approval from the Russian Academy of Sciences, allowing distorted narratives to enter international literature under the appearance of scholarly authority.

This control also extends to archaeological heritage. Valuable artefacts excavated in Circassia, including objects made of gold, are kept approximately 2,000 kilometres away at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, beyond the practical reach of most Circassians. Museums in the Circassian republics are instead filled with artificial exhibits, including the uniforms of Soviet soldiers with no connection to the Caucasus and illustrations of invented historical events that misrepresent the region's relationship with Russia. Removing a people's heritage from its homeland while

replacing it with a state-created version of the past is another powerful instrument of assimilation and historical erasure.

8. Peaceful advocacy recast as extremism

Circassians who defend their language, historical memory or national rights face repression. Peaceful national advocacy is often presented as separatism, extremism or Islamic terrorism. Knowing how Western governments respond to such labels, the Russian state deliberately presents Circassian national movements as Islamic movements. Security operations against Circassian activists are then described abroad as operations against jihadist groups. This encourages international silence and hides the people behind the label.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation reported in 2026 that counter-terrorism and extremism laws were being used to dismantle civil society and target Indigenous defenders. Genuine security threats do not remove the state's obligations of legality, necessity, proportionality, individual evidence and fair trial. Language advocacy, historical research and peaceful claims to self-determination must not be criminalized by association.

9. Transnational pressure on the diaspora

Pressure on Circassian civic life does not end at the borders of the Russian Federation. Russia has used diplomatic influence and other forms of pressure to restrict the independence of Circassian civil-society organizations in diaspora countries. As a result, even major mainstream diaspora organizations have been compelled to remain silent about serious human-rights violations in the ancestral homeland.

This silence should not be mistaken for consent or for the absence of abuse. It isolates communities in the homeland, weakens the flow of reliable information and prevents a dispersed nation from defending its rights through its own institutions. The United Nations and host states should provide safe channels for independent Circassian representatives and protect diaspora organizations, activists and their families from intimidation, retaliation and transnational pressure.

10. Killings, disappearance and the Nurdin Karaf case

These cases include the killings of Aslan Zhukov (14 March 2010), Fral Shebzuhov (12 May 2010), Aslan Tsipinov (29 December 2010), Kazbek Gekkiyev (5 December 2012), Timur Ashinov (13 May 2014) and journalist Timur Kuashev (August 2014), among many others. Their families and communities have been left without the full truth, justice or effective protection.

Nurdin (Najmuddin) Karaf was reportedly forcibly mobilized and resisted being sent to the war against Ukraine. Community sources state that he was taken to an undisclosed camp and died after severe torture. His parents were allegedly pressured, his father was forced to record a statement that Nurdin had volunteered for military service, and an apparently AI-generated image portraying him as a Russian soldier was circulated. His body was not returned for independent forensic examination. The case requires

immediate preservation of evidence, protection of the family, an independent autopsy and a transparent investigation.

In *Sabanchiyeva and Others v. Russia*, concerning the authorities' refusal to return the bodies of persons killed during the October 2005 events in Nalchik, the European Court of Human Rights found a violation of Article 8 of the Convention—the right to respect for private and family life—and a violation of Article 13, taken together with Article 8, because the families had no effective remedy against that refusal.

11. Mobilization, war and economic pressure

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern in 2023 that mobilization and conscription disproportionately affected ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Circassian young people have been mobilized without proper uniforms or equipment and sent to the front with defective weapons. Others have been coerced into signing military contracts during routine police encounters. People targeted for military service are threatened with harm to their family members if they refuse to enlist or continue fighting. Military contracts are automatically renewed without their consent, and leaving the front when the original contract period expires is not permitted. In practice, they are forced to remain in military service indefinitely.

These practices are reinforced by regional poverty. The Caucasus possesses valuable land, resources and tourism potential, yet many communities have limited income and opportunity. Military pay is presented as one of the few ways to support a household. Poverty does not make participation voluntary when the alternatives are deprivation, official pressure or threats. The UN must seek regional and ethnic data on recruitment, contracts, casualties, disability, compensation and prosecution for refusal to serve.

12. Demographic engineering through state-directed settlement

Demographic engineering in Circassia has continued through state-directed settlement policies. Since the beginning of the war against Ukraine, Russians and pro-Russian Ukrainians from the conflict zones have been settled in Circassian territories. After Azerbaijan regained control of Karabakh, Armenians who left the region were also resettled there. A substantial part of the housing and settlement costs was imposed on the budgets of Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia rather than being covered by the federal government. In effect, taxes collected from the local population are being used to finance policies that further alter the demographic structure of their ancestral homeland.

The concern here is not the ethnicity or humanitarian needs of displaced people. It is the deliberate placement of new populations in an Indigenous homeland without the free, prior and informed participation of the Circassian people, while Circassians in the diaspora continue to face serious barriers when seeking to return. Humanitarian assistance must not be used as a means of demographic engineering or as another instrument for weakening the Circassian presence in Circassia.

13. Political legitimacy, protection and self-determination

Russian authority in the Caucasus was established through military conquest, mass displacement and the destruction of Indigenous political institutions. Continuing repression, forced assimilation and denial of meaningful self-government raise serious questions about the historical, political and moral legitimacy of Russian rule in Circassia. Territorial integrity must not be interpreted as permission to destroy the peoples living within state borders. The world must decide what matters more: the survival of a people, or the territorial integrity of a state built through occupation, genocide and repression? A silent, systematic and determined campaign of destruction continues through every available means, targeting the Circassians and other Indigenous and ethnic minority peoples under Russian rule.

These conditions demonstrate the urgent need for effective international protection of the Circassians and other Indigenous peoples of the Caucasus, together with a peaceful process under international supervision through which they can freely determine their political status and future. If peaceful measures prove insufficient to prevent genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing or war crimes, effective collective action must be taken in accordance with the UN Charter and the Responsibility to Protect framework.

14. Who represents the Circassians at the United Nations?

No member state represents the Circassian nation as a collective people. Circassians in the homeland are formally represented internationally through the Russian Federation, despite the conflict between state policy and Circassian national rights. Diaspora Circassians are represented only as individual citizens of Türkiye, Jordan, Syria, European states, the United States and other countries. None of these states carries a mandate to speak for the Circassian nation as a whole.

The United Nations remains a system centred primarily on states, leaving stateless nations without adequate and equal representation. Peoples who were deprived of their statehood through conquest, forced displacement or colonial rule should not also be denied an effective voice in the international system. The UN must develop representative mechanisms through which the Circassians and other stateless nations can speak in their own name and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their existence, homeland and political future.

15. Applicable standards

Issue	Protected right	Legal basis
Self-determination	Free determination of political status and economic, social and cultural development.	UNDRIP arts. 3–4; ICCPR/ICESCR common art. 1
Assimilation	Protection and redress against forced assimilation and destruction of culture.	UNDRIP art. 8

Issue	Protected right	Legal basis
Language	Transmission and education through Indigenous languages.	UNDRIP arts. 13–14
Participation	Direct participation and good-faith consultation on decisions affecting the people.	UNDRIP arts. 18–19
Security	Life, liberty, freedom from torture and effective remedy.	ICCPR arts. 2, 6, 7, 9
Collective protection	Collective action through the UN when atrocity-crime thresholds are met.	UN Charter; 2005 World Summit paras. 138–139

16. Requested United Nations action

- Establish a continuing monitoring mechanism on Circassians and other Indigenous and national communities in the Russian Federation.
- Create secure channels for testimony from the homeland, families of victims, educators, veterans, defenders and diaspora institutions.
- Investigate language restrictions, administrative fragmentation, forced mobilization, disappearances, torture allegations and deaths in custody.
- Monitor and investigate transnational pressure on diaspora organizations, and protect independent Circassian representatives from intimidation and retaliation.
- Request disaggregated data on education, language, political participation, detention, recruitment, casualties, income and public investment.
- Examine the historical and present status of the peoples of the Caucasus and the effects of rule established through conquest and forced displacement.
- Support a peaceful, internationally protected and supervised process of self-determination for the Circassian people and other affected Indigenous peoples.
- Create a formal UN participation status for legitimate representative institutions of stateless Indigenous nations, distinct from ordinary NGO accreditation.
- Help establish mechanisms that strengthen solidarity and cooperation between the Circassian people and the international community in response to the threat to Circassian identity and collective existence under Russian rule.
- Recognize that no decision concerning the future of the Caucasus is legitimate without the free and informed participation of its Indigenous peoples.

17. Selected Sources

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Submitted on behalf of the International Circassian Political Committee (ICPC) by:

Kase Kik
Chairman
International Circassian Political Committee (ICPC)

www.icpc-circassia.org | contact@icpc-circassia.org