

To the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania

17 December 2025

Vilnius, Republic of Lithuania

Dear Honourable Speaker Juozas Olekas and Honourable Members of the Seimas,

We, the Circassians and friends of the Circassian people who gathered at the international conference **“The Circassian Genocide in the Context of History and Contemporary Politics”** held at the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on 17 December 2025, respectfully submit this appeal for your consideration.

Between 1763 and 1864, the Russian Empire carried out a systematic campaign of destruction against the Circassian nation during its invasion and occupation of Circassia in the Western Caucasus. Throughout this 101-year war, hundreds of thousands of Circassians were killed; villages, towns, cultural centers, forests, and agricultural lands were burned and destroyed; families were torn apart; and deliberate famine and disease were used as tools of annihilation. When the population was weakened and exhausted, the Empire initiated a planned mass expulsion in 1864.

As a result, more than 90% of the Circassian population was either killed or forced into exile. Hundreds of thousands perished during deportation due to starvation, epidemics, and exposure. Over 6,000 Circassian settlements, cultural sites, and historical locations were erased, paving the way for the systematic distortion of Circassian history and for the settlement of the region with groups loyal to the Empire. These events are documented in detail in the official records and reports of the major powers of the time, including Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and even Russia itself.

According to the definition set out in the **UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** of 9 December 1948, the Russian army committed all of the acts listed in the genocide definition with the intent to annihilate the Circassian people: *(a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.* There exist extensive documentation and numerous reports detailing the systematic implementation of these acts by the Russian military.

Today, approximately one million Circassians reside within the Russian Federation, while several million more remain dispersed across the world as an enduring legacy of the tragedies that occurred 161 years ago. In Russia, restrictions on freedom of expression hinder Circassians from openly discussing or addressing their national concerns, and efforts by community leaders or civil society organizations to engage constructively with these issues are frequently met with dismissive or obstructive responses from state authorities. As a result, the essential components of Circassian identity—its language, culture, and historical memory—face ongoing and serious risks. Despite this, no form of justice, recognition, or restitution has been undertaken by the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, or the Russian Federation; instead, current policies continue to include politically motivated repression, including the unlawful detention, mistreatment, and disappearance of Circassian youth.

In its 2023 Vancouver Declaration (**Resolution on Clarifying the Consequences of the Russian Federation's Aggression Against Ukraine in Terms of Adherence to OSCE Principles, Article 14**), the OSCE explicitly recognized the ongoing oppression of indigenous nations held under Russian domination, including the Circassians. This continuous policy of coercion and intimidation demonstrates the clear continuity of Russia's imperial methods across its different political forms.

A systematic policy of Russification continues in the Russian Federation. In 2023, the Russian Federation withdrew from the **Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**. The learning and transmission of the Circassian language have been increasingly restricted by decisions taken in Moscow. Twenty years ago, Circassian was taught eight hours per week in schools, but this has been gradually reduced to just one hour. Circassians seeking residence permits to return to their ancestral homeland face significant obstacles, with years-long application processes routinely and arbitrarily terminated by Russian authorities. Circassian youth are either sent to the frontlines to fight in the war against Ukraine or imprisoned on fabricated charges; numerous young Circassians are currently in detention, and there are reports of some being tortured to death. During the Putin era, many Circassian activists were abducted from their homes and killed. Moreover, despite the rich natural resources of Circassia, the average income of Circassians remains among the lowest in the Russian Federation, reflecting a broader pattern of systemic discrimination, political marginalization, and economic deprivation.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted on 13 September 2007, affirms in Article 3 that *Indigenous peoples have the right to self-*

determination. By virtue of this right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. However, the circumstances clearly demonstrate that the Circassians, the Indigenous people of Circassia in the Western Caucasus, cannot secure a safe and prosperous future under Russian domination, nor can they realize their development as an Indigenous people in their ancestral homeland.

If the lessons of the Circassian Genocide—one of the most extensive and well-documented genocides of the modern era—had been heeded by the international community, perhaps humanity would have been better equipped to prevent later genocides such as the Holocaust, the Holodomor, and Srebrenica. Accurately defining and acknowledging what happened to the Circassians is essential not only for historical justice but also for global efforts to prevent future genocides. The existence of extensive documentation in 19th-century state archives is not, by itself, sufficient; only official recognition can ensure that the truth is preserved and that future generations learn from it. Recognizing the Circassian genocide will not only ensure that the past is learned accurately, but will also contribute to building a safe future!

For these reasons, and in the name of historical truth, justice, and human dignity, we respectfully request that the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania consider the following actions:

- 1. To officially recognize the systematic campaign conducted by the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries to occupy Circassia in the Western Caucasus and to annihilate the Circassian nation as an act of genocide, and to explicitly condemn the Circassian Genocide.**
- 2. To affirm the Circassian nation's right to return to its historical homeland, Circassia, and to exercise the right to self-determination on its ancestral territory in accordance with international law.**
- 3. To support the investigation and international recognition of the Circassian Genocide, carried out by successive Russian regimes between 1763 and 1864, through engagement with relevant international mechanisms and institutions, including the International Court of Justice.**
- 4. To engage in effective and long-term solidarity with the Circassian people in their struggle to preserve their existence, language, culture, and identity, and to**

We extend our sincere gratitude for your attention and for Lithuania's principled dedication to justice, historical responsibility, and the rights of oppressed peoples. Your leadership in this matter would represent a profound step toward restoring historical truth and safeguarding human dignity.

[illegible]