

“WHY ARE CRIMEAN TATARS STILL HUMILIATED? WHY ARE THEY STILL INSULTED?”

by Mubeyyin B. Altan – CTRIC - N. Bethesda, MD , December 31, 2009

These are some of the critical questions Bilal Bilalov, the head of the Crimean Tatar Academic Musical Theater asked Ukraine’s President Viktor Yushchenko, during **Ukraine’s Intellectuals’ Forum** held in Simferopol on December 23, 2009.

While searching for an event that strongly impressed me I read this news piece on QHA (Qirim Haber Ajansi- Crimean News Agency) titled “*Kirim Tatar Tiyatrosu Muduru Bilalov’dan Yuscenkoy’a demokrasi dersi - Bilalov Gave President Yushchenko a Democracy Lesson*” (QHA- Politics, December 25, 2009). I wanted, therefore, to close the year 2009 by commenting on this interesting article.

Praising Ukraine as the most democratic of all the former Soviet republics, Mr. Bilalov states: “*I apologize for being so blunt, Mr. President; it was you who made it possible for me to openly confront you with my questions*” and he went on to ask the most important questions facing the Crimean Tatars today.

“The language issue is highly important issue (for Crimean Tatars in Crimea); therefore I must ask you, Mr. President. Our language (Crimean Tatar) is not widely used in Crimea today. Five and a half centuries ago, however, we had our own state in Crimea (The Crimean Khanate) where our language was widely used, our music was widely played and our culture had flourished. I am not here to blame anyone, but just state the facts”

On the cultural issues Bilalov informed President Yushchenko as: “*We, the Crimean Tatar Academic Musical Theater, are forced to work in a run down building. Our national theater is the only theater in Ukraine that does not have its own costume and decoration atelier (workshop). Our National Art Museum and the Crimean Ensemble buildings are in ruins with leaky roofs..”*

Bilal Bilalov continued by pointing to the religious issues as one of the most important issues facing Crimean Tatars and Crimea: “*we had 1700 mosques in Crimea many years ago (during Khanate era), but since 1994 not a single mosque was built in Simferopol (Akmescit) and people are forced to pray outside (during holy days.) Cuma Camii (The Central Mosque) on Yaltinskaya Street in Simferopol is yet to be built (even though the permit was issued by the city government and later rescinded). “You mean to tell me that land to build a mosque can not be allocated, a mosque cannot be built for the past 16 years?”*

Mr. Bilalov also drew President Yushchenko’s attention to the problem of desecration of Crimean Tatar Muslim cemeteries. He gave the vicious attack on a Muslim cemetery in Chistenkoe near Simferopol where vandals attacked, desecrated and broke the headstones on April 11, 2008. He also gave another vandalism perpetrated against another Muslim cemetery “ *Two years ago vandals attacked our cemetery (in) and destroyed not two, not three, but 226 headstones, Mr. President! Do you think the perpetrators are arrested? Of course not!”*

At one point he simply asked President Yushchenko: ***Why are the Crimean Tatars still humiliated? Why are they still insulted?”***

As the year 2009 comes to an end and as we ready ourselves to enter the second decade of the twenty first century, as Crimean Tatars we should follow up on Mr. Bilal Bilalov’s questions and ask our political leaders at all levels, local, regional and national, the same simple but crucial questions! We should ask the leaders of the world nations, the heads of the international organizations the same simple but highly significant questions:

WHY ARE CRIMEAN TATARS STILL HUMILIATED? WHY ARE WE STILL INSULTED?

Mr. Bilal Bilalov not only taught President Yushchenko a lesson, but with his courage he taught all of us a lesson, a lesson how to bring up the on going human rights violations committed against the indigenous people of Crimea, the Crimean Tatars. As Bilal Bilalov attempted to demonstrate, we, the Crimean Tatars, can resolve our problems by being proactive in demanding the full restoration of our human and national rights. Thank you, Mr. Bilalov, thank you for your courage! You made me proud to be a Crimean Tatar.