



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1998/NGO/24  
24 February 1998

ENGLISH  
Original: ENGLISH, FRENCH  
and SPANISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Fifty-fourth session  
Item 9 (d) of the provisional agenda

FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE  
PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION: HUMAN  
RIGHTS, MASS EXODUS AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Written statement submitted by the International League for the  
Rights and Liberation of Peoples, a non-governmental organization  
in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement  
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council  
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[19 February 1998]

### A people in continued exodus

1. The purpose of this written statement is primarily to submit to the Commission on Human Rights information about the case of a people which has been subjected or reduced to several exoduses, the Pontians. Their tragic history is not widely known. The case is not only that of the dreadful events and the elimination process they had to undergo some 70 years ago; in fact they turned into a people of refugees, displaced from one country to another.

2. The presence of the Pontians may be traced back to the mid-eighth century B.C. Their initial Greek settlements are mentioned by Xenophon, 1/ between Trapezous (Trabzon) and Sinope, before the emergence of the Pontian Kingdom controlling the North coast of Asia Minor and part of its hinterland. Philosophers and historians such as Diogenes, Diodorus and Strabon make part of the past of this region. The influence of this power in the region and over the Euxinus Pontus, its contribution to trade, culture and civilization during the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods are well attested. 2/

3. After the Ottoman conquest by the middle of the fifteenth century, the influence and unity of the Pontians was threatened. Under the Ottoman Empire, 3/ whose system of power and administration was based upon the discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims, even their living conditions and communal life as a people were affected by a number of economic and social mechanisms.

4. The first mass exoduses of the Pontians are closely related to the Ottoman-Russian wars. Thousands of refugees panicked by the reprisals they would have to suffer on the return of the conqueror, followed the Russian army's withdrawal. The formation of the initial Greco-Pontian communities in North Caucasus and in Georgia coincides with the Ottoman-Russian wars in 1828-29, 1853-56, 1877-78. The complete uprooting of the Pontians from their homeland took place in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

### Elimination and dispersion

5. With the formation of the Young Turk movement a new nationalistic and ethnocentric ideology appeared in the Ottoman Empire. After it came to power in 1908, the will and resolve of eliminating the Christian minorities took shape and was put into effect during and in the aftermath of World War I. The number of Pontians in the beginning of the twentieth century may be estimated at about 750,000. The process of their elimination goes from 1916 to 1923.

6. In 1916, shortly after the completion of the genocide of the Armenians, the elimination process of the Pontians, started. The methods were the same: massacres, atrocities, massive rapes, abduction of women and children, forcible conversions to Islam, death-marches into arid regions, in inhuman conditions of hunger, thirst and disease meant for full extinction. These measures were called "deportation" by the authorities and were supposedly taken for security reasons. These facts are related by survivors and by many foreign witnesses confirming the deliberate destruction of the Pontian minority as such. The testimonies coming from German and Austrian diplomats

allied to the Ottomans, are anything but partial towards the victims. 4/ After these tragic events, tens of thousands of Pontians left their homelands during the withdrawal of the Russian army, towards the Caucasus and Russia.

7. The elimination of the Pontians was carried on after World War I, in fact systematically after 1919. The event which is considered as the starting point of a new stage of the final uprooting is the arrival of Mustafa Kemal at Samsun on 19 May 1919. Indeed, operations of mass killings, persecution, "deportation" for elimination, were resumed on a large scale in 1919. Some acts of self-defence or resistance were repressed severely by the Turkish army. Scores of villages were burnt after looting. Churches and houses were plundered. A number of churches were demolished.

8. No security or strategic reason can be put forward to "explain" these crimes, especially those committed after the end of World War I, in 1919 and in the subsequent years, even during the Greco-Turkish conflict in Western Anatolia, hundreds of kilometres away. Again, these facts are reliably documented by survivors and by foreign witnesses, including officials, notably among the Bolshevik rulers, the new and temporary allies of the Kemalists. 5/ This preplanned destruction over 6-7 years after 1916, of about 50 per cent of the Pontians constituted a genocide under the United Nations criteria (Article II of the Convention on genocide, paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d), (e)).

#### Further mass exoduses

9. From 1916 to 1923, about 350,000 Pontians disappeared through massacres, persecution and death-marches. The population which could survive was driven to exodus. Thousands went away as refugees to a number of countries, such as France and the United States of America. Some 190,000 of the survivors arrived in Greece before 1923. The agreement signed in 1923 by Greece and Turkey, along with the Lausanne Treaty, for the mass exchange of refugees between the two countries, did not include the Pontians still alive in the region, most of whom had been converted to Islam. As a whole, about 200,000 fled from 1916 to 1923 to the Caucasus, mostly to Georgia and to Russia.

10. For these refugees, this was not the end of their exodus. During the Stalin period, in 1937 mass displacements to Siberia took place; later from 1945 to 1949 most of the Pontians were displaced to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Siberia. More recently, in 1990-96, about 180,000 Pontians, mostly descendants of those who fled from their homeland, could leave Russia, Kazakhstan and Georgia, and arrive as refugees to Greece.

#### Conclusion

11. Based on the information that the *International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples (LIDLIP)* could recently collect, it appears that the suffering endured by the Pontians is not something which belongs to the past. Obviously, a great part of them took the first opportunity they had these past years after the collapse of the USSR, to leave the places where they were forcibly displaced under Stalin's rule. The information available is not telling as to

whether sizable numbers of Pontians are still eager to leave these places in the CIS countries without being in a position to do so the *International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples (LIDLIP)* considers it highly desirable that the Commission of Human Rights requests the Representative of the Secretary-General for internally displaced persons to obtain, with the help of the Governments, more information in this respect on the situation and on the conditions of life of the Pontians in the CIS countries where they had suffered from inter-ethnic conflicts.

12. Further, in the likely event of Pontians in CIS countries wishing to emigrate, they should have the opportunity to choose their destination for once in their history of continued exodus. The *International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples* deems that, among other possibilities, were the conditions given, i.e. normal conditions of cultural, social and economic life, the Pontians should be able to return to their Pontian homeland in present Turkey.

#### Notes

1/ Xenophon, Anabasis, Part IV, Ch. VIII and Part V, Ch. I-VII.

2/ See inter alia Falmeryer, History of the Imperium of Trapezous, Ed. Kiriakidis, Thessaloniki.

3/ See inter alia B. Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, London, New York, 1968 (2nd ed.).

4/ Notably in 1916 the German and Austrian Consuls in Samsun (German and Austrian diplomatic archives).

5/ See inter alia C.N. Aralov, The Memories of a Soviet Diplomat 1922-1923, reporting on the official visit in Turkey of the Soviet Commander-in-Chief Froundzé to Kemal Ataturk.

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