

## **Sometimes Beard is a Beard...But sometimes it is a tool for religious profiling!**

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Question: Who are these people? What do they have in common?

The one on the top right is a Crimean Tatar “land” activist Danial Ametov, who was, a few days ago, beaten up by five prison guards in a jail at Herson region of Ukraine, because of his beard. Yes, it is true! He was beaten up by five prison guards who unexpectedly showed up in Ametov’s jail cell in a February evening of 2011, and asked him to cut his beard. When he refused to cut his beard, he was attacked by the prison guards with batons and rods and badly beaten. After the torturous beating, the guards cut his beard and placed barely conscious Ametov under solitary confinement.

Now, let us look at the other photos. The one on the left is the well-known Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. He is the author of Anna Karenina, Last Station (made into a movie in 2010) and many

other literary works. He is well- respected and loved all over the world, as well as in Ukraine. He also has a beard.

The bottom center is the photo of famous Soviet/Russian novelist and dramatist Alexander Soljenitsin, who had a Ukrainian mother. This bearded author/historian is the author of world famous literary works, such as, *The Gulag Archipelago*, *The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, and many others. Yet no one even mentions his beard!

Daniyal Ametov is a Crimean Tatar. He lives in Simferopol, where I took his picture of him at his house during my State Department sponsored IREX IARO research grant in 2006. Ametov, a soft spoken man, heads an organization called Avdet, one of the many associations that planned and executed several land squatting protests throughout Crimea within the past years. In 2010, he was sentenced to jail for four years. The reasoning behind his incarceration was not transparent. Consequently, Ametov was removed from his homeland territory of Crimea and transferred to another jail in Kherson region (Labor colony #105, Daryevka village, Kherson oblast) of Ukraine, where he has no support system.

Ametov's beard differs from Soljenitsin's and Tolstoy's. His beard is ethnically and religiously defined. He is a Crimean Tatar. A Muslim, who believes that growing a beard, is one of the requirements (*fard*) of his Islamic faith.

The Ukrainian constitution article 35 guarantees freedom of religion. Beard is included in this freedom, as an expression of religion. Therefore, this jail-beating of a Crimean Tatar prisoner in an Ukrainian jail because of his beard, for one, is **unconstitutional** based on the Ukrainian constitution.

How can a helpless man be beaten by five prison guards for his beard in his jail cell? Does this mean that tomorrow Christians of Ukraine will be beaten by the police because of the crosses they wear around their neck? How about the Jews of Ukraine who wear Star of David as a symbol of their religious faith?

I thought that Ukraine I know and conduct research in since 2002 respected religions. Every year when I visit Crimea with different academic grants, I see Hare Krishnas dancing at airports or parks in Sevastopol, I talk to Jehova's Witnesses walking around the cities. In Crimea, I see churches, synagogues, and mosques next to one another. Is this just a façade presented to Western visitors, including OSCE, or does religious freedom really exist in Ukraine?

I wonder if these five prison guards will be punished for their unjust behavior by their superiors now that this news of this event spread outside of Ukraine? I wonder if Crimean Tatars in Crimea will reconcile their differences and condemn what happened to Daniyal Ametov in his jail cell? When an event like this takes place, if people do not unite regardless of their political and ideological differences, then the battles cannot be won and people would continue to live in an environment where bickering about the *Other* is the most practiced activity.

I for one, as a US citizen and a US scholar whose work was supported by numerous academic grants and who conducted research in Crimea since 2002, and the current President of the

International Committee for Crimea, condemn this inhumane action of collective beating of a helpless prisoner in a Ukrainian prison (Herson region).

I condemn the religious profiling based on a beard, which is against the Ukrainian Constitution, Article 35.

I invite Crimean Tatar Diaspora as well as everybody who opposes human rights violations wherever it is to protest and condemn this event. I invite Human Rights organizations and conflict monitoring organizations, such as OSCE HCNM, to protest and investigate this ugly event.

Ukraine is aiming to be a part of the European Union. However, against the backdrop of these types of human rights violations, I wonder if it will pass the civilization test and be allowed to enter the European Union.

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<http://www.iccrimea.org/reports/ametov.pdf>