



Circassian Repatriation Organization

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The CRO's Annual Report 2022

The organization continued its fundraising campaigns. The CRO's branch in New Jersey as well as the members of the organization initiated fundraising activities to contribute to the student initiative the organization established in cooperation with Circassian associations in the world during the year 2021.

The student initiative was the main focus set by the Board of Directors in its work plan, which resulted in a temporary suspension of other programs such as the school bag drive and small business project. However, the relief program continued its work and made donations to many emergency humanitarian cases.

Relief program:

The relief program is one of the key programs in which the organization is based and is subject to its goals and vision. The program aims to:

- Preserve the dignity our people through the concerted efforts and collective action of all members of our community around the world.
- Respond to critical and urgent humanitarian emergencies, as well as assist in providing material support required for medical operations or treatment and expensive medicines.
- Carry out annual campaigns to collect donations and support and distribute them to the beneficiaries.
- Provide assistance in securing free medical consultations, medical grants for treatment, or communication with doctors wishing to provide their services for free. This is to be achieved through cooperation and coordination with various clinics, medical associations, and charities.

From the work of the Relief Committee during the year 2022:

- Various financial aids, including assistance in repairing a destroyed house and assistance in paying the house rent for an orphan family
- Distribution of food baskets in Ramadan
- Distributing Zakat al-Fitr to families living below the poverty line
- Medical and surgical assistance which includes assistance for patients with cancerous tumors, fracture accidents, the purchase of medical devices, assistance in the purchase of medicines and cases of heart attack. In addition to aid for various medical conditions.
- The relief team also sponsor a student to study monthly.
- The amount of donations for this year was 73,480.00 USD

Student initiative:

The student initiative, which was launched by the organization with Circassian institutions and associations, as well as individuals around the world (the coalition) in 2021, also continued during 2022. Students' requirements were followed up and they were assisted in the procedures for applying for residence permits.

- Students who have been accepted into Krasnodar University:

Krasnodar University accepted eleven students, all of whom obtained the necessary residence permits, and some of them received government-funded scholarships to continue their studies at the university. Two students got married back home and one student left for Europe.

- Students who have been accepted into Nalchik University:

Nalchik University admitted 35 students who faced many difficulties in obtaining residence permits. In the beginning, the students submitted applications for residence according to the quota system allocated to the Republic. Unfortunately, it turned out there were changes in the quota system that year that we were not aware of. The allocated quota was reduced from one thousand to one hundred names only. Most of the students' applications were rejected, as only 5 students obtained a residence permit. Three students also received a full scholarship and student accommodation.

The coalition tried to find solutions for the students in Nalchik without any help from the Kabardian authorities and without any recognition of our students as Circassians.

We did not have good options for our students. It was either to return to Syria or to stay illegally in their original country with all the consequences! Therefore, we contacted the brothers in Abkhazia and met by video call with the Abkhazian returnee committee to find out if they can help our students who want to stay in one of the republics of the Circassian homeland and do not want to return to Syria.

The Abkhaz side presented an idea of the laws in force in Abkhazia regarding students of Abkhaz origin and the facilities provided to them. However, he admitted the Circassians are not treated as Abkhaz, but rather as foreigners, despite their recognition of brotherhood and kinship, due to amendments to the Abkhazian laws. But at the same

time, the position of the Abkhaz side was very friendly and they expressed their willingness to receive our Circassian students to study at the University of Abkhazia, and they pledged to provide all possible facilities on their part.

Due to the presence of a number of our students of purely Abkhaz origin, and because most of our students have Abkhazian blood in their veins from their fathers, mothers, grandfathers or grandmothers, it was decided to send a list of the names of our students with detailed information to the Abkhaz authorities to study their files. We were told from the Abkhazian side that studying the files of the Syrians requires cooperation between the Abkhazian embassy in Syria and the Circassian Association in Syria, which must approve the origins of the names in the list.

But, unfortunately, just as the administration of the Circassian Association in Syria refused to provide our students with declarations of their Circassian origins, it also refused to endorse the list sent from the Abkhaz side. It is unfortunate that the Circassian Association in Syria does not give this document similar to the Circassian Association in Jordan and without the presence of any written legal reason, despite the recognition of the Syrian government represented by the First Lady that the Circassians are one of the components of the Syrian society. We hope in the future the Circassian Society in Syria will make this a concerning matter so the affairs of our students will not be hindered in obtaining residency in their home country.

The refusal of the authorities in the Circassian republics to grant our students residence permits led to disappointment, forcing some of them to leave for Europe through very dangerous roads. Thirteen of them succeeded in reaching Europe, while 6 other students returned after failing to cross the borders despite their repeated attempts. Thus they resumed their status in the university and succeeded in the preparatory year.

In the second academic year, the initiative continued to take care of students who remained in the Circassian republics and were not abandoned despite the expiry of the grant allocated to them. A new initiative was launched for students to continue their studies and assistance was provided to them until the writing of this report.

We can summarize the initiative of the first academic year as follows:

- The number of students receiving the scholarship is 46 students.
- 13 of them left to Europe.
- 2 students got married.

That is to say, 31 students obtained a study seat and funding from the student initiative until the end of 2022, while 2 returned to Syria.

The 3rd International Circassian Conference

The Third International Circassian Conference was held in Istanbul between June 24 and June 27, 2022 at the Baglarbashi Convention and Culture Center. Due to the continued spread of coronavirus mutations, the organizers of the "Third International Circassian Conference" decided to postpone the conference twice during the past two years.

The conference was an excellent platform for Circassian activists to meet, exchange ideas, share results and outputs of research and projects, and initiate discussions and collaborations. Circassian communities in the motherland and diaspora are rich in experts in various fields. Therefore, the slogan of the Third International Circassian Conference was "Together for a better future".

The conference was organized by the Circassian Women's Association in Turkey, the Circassian Repatriation Organization, the Circassian Culture Association in Nuremberg, the Circassian Associations Federation, and many other Circassian associations in Turkey.

The organizers exercised their joint role in serving the Circassian cause, away from political and ideological differences. The Circassian cause can be served through the following:

- Building bridges of communication by establishing cooperation and coordination efforts among Circassian intellectuals all over the world.
- Identify areas of cooperation and communication with scientific and educational institutions in the mother country.
- Benefit from the experiences of Circassian experts from around the world and form specialized committees to follow up on meetings and conferences.
- Encouraging those interested in Circassian culture to learn more about their history and urging their children to enroll in Circassian universities, especially in humanitarian programs, to perpetuate their connection to the homeland.
- Seeking to build an alliance to organize the common goals of all Circassian activists and institutions, addressing their concerns, and collective work to find solutions in line with globalization and the revolution of knowledge and communication.
- Removing barriers that prevent cooperation between those interested in Circassian affairs and benefiting from the experiences of other peoples.

The conference program consisted of 17 sessions with approximately 80 lectures. Delegations from more than 12 countries (Turkey, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Palestine, Kafar Kama, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America, and the Russian Federation) also participated.

The conference was accompanied by the second Circassian Art Exhibition. This year's exhibition was very rich, as 42 Circassian artists from several countries participated in it. The highlight of the conference was the wide participation of the young speakers with their valuable contribution.

The conference sessions dealt with the following topics:

- Circassians around the world and the Circassian identity.
- The role of existing Circassian institutions in preserving the Circassian identity, activities, and cooperation.
- Inter-Circassian relations and how to improve cooperation.
- How to improve Circassian relations and how to improve awareness of Circassian identity.
- The importance of art in Circassian culture and identity.
- Circassians in the diaspora and the right of return: an achievable goal.
- How is the right of return achieved?
- Circassian youth in the homeland and diaspora: identity awareness.
- Circassian language and dialogue between Circassian youth in the homeland and diaspora.
- Circassian youth: How can they be supported?

- Circassian youth: a possibility to achieve a better future.

The conference participants took the opportunity to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Circassian republics in the North Caucasus.

The following recommendations were adopted by the General Assembly of the Third International Circassian Conference:

- 1) Continue to organize the International Circassian Conference annually.
- 2) Limiting the topic of the conference to one or two topics. This can also be done by organizing a focused meeting on one topic (language, culture, music, art, etc.) every two years.
- 3) In future conferences, increase the time allotted for the presentation of some important topics and allow more time for discussion.
- 4) Formation of a working group to address the improvement of dialogue between Circassian institutions and the preservation of the Circassian identity.
- 5) Participants emphasized the importance and necessity of collective action for all Circassian communities to make sound and joint decisions that benefit the Circassian nation, especially in times of adversity, such as in wars and epidemics in this turbulent world.
- 6) Formation of a working group of intellectuals and academics to address critical issues and develop strategies.
- 7) Formation of a working group to address the right of return.
- 8) Formation of a working group to discuss the necessity of establishing a global Circassian organization in the diaspora. All participants agreed on the need to develop an international organization of Circassians in the diaspora that includes all Circassian associations/organizations around the world.
- 9) Formation of a working group to address the importance of forming the International Circassian Youth Organization.
- 10) Formation of a working group to study the formation of the International Federation of Circassian Arts.
- 11) The participation of the young generation is highly appreciated and necessary and needs to be further developed by encouraging more Circassian youth to participate.
- 12) Participants discussed the deteriorating situation of the Circassians in Syria. Moreover, the participants urged the President of Adygea to consider helping families who wish to return to the motherland to fulfill their dream by getting out of the miserable situation in Syria and establishing a new life in the motherland.
- 13) The Organizing Committee has received several offers to host the next meeting, but no decision has been made yet. A public announcement will be made once a decision is made.
- 14) The importance of involving the local and international media in all upcoming meetings.
- 15) Support the Circassian Art Gallery and make all efforts to develop it.

During the conference, one of the attendees applied for permission to present a video from a Ukrainian parliamentarian. The organizers refused the request after listening to the content of the video, as the message that the video carries is not commensurate with the nature of the conference. Also, the political message prompted by the video is not endorsed by the organizers of the conference. However, after the end of the conference, the organization was subjected to a fierce campaign containing many lies and misinformation on social media because it refused to display the video message. This forced the Board of Directors to write an explanation on its page about the incident and to clarify what happened.

Organization Awards

The awards organized during the Third Circassian Conference were handed out according to the following:

- Lifetime Achievement Award

A Lifetime Achievement Award was awarded to each of Mr. Aslan Jarmoquwa, the former President of the Republic of Adyghe, and to Mr. Shenkari Hakorteh, one of the most important historical figures who contributed to the establishment of the Republic.

- Personality of the Year Award

The "Personality of the Year" award was presented to Askar Sukht, Atilla Gucer and Gazi Balkar respectively

- Project of the year

Award given to the mentor program

Activities of the branch of the Circassian Repatriation Organization in New Jersey, USA

The most important activities carried out by the branch of the Circassian Return Organization in New Jersey are summarized as follows:

- Care supplies against the spread of COVID-19, including a mask, postcard and hand sanitizer, were distributed to workers in the health and education sectors, to thank them for their dedication to community service in the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Holding a Ramadan dinner on 10/04/2022
- Launching the Tip Toe Challenge to collect donations to fund the students' initiative on 04/05/2022
- Summer Solstice Evening - 06/23/2022
- The organization's branch in New Jersey obtained a license to hold a charity lottery to finance the organization's programs starting from 07/14/2022, and the first charity lottery draw was held on 12/22/2022.
- A charity dinner on the occasion of Thanksgiving on 11/19/2022

Other activities

The organization continued its cultural activities and conducted a short story competition in the Circassian language named after the great Circassian writer Nalo Zaur in cooperation with the Circassian Language Association in Kabardina Balkaria for adolescents and youth.

The aim of the competition:

- Increasing awareness of the importance of the mother tongue among the young generations and strengthening their positive view towards it as the most important spiritual value for the Circassian people.
- Identifying talented young people and increasing their ability to exploit the richness of the Circassian language.
- Enhancing and developing the skills of adolescents and youth in the Circassian language in the field of literature and short stories.

The cultural programs organized by the organization help preserve Circassian literature and culture and serve to build bridges between the diaspora and the motherland.

The media program (From the Heart), which the organization started in 2020, also continued, to introduce and meet influential figures in Circassian culture.

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Circassian Repatriation Organization is nonprofit organization registered under the *Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act* under registration number **878524-4**, Not-for-profit-humanitarian- charitable and peaceful, with no religious agenda or orientation aiming to To provide aid and support to all Circassians who wish to return to the historic homeland in the North Caucasus; and To relieve distress resulting from the dislocation of persons of Circassian heritage and provide support by establishing, operating and maintaining a center or centers to provide relief, and to provide assistance for relocation and repatriation to safe environments