The Reasons of the Tragic Events in Fergana in the Summer Of 1989

(Based On the History of Relations between the Nations of the Former Soviet Union)

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The relations between peoples, nations, is a complicated social and political problem all over the world. This problem has its own history, perspectives, and phenomena in every country. In the former Soviet Union, the relations between peoples were very difficult. More than 130 nations belonging to various ethnic groups lived in the country. During its history, the Soviet government has practiced colonial, powerfully chauvinist politics. By carrying out its 'betrothal' politics, the state limited the possibilities of nations to experience normal economic, political and spiritual development. Many obstacles were put in the way of the development of national culture and national self-consciousness. The true intentions of this politics were always hidden from the world community. During these decades the propaganda apparatus of the Soviet State always said that in the USSR the national issue was solved fairly and correctly, based on the principles of equality and equal rights of the nations. Despite the increased propaganda followed by extremely rigid repressive measures, the nations continued their struggle for their own interests, honor, and dignity. This led to a degeneration of the situation year by year. These consequences may be clearly seen in the 80's when they led to conflicts among the nations in the USSR. We mention the youth demonstrations of Yakutiya and Kazakhstan against unfair national politics, clashes between the Armenians and the

Azerbadjanians in Nagorno Karabakh, bloody clashes in Baku, Sumgait, and Tbilisi in the summer of 1989, the anti-soviet actions in Moldova, and in the republics of the Baltic area. As a result of this unrest hundreds of people have lost their lives.

There was also bloodshed between the Uzbeks and the Meshetin Turks in Fergana valley of Uzbekistan in May, June of 1989. The reasons for the Fergana valley (Uzbekistan) tragedy have to date not been thoroughly studied. In the literature available these events are described as clashes between Uzbek and Turk mafia youth groups. This interpretation of the Fergana tragedy has become very common in most of the research papers on the subject.

In our opinion, the Fergana events of 1989 are not the result of national conflicts between the Uzbeks and the Turks. The arguments of our position on this issue are based upon the following facts. The former Soviet Union politics of the Party and the Power were always directed to create tension between the nations and the nationalities. The Soviet power, operating on the principle "divide and rule", always pursued a policy aimed at stirring up hatred and mistrust among the nations, thus weakening the possibility of them uniting into a single front of struggle against the Soviet Empire.

It is known that for many centuries, the Meshetin Turks lived in the southern regions of the Adiginsk, Askizinsk, Ahaltsinsk districts of Georgia, which is their motherland. For thousands of years their ancestors lived there. Their motherland was on the border with Turkey. The Soviet State deported natives from these border regions and colonized Russian speaking populations there. In the summer of 1954 the Meshetin Turks, such as the Tatars from Grimea, and other nations of the northern Caucasus region were accused of high treason and within two hours were forced to leave their motherland and emmigrate to Central Asia. People from Russia and Georgia were resettled in their abandoned homes. This was considered genocide of hundreds of thousands of people. They were mostly deported to different regions of Uzbekistan. The Soviet power planned forcibly to assimilate them with the local Turkish speaking population. In the early years of the resettlement the Meshetin Turks lived in difficult conditions. They didn't have political rights, nor the opportunity to develop their language, culture and traditions. Their children were educated in local schools. They were always under the supervision of NKVD workers. They were restricted from moving from one village to another. As a result of difficult economic conditions of life, and because of the lack of medical care, most of the adult population died in the early years of the resettlement.

The Uzbek people always offered support and help. Ties of relationship had established between the Uzbeks and the Turks. These are due to the sameness of religion, similarity of the two languages, cultural traditions and national psychology. From 1994 to 1999 there was not a single conflict between the Uzbeks and the Turks. Most Turks lived in the Fergana valley where the social-economic situation had worsened in

the second half of the 80's. The monoculture of cotton, the difficult ecological situation, the growth of unemployment, and the worsening of the living conditions of the people were reflected in the relations between the nations.

In 1970, approximately 1,698,493 people lived in the Fergana valley, of which 1,138,763 lived in the countryside. The Fergana valley was one of the most populated areas of Uzbekistan. In this republic an average of 34.4 people inhabited 1sq. km of land. As for the Andijan region alone, 1 sq. km of the area was inhabited by 321.3 people. High demographic growth deepened the difficulty of the economic situation.

Beginning with the second half of the 60s, the Meshetin Turks demanded to return to their own motherland. In the second half of the 80s, this movement had extended and had taken a mass character.

The soviet authorities had no intention to allow them to return to their motherland. This caused mistrust and conflicts between the Turks and the Uzbeks. This is why the main cause of the tragic events in Fergana should not be sought in the hatred between the Uzbeks and the Turks, but rather in the national policies of the Soviet power. The policies of the Soviet power were aimed at suppressing the struggle of peoples for human rights. The clashes between the Uzbeks and the Turks started in the city of Kuwasay on May 23rd, 1989, and spread to the towns of Tashlak, Margilan, Fergana, and Kokand. On June 3rd more than 3,000 people participated in the clashes in Tashlak. As a consequence of the tragic events, 103 people died in Fergana. 58 of the victims were Turks and 36 were Uzbeks. 1,011 people were wounded. 757 houses, 27 state buildings, and 255 vehicles were burnt. More than 5000 Meshetin Turks were settled in military camps situated not far from Fergana. The Soviet press of that period blamed the Uzbeks for those bloody clashes, characterizing them as nationalists hostile to other peoples.

False rumors were spread about the Uzbeks, who allegedly wanted to expel Russians, Tatars, Jews, and other nationalities from Fergana valley. As a result of these rumours, the true goals of the Turks to return to their homes, as well as the difficult socio-political, and economic situation in the Fergana valley, was hidden from the international community. Having succeeded in orchestrating the bloody clashes in the Fergana valley, the authorities wanted to use the Meshetin Turks as a cheap labor force in the central regions of Russia. It is well-known that in central regions of Russia the conditions of life are harsh and that this had forced the rural population to move to other towns, including some regions of Central Asia. In the second half of the 80s there were more than 900.000 deserted houses in the rural regions of Central Russia. This situation was clearly seen in the regions of Pskov, Bryansk, Orlovsk, Smolensk, Yaraslawl, Kirov and others. The Meshetin Turks deported from Uzbekistan were resettled in these regions. By June 10th, 1988, there were 2.839 people resettled into the Belgorod region. 16.282 people were resettled into the Smolensk, Orlovsk, and Voronez region. In this way

the Soviet authorities settled Meshetin Turks in this large territory of Russia, isolating them from the others, inflicting a heavy blow to their ability to return to their Motherland. In the unpopulated areas of Russia, the Turks didn't receive any help, or support from the government; they found themselves in difficult conditions. The Meshetin Turks didn't have any opportunities to educate their children nor to develop their culture. Their religious sentiments were in jeopardy. They lived in areas lacking any Muslim spiritual institutions. They were also isolated from other Turkish-speaking peoples of the USSR.

In short, the hard working Meshetin Turks have twice faced a national tragedy over a period of just 50 years.