

New Jersey Congressman Bill Pascrell (D- 9th District) submitted this "Statement of Support for the Circassian People" to the United States Congress on January 29, 2014.

This statement in the Congressional Record was made possible by our letter campaign and petitions submitted by supporters of Circassians worldwide.

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STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE CIRCASSIAN  
PEOPLE

HON. BILL PASCRELL, JR.  
OF NEW JERSEY

Mr. PASCRELL of New Jersey. Mister Speaker, I rise today to express my deep concerns regarding the Sochi Olympics. A number of issues have been raised regarding the misguided decision to host the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, from LGBT rights to the real threat of terrorism. However, I would like to discuss an issue which has not received the same level of attention: the historical mistreatment of the Circassian people by Russia.

The Circassians are an ethnic group originating in the North Caucasus region. Sochi is located in the historical nation of Circassia, which was conquered by the Russian Empire in a series of wars during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In fact, Sochi served as the last capitol of Circassia.

Following their defeat in 1864, 90% of the Circassian population was forcibly deported or killed and Circassia was annexed by Russia. Hundreds of thousands of Circassians were exiled from their homeland, never to return.

Millions of Circassians are now spread around the world in diaspora communities, while only about 700,000 Circassians

remain within their ancestral homeland, now a part of the Russian Federation.

Given this history, it is deeply disrespectful to the Circassian community for the Russian government to use Sochi as a stage to promote themselves to the world. Although I condemn the decision to hold the Olympics in Sochi, this year's Winter Olympics present the opportunity to raise the world's awareness of the historical injustices perpetrated by Russia against the Circassian people and homeland.

Today, Circassians worldwide strive to achieve the right of return to their homeland, and seek to gain self-determination and a revival of their language and culture. I am proud to represent a large and active Circassian-American community within New Jersey's Ninth Congressional District.

Colleagues, I urge you to join me in condemning the Sochi Olympics and celebrating the contributions of the Circassian people to the United States of America.

*Bill Pascrell Jr*