

Amaru Antoniu Lima

01 June 2004

Russian Federation

On 21 February 2004 Amaru Antoniu Lima was walking near the Voronezh State Medical Academy where he was a second-year medical student. Moments later, the 24-year-old from Guinea-Bissau was stabbed to death in broad daylight, reportedly by three young men.

Foreign students in Voronezh – a city with just under one million inhabitants approximately 600 kilometres south of Moscow - were already fearful of racially-motivated attacks prior to the vicious murder of Amaru Antoniu Lima. The city is known as a centre for “skinhead” activity and local NGOs report that racist attacks regularly take place near student hostels in the town. There are reportedly around 1,500 foreign students in Voronezh and according to reports, seven murders and some 70 attacks against them have been documented in the past five years. In October 2003, Amaru Antoniu Lima’s room-mate, who is also from Guinea-Bissau, was reportedly stabbed on a city bus. Many students in the city generally try to avoid travelling at night.

For a few days after the murder, up to 500 students refused to attend lectures and organized pickets throughout Voronezh in protest at the prevalence of racist attacks and the failure of the procuracy, police and the courts to offer them adequate protection. The impact and media attention attracted to the problem by these demonstrations reportedly forced the city authorities to hold a meeting with foreign students. Improvements to security in and around the university campus were promised by city officials. However, many students are said to be still sceptical about the ability of the authorities to stem the tide of racially-motivated assaults on foreigners in Voronezh.

Immediately following the murder, police officials in Voronezh reportedly denied that the attack was racially-motivated on the basis of the fact that the assailants “had hair” – i.e. could not have belonged to a “skinhead” group. On 18 March 2004, three young men aged 16, 19 and 21 were reportedly detained in connection with the murder of Amaru Antoniu Lima. However, it was not until the following day, when one of the suspects confessed in court that the suspects had decided to go and “kill a black” out of boredom on the day of the murder, that the investigation was reportedly requalified under Part 2 of Article 105 of the Russian Criminal Code – “murder with aggravating circumstances committed by a group of persons on grounds of national, racial, or religious hatred or enmity”. Significantly, this article of the Russian Criminal Code is rarely used in race hate murders of this kind, and a conviction under this article could set an important precedent.

Discrimination on grounds of race is a reality for many members of ethnic or national minority groups in the Russian Federation. Victims whose cases have come to the attention of Amnesty International are predominantly students, asylum-seekers and refugees from Africa, but also include citizens of the Russian Federation (including ethnic Chechens and Jews), as well as people from the south Caucasus, from South, Southeast and Central Asia, from the Middle East and from Latin America.

The Russian Federation is a state party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Convention obliges the authorities to take active measures to prohibit and eliminate discrimination on grounds of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin and to guarantee to everyone equality before the law.

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Please send appeals immediately:

- welcoming the fact that an investigation is being conducted into the racially-motivated murder of Amaru Antoniu Lima and urging the authorities to conduct the investigation in a thorough and impartial manner;
- calling for allegations that the murder was racially-motivated to be fully investigated, and urging that charges against suspects reflect the racial motivation of the murder, if it is so established;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that anyone reasonably suspected as responsible for the attack is brought to justice in the course of a fair trial in line with international standards;
- calling for urgent measures to be taken to protect racial and ethnic minorities in Voronezh from racial or other abuse and assaults, and to encourage tolerance and respect for difference amongst the local population in line with the international obligations of the Russian Federation;
- urging the Russian authorities “to strengthen its efforts to prevent racist violence and to protect members of ethnic minorities and foreigners...” as recommended by the (UN) Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in March 2003.

Send appeals to:

Main Procurator of Voronezh Region

Aleksandr Ponomarev

Voronezh Regional Procuracy

Ul. Ordzhonikidze 41

394006 Voronezh

Russian Federation

Fax: +7 0732 55 38 61/+7 0732 55 25 71 (if someone answers say “fax please”)

Salutation: Dear Procurator

Head of Main Internal Affairs Department of Voronezh Region

Aleksandr Dementev

Main Internal Affairs Department of Voronezh Region

Ul. Volodarskogo 39

394690 Voronezh

Russian Federation

Fax: +7 0732 77 98 07

Salutation: Dear Chief of Police

Copies to:

Procurator General of the Russian Federation

Vladimir Ustinov

Ul. Bolshaia Dimitrovka, 15a

103793 Moscow

Russian Federation

Fax: +7 095 292 88 48

Salutation: Dear Procurator General

Director of Voronezh Institute for International Education

Vladimir Rodionov
Ul. Kol'tsovskaia 40a
Voronezh
Russian Federation

Fax: +7 0732 13 33 50

Salutation: Dear Director

Special Presidential Representative for the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation

Sergei Poltavchenko
Nicol'skii per. 6
103012 Moscow
Russian Federation

Fax: +7 095 206 7113

Salutation: Dear Special Representative