

Russian Federation: Germain Soumele Kembou

Germain Soumele Kembou, a student from Cameroon, was attacked on 13 July 2002 by skinheads in Moscow's Troparevskii Park. He and other African students, refugees and asylum-seekers who took part in a picnic, organized by a Protestant organization, were brutally attacked by a group of about ten Russian men with shaven heads shouting racist abuse. Germain Soumele Kembou suffered serious injuries during this attack.

The attack took place as the picnickers were leaving the park, at about 8 pm. When some of the Africans tried to call the police nearby, they refused to intervene. Only half an hour later, police did arrive at the park. By this time all but two of the alleged attackers had left and their victims had been joined by the organizers of the picnic, Reverend John Calhoun and his wife, Dr Noel Calhoun.

One of the officers, a criminal investigation officer, immediately accused the picnickers of starting the fight because "there are twenty of you and only two Russians". When eyewitnesses to the attack tried to tell him what they had seen, the officer ignored them. Instead, he started questioning the picnickers about their identities and status: "Where are you from? Are you legally in Moscow? What is the legal address of your church? Where is it registered? Are you all legally registered? Are you Africans or African-Americans?" Dr Calhoun asked the officer for his full name, but he refused to answer. Other officers checked the identity documents of those present.

Despite needing hospital treatment, Germain Soumele Kembou was taken to the police station at Teply Stan with the two alleged attackers for questioning.

A witness described to Amnesty International how when Germain Soumele Kembou arrived at the police station, three young men matching the description given of the attackers were waiting on the front steps. One of them shouted "White Power" in full view of Germain Soumele Kembou and the police.

As Germain Soumele Kembou's condition was deteriorating and there was no sign of an ambulance, the Reverend and Dr Calhoun insisted on taking him for emergency treatment. After being stopped for questioning by police on the way, they finally arrived at Yasenovo accident and emergency unit at 10.30pm. Several police officers then arrived and tried to insist that Germain Soumele Kembou return to the station immediately. He was finally admitted to hospital only after a Cameroonian embassy representative intervened. Germain Soumele Kembou reached Botkin Hospital at 2am, several hours after the attack.

This case is unusual in that it received considerable media attention and a criminal investigation was opened. Several refugees were willing, with the help of UNHCR lawyers, to put their complaints in writing, including complaints about police failure to provide them with protection. However, the most unusual aspect of the case is that the charge¹ refers to "aggravating circumstances", acknowledging the racist nature of the attack.²

However, no one has been arrested so far in connection with the attack during the picnic. Germain Soumele Kembou was called in by the police for a further interview in November 2002 and was told that he should wait for further outcomes of the investigation.

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.

¹ Hooliganism with aggravating circumstances, Article 213, part 2 of the Criminal Code.

² Article 63 of the Criminal Code lays down the general rule that having "motives of national, racial or religious hatred or enmity" for committing a crime constitute an aggravating circumstance.

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 write appeals to the Russian Authorities asking them to

- continue their investigation into the racist attack on Germain Soumele Kembou, ensuring that it is thorough and impartial;
- ensure that those responsible are brought to justice;
- ensure that Germain Soumele Kembou has full access to the information necessary to pursue his case and that he is kept informed of the progress of the investigation;
- take steps to ensure that law enforcement officials are trained to recognise, report and deal competently and impartially with racially motivated crimes;
- abide by the Russian Federation's international obligations and ensure full implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Send your letters 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

Ombudsman on Human Rights

Oleg MIRONOV
State Duma
Okhotnii riad, 1
103009 Moscow
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 095 292 1842

Salutation: Dear Ombudsman

Minister of Internal Affairs

Boris Gryzlov
ul. Zhitnaia, 16
117049 Moscow
Russian Federation
Fax: (7 095) 237 49 25

Salutation: Dear Minister

Contacts:

Letters of support can be sent to Germain Soumele Kembou through the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy. The Chaplaincy has a Task Force on Racial Attacks and Harassment and provides information on racially motivated attacks to human rights organizations, lawyers and the press.

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