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Russian Federation: Fight against racism essential to end climate of impunity

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Discrimination on the grounds of race is a reality for many members of ethnic or national minority groups in the Russian Federation, warned Amnesty International as it issued its latest report *'Dokumenty! Discrimination on grounds of race in the Russian Federation'* on the eve of the United Nations International day against discrimination.

"The clampdown on human rights across the world, including the Russian Federation, after 11 September 2001, remains one of the most pressing human rights concerns," Amnesty International said. "In situations of increased tension representatives of ethnic minorities, refugees and internally displaced persons are the most vulnerable sections of society. The state must take responsibility to preserve the human rights of all its citizens."

Amnesty International's report gives examples from the numerous cases that have come to the attention of the organization and which illustrate the organization's concerns - African students and ethnic Tajiks beaten by skinheads and left without redress when the police fail to take appropriate action; Meskhetian Turks being refused registration and arbitrarily denied recognition as citizens of the Russian Federation, leading to denial of a whole range of basic human rights like the right of freedom of movement; ethnic Chechens being subjected to arbitrary document checks and detention; racist attacks on Jews and Roma.

"Racism is an attack on the very notion of universal human rights. It systematically denies certain people their full human rights because of their colour, race, ethnicity, decent or national origin. The right to be free from racial discrimination is a fundamental principle of human rights law," the international organization said.

As Amnesty International's document is being launched, the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination will be preparing to debate in Geneva its draft conclusions and recommendations on the Russian government's periodic report. The Russian Federation is a signatory to a number of human rights treaties of particular relevance to race-related discrimination, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Under international treaties the Russian government has the responsibility to ensure that the country's legislation and institutions address the causes and consequences of discrimination.

The Council of Europe, The European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the UN have all raised their concerns about racism and discrimination in the Russian Federation and have made recommendations to the authorities.

Russian non-governmental organizations continue to work to counteract racism, discrimination and intolerance in Russia. They face complicated problems which require long-term, consistent and careful work. "Although the anti-racist and pro-tolerance movement is new to the Russian civil society, it is growing and consists of human rights NGOs, ethnic and racial minority groups, organisations of migrants, anti-Nazi movements, and social research groups. They are gradually mastering the methods of monitoring, strategic litigation, legal and non-legal advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, and understand the importance of coordination, shared perceptions and common strategies," Alexander Ossipov from the Human Rights Centre "Memorial" said.

"The failure to hold to account those who commit, encourage or tolerate racial abuse frequently exacerbates the problem and helps create a climate of impunity for those who commit such acts," Amnesty International said.

Background

Amnesty International's report *'Dokumenty! Discrimination on grounds of race in the Russian Federation'* concludes with a series of recommendations to the Russian government and to the international community aimed at improving the respect for the rights of all individuals in the country to be free from discrimination on the basis of race. It is being published as part of Amnesty International's major worldwide campaign against human rights abuses in the Russian Federation, seeking to highlight the discrepancy between human rights protection guaranteed by international and national law and the reality of widespread human rights abuses committed in a climate of impunity.

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