

Amnesty International
Russian Federation: Bring to justice those who are guilty of the murder of
Khursheda Sultonova¹

Appeal case
10 May 2006

Khursheda Sultonova – a nine-year-old girl of Tajik ethnicity – was living with her family in St Petersburg when she was brutally murdered in a racist attack on 9 February 2004. At around 9pm, Khursheda Sultonova was returning to her home in St Petersburg with her father Yunus Sultonov and her 11-year-old cousin Alabir Sultonov. As the Sultonov family reached the courtyard by their home they were set upon by a gang of youths carrying knuckledusters, chains, sticks and knives. During the violent assault that ensued, the attackers are reported to have shouted racist slogans at the victims, such as “Russia for Russians”. Khursheda Sultonova died at the scene of the attack from excessive blood loss – she had been stabbed nine times in the chest, stomach and arms. Yunus Sultonov sustained head injuries during the violent attack but reportedly refused hospitalization. Alabir Sultonov – who later managed to hide under a nearby parked car to avoid further injury – also sustained head injuries and received hospital treatment.

In the earlier stages of the investigation into the murder of Khursheda Sultonova, the alleged racial intent of the attack had not been acknowledged by the authorities. As late as February 2005, St Petersburg Procurator Sergei Zaitsev was reported in the *St Petersburg Times* as stating: "For the moment, this crime is not classified as one committed on the grounds of national hatred. This is an ordinary crime linked to unemployed youths, who were excited after drinking alcohol." On 31 March 2005 the St Petersburg procuracy reportedly announced that eight people, aged 14 to 21 when the crime was committed, had been charged in connection with the murder of Khursheda Sultonova. One of them, who was only 14 at the time, had been charged with the murder of a person in a helpless state, with a motivation of racial hatred (Article 105 part 2 1) as well as with hooliganism (Article 213) and robbery (Article 161 of the Criminal Code). However, the other seven individuals were charged with hooliganism (Article 213 of the Criminal Code, carrying a possible sentence of seven years' imprisonment) rather than accessories to murder or assault. Moreover, while the murder charges against the main defendant included racial motivation, the Procurator failed to include in the charges against the other seven defendants such motivation of racial hatred, despite this being possible under Article 63 of the Criminal Code.

A jury passed a verdict of not guilty on the main defendant in relation to the murder charge on 22 March 2006, finding him and six other co-defendants guilty of “hooliganism” only. The racial motivation of the crime was left unrecognized in the convictions. The defendants convicted of “hooliganism” were given sentences ranging from 18 months' to five and a half years' imprisonment on 30 March 2006. The eighth defendant was found not guilty. Many of the details of the court case are not public, as the case was heard in closed session due to the fact that some of the defendants were minors. The Procurator appealed the verdict.

Amnesty International learned about other human rights abuses, which the family of Khursheda Sultonova has been subjected to, but which were not directly linked to her death. In February 2005, police reportedly visited a market in St Petersburg and detained the father of Khursheda Sultonova, Yunus Sultonov, and two or three other Tajik workers, for not having proper documentation. The men were reportedly taken to police station No. 1 in Admiralteiskii district of St Petersburg. The police released the other Tajik workers allegedly after they paid a bribe. However, Yunus Sultonov allegedly refused to give the policemen a bribe and instead showed them a document issued by the Procurator's office that showed he

¹ In previous campaigns Amnesty International transcribed the family name as SULTANOV.

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had the right to be in St Petersburg in connection with the investigation into his daughter's murder. Allegedly the police nevertheless continued to hold him in detention for 24 hours and he was only released following the intervention of the head of a Tajik organization in St Petersburg. Since then he has been detained three times; on each occasion he has been released when a representative from the Procurator's office has telephoned the police station.

Please write letters to the authorities in St. Petersburg,

- expressing concern that the conviction of those who had attacked Khursheda Sultonova and her relatives seemed to have failed to recognize the seriousness of the crime;
- urging for further investigation into allegations that the attack on Khursheda Sultonova, her father and cousin was racially motivated;
- asking that anyone found responsible for the murder of Khursheda Sultonova be brought to justice in the course of a fair trial in line with international standards;
- calling for effective and comprehensive measures to be taken to end violent racist attacks in St Petersburg;
- calling for a review of guidelines and their implementation in relation to identity checks in order to ensure that they are not carried out in a discriminatory manner, and investigate and prosecute all allegations of police extortion.

Please send your appeals to:

Governor of St Petersburg

MATVIENKO Valentina Ivanovna

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Procurator of St Petersburg

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Please send copies of your letter to the Russian embassy in your country.