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Russian Federation: Out of control: Anti-Chechen sentiment in Moscow post-metro blast

The Russian authorities are responsible for the safety and security of all their citizens, including Chechens, Amnesty International said today as it called on the authorities to take immediate and decisive steps to prevent the incitement of racial hatred, in accordance with law.

The human rights organization is concerned about the current wave of hostility towards Chechens and other people from the Caucasus region that has been reported in the Russian capital in the wake of the metro blast on 6 February 2004 that killed up to 41 people, and injured more than 100.

According to information received by Amnesty International, minority ethnic groups from the Caucasus region have once again become the target of discriminatory rhetoric, arbitrary document checks and searches, and racially-motivated revenge attacks. Although no-one has as yet claimed responsibility for the metro blast, senior Russian government officials, including President Vladimir Putin, were quick to blame Chechens. New tougher legislation - linked to the unconstitutional residence registration system "*propiska*" - is currently being drafted in the capital, allegedly aimed at combating "illegal migration".

Furthermore, it has been reported that an extremist organization has been calling upon people to attend a public meeting, under the slogan "Cleanse Moscow of Chechen bandits!" Amnesty International is concerned that this may amount to incitement of hatred on grounds of nationality and incitement to racially-motivated violence. Prominent Russian human rights groups have also expressed their concern regarding the demonstration.

"In the current climate, we are concerned that the meeting could lead to incidents of racially-motivated violence. The authorities must take all necessary steps to protect potential victims in line with their international obligations, and uphold constitutional guarantees in relation to equality of citizens. Such inflammatory slogans appear to be aimed at inciting racial hatred and should therefore be immediately removed from all public places in the capital", Amnesty International said.

"Indiscriminate killing of civilians can never be justified", the organization said in its unreserved condemnation of the metro bomb blast. "Those found responsible for such acts must be found and brought to justice in a court of law."

The organization calls on the Russian Federation to ensure that all measures taken are in

accordance with international human rights law and that the "fight against terrorism" is not used as a means to restrict the human rights of its citizens, regardless of their ethnicity.

Background

Research conducted by Amnesty International and Russian human rights groups has shown that discrimination towards Chechens is commonplace throughout the Russian Federation, with increased levels of harassment and racist attacks reported following bomb attacks or incidents, such as the Moscow theatre siege in October 2002. Law enforcement agencies have launched what can be described as targeted campaigns against Chechens which have resulted in arbitrary arrests and planting of drugs and ammunition during personal searches of Chechens or their homes.

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