

Russian Federation

The Meskhetians in Krasnodar Territory

“They came to the field on 8 or 9 May (2002). They said to us ‘Let the grass grow. Your work is not needed here. Just go away.’ There were police, someone from the village administration and then there were ten Cossacks. They were saying ‘Why do you live here. We will get rid of you.’ We stayed at home for five days after they came to the field. But without the field we have no income.” Mavlud Gafurov, father of Shavkat (20), Laziz (18) and Mukhabat (17), who live in a village in Krasnodar Territory.

Meskhetians are a largely Muslim group who were forcibly relocated from southwest Georgia in 1944 by the former Soviet regime. Many Meskhetians who had been transported to Uzbekistan were subsequently forced to flee to Russia in 1989 after violent attacks on them and their property in the Fergana region between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

As citizens of the former Soviet Union who were “permanently residing” in the Russian Federation when the Citizenship Law came into force (on 6 February 1992), and who had not declined Russian citizenship, the Meskhetians are by law Russian citizens. There are estimated to be between 50,000 and 70,000 Meskhetians living in the Russian Federation. Most have been able to affirm their right to citizenship. However, the vast majority of the 13,000 to 16,000 Meskhetians living in Krasnodar Territory continue to be denied their legal rights, including their right to citizenship, because of discriminatory legislation and practices in the Territory. In 1999 an estimated 10,000 Meskhetians resident in the Krasnodar Territory remained without registration.

Those denied citizenship and permanent registration in the Russian Federation are effectively denied a whole range of basic rights including freedom of movement and equality before the law. Many are arbitrarily deprived of their liberty in the context of police checks on their registration documents; sometimes such checks are carried out by local self-styled Cossacks. Their “statelessness” also expresses itself in denial of access to pensions, child benefits and higher education. They cannot officially register house or vehicle purchases, marriages or deaths. They are frequently stopped and questioned by police on the pretext of checking their identity documentation, and obstructed in their work or going about their daily business. Often a family has to pay a fine for the “illegal use of the land” because without the registration they cannot purchase land.

The children cannot go to university and often are not allowed on the streets after dark, because their parents are afraid that they will be stopped by the police and might suffer ill-treatment. Shavkat would like to study law and his brother Laziz wants to become a doctor but in the current situation they will not be able to achieve their dreams.

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

- Ensure that the Meskhetians in the Krasnodar Territory are not denied their basic human rights, including the right to freedom of movement and equality before the law, which they are entitled to according to the Russian Constitution and international law;

- Urge the authorities of the Krasnodar Territory to issue instructions to officials responsible for registration and citizenship to promptly and without any discrimination process all applications including those submitted by Meskhetians living in the Territory;
- Urge the law enforcement officials in Krasnodar Territory not to harass, ill-treat, intimidate or discriminate against members of ethnic minorities.

Send your letters to:

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

Copies to:

Governor of the Krasnodar Territory

Aleksandr TKACHEV
ul. Krasnaia 35
35 00 14 Krasnodar
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 8612 68 45 38

Head of the Department of Interior of Krasnodar Territory

Sergei KUCHEROK
ul. Gavrilova 96
35 00 14 Krasnodar
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 8612 55 09 97