

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety

14 April 2003

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Ethnic and national minority groups in the Russian Federation

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of all national and ethnic minorities in Russia as the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth on 20 April approaches. In previous years, this anniversary has been marked by an escalation of racially motivated harassment and violence.

The racial attacks are often perpetrated by people with far-right extremist sympathies, known as skinheads. According to the Russian Interior Ministry, there are approximately 20,000 skinheads in Russia and 2,500 in Moscow. The victims of racist attacks include immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers from Africa, Asia, Central Asia and the Caucasus, including ethnic Chechens. Members of the Jewish community are also frequently subjected to racial harassment and assault, and synagogues and Jewish community centres are often targeted.

On 26 March 2003, students Isaac Gerald from Tanzania and Bok Heng Christian from Cameroon were attacked by a gang of some 15 men whilst returning to their accommodation in the grounds of the Russian University of People's Friendship in southwestern Moscow. Both students were injured and Isaac Gerald needed hospital treatment. Police are currently investigating this incident. Racially motivated attacks like these are frequent and incidents in past years suggest that they will intensify around 20 April.

On 20 April 2002 several foreign embassies in Moscow, including that of the USA, Japan and India received anonymous emails threatening to kill all foreigners in Russia, while embassies of seven former Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia reported that they had received numerous complaints about violent harassment on public transport and in outdoor markets. Around the time of the anniversary in 1998, a black United States Marine guarding the US embassy was assaulted by a group of unknown men as he walked through a Moscow park. He sustained serious injuries to his face. On 20 April 2001 a Chechen man was stabbed to death in Moscow by a group of men, and in another part of the city skinheads attacked ethnic Azeri merchants in a street market and destroyed their stalls and property.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Many members of ethnic and national minority groups in the Russian Federation have experienced racial discrimination and violence. Police are often indifferent to racially motivated attacks, or even participate in harassment and intimidation themselves. They frequently fail to understand the serious implications of racially-motivated violence and advise the victims to report the attack as 'hooliganism'.

Both President Putin and Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov have made public statements that racist offences will not be tolerated and that those responsible will be treated with the "maximum strictness allowed by law". In 2001, the authorities initiated a five-year State Program on Tolerance and Prevention of Extremism in Russian society which aims to change attitudes and practices that facilitate discrimination on the grounds of race and religion.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or Russian or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of ethnic and national minority groups in the Russian Federation as the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth on 20 April approaches;
- urging the authorities to take effective measures to protect ethnic and national minority groups from racially motivated harassment and violence;

- urging the authorities to take steps to ensure that law enforcement officials are trained to recognize, report and deal competently and impartially with racially motivated crimes;
- welcoming public statements made by both President Putin and Public Prosecutor Ustinov denouncing racially motivated attacks;
- calling on the authorities to abide by the Russian Federation's international obligations regarding racial discrimination and ensure full implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs

Boris Gryzlov
ul. Zhitnaya, 16
117049 Moscow
Russian Federation

Telegram: Rossiia, 117049 Moskva, Ministru vnutrennykh del

Fax: + 7 095 237 49 25

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Igor Ivanov
Smolenskaya-Sennaya pl, 32/34
121200 Moscow
Russian Federation

Telegram: Rossiia, 121200 Moskva, Ministru inostrannykh del

Fax: + 7 095 244 2203

Salutation: Dear Minister

Ombudsman on Human Rights

Oleg Mironov
Ul. Miasnitskaia, 47
103084 Moscow
Russian Federation

Telegram: Rossiia, 103084 Moskva, Ombudsmanu

Fax: + 7 095 292 6501/ 6545

Salutation: Dear Ombudsman

and to diplomatic representatives of Russian Federation accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 May 2003.