

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 46/032/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 93
17 April 2003

Russian Federation: Racial intolerance must be stamped out

Amnesty International today called on the Russian authorities to take vigorous measures to combat racism and promote tolerance and respect for difference in order to stop the growing tide of attacks against ethnic minorities.

The organization is concerned for the safety of 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.

On 26 March 2003, a group of young people attacked and severely beat two African students in Moscow. One of them was hospitalized. The Association of African students in the Russian Federation called for speedy investigation of this crime and asked for increased security around the students' compound as it feared more racist attacks.

"Fear of racist attacks among Russia's minority population is not confined to fear of 'skinheads'; they have almost as much to fear from officials," the organization stated.

One July evening in 2002 a group of about 10 Russian men with shaven heads shouting racist abuse brutally attacked African students, refugees and asylum seekers who were picnicking in a Moscow park. Police nearby initially refused to come to their help. When finally police arrived half an hour later, all but two of the alleged attackers had left. One of the officers accused the picnickers of starting the fight and ignored evidence forwarded by eyewitnesses.

"Police and other law enforcement officials routinely subject racial and ethnic minorities to harassment and intimidation and often respond with indifference to racist attacks. Victims of racist attacks frequently complain that law enforcement officials are reluctant to register attacks as racist or fail to understand the serious implications of racially-motivated violence. Police often advise the victims to report the attack as 'hooliganism'," Amnesty International said

"Until the authorities address racist attitudes within law enforcement agencies, they will continue to be part of the problem, rather than the solution."

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 when it issued its latest report *'Dokumenty!' Discrimination on grounds of race in the Russian Federation* last month.

"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," Amnesty International warned again.

Background

Racial attacks are often perpetrated by people with far-right 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.

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.

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