

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 46/049/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 211
1 November 2007

Russian Federation: Day of National Unity - a day to challenge racism

As Russia prepares to mark National Unity Day on 4 November, Amnesty International urges the authorities to publicly speak out against racism and violence directed at foreigners and ethnic minorities, and state clearly that racially motivated violence is totally unacceptable.

"Hardly a day goes by without a report on yet another violent attack on people of non-Russian origin or those who do not look Russian or slavic -- three members of ethnic minority groups were stabbed to death over one recent weekend in Moscow alone," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"The circumstances in which such attacks take place indicate that they may have been racially motivated, yet the authorities have tended to classify them as 'hooliganism'."

The SOVA Information and Analytical Centre, a Russian non-governmental organization (NGO) that monitors racist violence, mainly through media reports, announced on 1 October 2007 that "in the period of January 1 to September 30, 2007 in Russia, there were no less than 230 racially motivated attacks affecting a total of 409 people, including 46 fatalities. Last year in the same period, there were 180 attacks with 401 victims, 41 of them dying as a result."

While attacks against foreign nationals from the "far abroad" (Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas) represent a serious problem, there has been an alarming rise in reports of attacks against those of non-slavic origin, or those who do not look "typically" Russian, from countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Georgia, and from constituent parts of the Russian Federation -- such as the republics of Chechnya, Ingushetia, Tatarstan and Dagestan.

In its briefing, *What progress has been made since May 2006 to tackle violent racism?*, Amnesty International points out that in 2006 and 2007 violent racist attacks have continued to occur in Russia with disturbing regularity, mostly concentrated in big cities such as Moscow, St Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod, where many foreigners live.

"Despite the fact that the authorities are making increased efforts to recognize the issue of racism, the official reaction to the problem is still far from adequate, and convictions for racist attacks, while increasing, are still too few and far between," Nicola Duckworth said.

Three members of ethnic minority groups -- an Armenian, an ethnic Uzbek and a ethnic Yakutian -- were stabbed to death in the weekend of 20 to 21 October in Moscow alone. Two men of non-slavic appearance -- natives of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan -- were also attacked and have been hospitalised for treatment for serious injuries. Two of the killings are allegedly connected to violence that erupted after a football match, when youths in the southern part of Moscow attacked people that they thought did not look ethnically Russian. Initially, police officials reportedly denied the possibility that the attacks could have a racist motive. Subsequent reports, however, suggest that three men have been detained on charges of murder and aggravated assault, with a racist motivation noted for the two killings that occurred on 20 October. The police continue to deny that the killing on 21 October had a racist motive.

Many foreigners and people of ethnic minorities have told Amnesty International about their futile attempts to complain to the police about attacks that they have suffered, which they believe were racially motivated. According to them, the police are reluctant to record those details of the attack that suggest it was racially motivated. It seems that the police and law enforcement authorities are more likely to investigate the racial motivation of an attack when the attack has resulted in a killing or serious injury.

Amnesty International urges the Russian government to unconditionally and publicly condemn anti-foreigner sentiment and racist attacks, and to take steps to ensure that, in the spirit of National Unity, the rights of all are protected equally,

regardless of race.

Background

On National Unity Day in November 2005 and 2006, rallies were held in Moscow at which demonstrators shouted 'Russia for Russians!' and held placards with anti-semitic and anti-immigration slogans. Similar Russia Marches have been sanctioned for this weekend. While President Putin and the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, have condemned such slogans and sentiments, according to Russian anti-racism activists, the rhetoric of xenophobic organizations is increasingly being adopted and manipulated by politicians and officials.

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur460472007> See: *What progress has been made since May 2006 to tackle violent racism?* (AI Index: EUR 46/047/2007) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur460472007>

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