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Ukraine: Racial discrimination on the rise

We fear for our children who are going to schools and kindergarten -- they can be attacked or killed at any time.

Tomas Lukayi, Director of the African Association in Kyiv

(Kyiv) In a report published today, Amnesty International warns about an alarming rise in violent attacks against foreigners and members of ethnic and religious minorities in Ukraine and the lack of adequate response from the authorities. Four foreigners have been murdered in Kyiv since the beginning of 2008 because of the colour of their skin, according to the information received by the organization.

“Anybody who looks different is at risk of attacks by members of the public or frequent document checks and racial profiling by the police,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“The Ukrainian authorities cannot afford to ignore xenophobia and social prejudice. Such attitudes can permeate official structures, becoming entrenched and leading to a climate where graver human rights abuses are perpetrated and tolerated,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Amnesty International’s report, *Ukraine: Government must act to stop racial discrimination*, documents how the authorities are failing their international and domestic obligations to ensure the right not to be discriminated against for all who live in the country.

Between 8 and 10 July an Amnesty International delegation presented the report’s findings and recommendations to the relevant Ukrainian authorities and urged them to publicly acknowledge the existence of racial discrimination and to take effective measures to address it and protect potential victims.

“While we appreciate that the authorities were willing to meet us, and that there was recognition from some quarters of the existence of the problem of racism and discrimination, we regret the absence of a consensus view that racism is on the increase and needs to be tackled,” Nicola Duckworth said.

“Racism and xenophobia are alive in reality, but invisible in official terms. In order to understand the scale and nature of the problem, and as a step towards ending it, the authorities should monitor and record incidents of racist attacks across Ukraine. This monitoring should follow a clear methodology of what constitutes a racist attack, in accordance with international standards that Ukraine has pledged to uphold.”

“Monitoring alone will not solve this issue, however. All levels of government should speak out frequently and strongly against racism and xenophobia in all its forms, publicly acknowledging the seriousness of the

problem and the need to take concerted action to address it.“

According to non-governmental organizations, there were 60 racist attacks in Ukraine in 2007 and six of these resulted in the death of the victims. This year there have been more than 30 racist incidents so far, of which four were murders. The majority of the victims have been African or Asian. More often than not the police have failed to react with the needed urgency to calls for help from victims of racist attacks or have refused to do so. In many cases victims do not report crimes because they have no confidence that they will get justice.

Prejudice and violent attacks against Jews and Jewish properties also continue. Foreign-looking people are arbitrarily stopped for document checks. All members of certain Roma communities including women and children have been fingerprinted and photographed by the police apparently purely because of their ethnic identity. This kind of racial profiling is in violation of Ukraine's international obligations.

“The Ukrainian government must strive to create a society in which diversity is viewed not as a threat, but as a source of enrichment. Government measures towards achieving this will only enhance Ukraine's standing and the role the country can play in all areas on the global scene,” Nicola Duckworth said.

Cases

Daniel Osaemor, a Nigerian market trader, was attacked on 19 February 2008 as he came out of a supermarket in Kyiv by a group of youths. They reportedly surrounded him and knifed him in the chest. Daniel Osaemor ran after the man who was still holding the knife. Daniel Osaemor had a metal table leg in his pocket which he had been using to mend his market stall and reportedly hit the attacker on the head with it. Daniel Osaemor was subsequently charged with hooliganism, but the three attackers who had knifed him were not charged. The investigator denied that there had been any racial motive in the attack on Daniel Osaemor.

Jeong Kwon Kang, a South Korean citizen, was killed in April 2007 by four young men when he came out of a supermarket near his home in Kyiv. The attackers kicked him until he fell to the ground. A witness testified that he saw one of the group leap onto Jeong Kwon Kang with both feet. Four young men were arrested before Jeong Kwon Kang died from his wounds and were charged initially with grievous bodily injury and hooliganism. According to the prosecutor's statement one of the group stated that he wanted to kill Jeong Kwon Kang because of his nationality. The Consul of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea expressed his view that to prosecute such a serious crime as hooliganism shows “a very relaxed attitude towards racism that is very dangerous for the reputation of Ukraine”.