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Russian Federation: Cases of discrimination on grounds of race

"Putin has said that everyone should feel at home here, and that is of course welcome. But we want to feel safe, not at home."

Petrus Indongo, General Secretary of the Association of African Students at the Moscow University of Peoples' Friendship.

The following information is an extract from Amnesty International's report '*Dokumenty!* Discrimination on grounds of race in the Russian Federation'. The cases listed below illustrate discrimination on the grounds of race against ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and refugees.

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 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. One of the picnickers, **Germain Kembou, a student from Cameroon**, suffered serious injuries during the attack. Despite needing hospital treatment, he was taken to a police station with the two alleged attackers for questioning. Germain Kembou was admitted to hospital several hours after the attack only after the intervention of a Cameroonian embassy representative. Germain Kembou's case received considerable media attention and a criminal investigation was opened. This case is unusual for the fact that the racist nature of the attack was acknowledged in the charge. However, to date no one has been arrested in connection with this attack.

Andre Guy Tranquille Temgoua, a Cameroonian student, came to the Russian Federation to study in 1996. He told Amnesty International that within a week of his arrival he was attacked by a gang of youths. Since then he has reportedly been attacked on a number of occasions and has also regularly been subjected to racist insults and threats. He told Amnesty International that despite making official complaints on a number of occasions, the police have concluded either that there were no grounds for opening a case, or that there was no evidence of racial motives.

Usam Baisaev of the Memorial Human Rights Centre flew to Moscow in March 2001 on his way from Ingushetia to Switzerland to attend the 57th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. He was stopped by police in Moscow as he was meeting his aunt, and although his documents were in perfect order, he was asked to go to the local police station for verification of his identity. When Usam Baisaev asked for the reasons for his detention, as his documents were in order, the only explanation he got was that he was **a Chechen**. One of the officers then insulted Usam Baisaev and threatened

to have him detained for at least a week. Usam Baisaev and his aunt were both forced to pay a bribe to the police. An investigation into the case was instigated following the intervention of State Duma Deputy Sergei Kovalev. No further progress is known to have been made.

In May 2002 **Tatiana Sapunova** noticed an **anti-semitic placard** at the side of a road in the Moscow region. She tried to pull the placard out of the ground but it was connected to an explosive device, which went on causing her burns and facial injuries. Days after the incident, a Moscow police chief reportedly told a national newspaper that he did not consider the slogan on the placard, "Death to Jews!", to be explicitly anti-semitic or an incitement to ethnic hatred.

Lom-Ali Tasuev, a computer specialist working in a school, was living in Moscow, where his wife was registered, even though he was registered in Friezino, a city 25 km from Moscow. In September 1999, several men in plain clothes went to his flat, carrying out, what they said was an "identity check". They took Lom-Ali Tasuev to a police station giving as a reason him being a **Chechen**. Three days later his wife was informed that he was not going to be released because 0.15 gm of drugs had been found on him. His wife lodged a complaint with the district procuracy and Lom-Ali Tasuev was released on parole. Lom-Ali Tasuev told Amnesty International that he was told by police in the presence of witnesses to empty his pockets on a table. A police officer asked him to pick a foil lying under the table but he refused saying that it did not belong to him. The foil was found to contain heroin. Lom-Ali Tasuev's case was heard in Liublino intermunicipal court where he proclaimed his innocence. In a written explanation to the court he stated that the drugs were placed on him by police. He linked the criminal case against him with the anti-Chechen campaign in Moscow which followed a series of bombings of apartment buildings which were blamed by the authorities on "Chechens". Nevertheless, the judge found Lom-Ali Tasuev guilty for the possession of drugs and imposed a conditional sentence of six months with one year's probation.

In July 2000 the inhabitants of the village of Starbeevo sent a letter to the Main Department of Internal Affairs of Moscow region and the Prosecutor of the town of Khimki, expressing their gratitude to a group of **Tajiks** who came the previous year to their village to work for a telephone company and stayed on to do private construction work. "Such people earn their money only with the calluses on their hands. We all sign up to their innocence and demand that steps be taken against the excesses committed by the supposed law enforcement agencies," the letter said. On 4 July 2000 a group of unidentified men had entered a house in Starbeevo village, Khimki district, where Tajik construction workers lived, and reportedly insulted and severely beat three men before taking them away and charging them with drugs offences. The men in the group were police officers led by a major from the 4th division of RUBOP, the organized crime squad, in Moscow region. In March 2002, three officers appeared in court charged with fabricating evidence, exceeding their authority, theft and extortion.

Bogsho (family name withheld), a senior member of staff at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, is a **Tajik with a Russian passport**. In May 2002 a racist gang attacked him, his son and a student of his, as they were returning from a cultural event in the Moscow area. Between 25 and 30 young skinheads surrounded Bogsho and his companions in the train carriage they were travelling in and severely beat them. By the time they reached the next stop, all three victims were covered in blood. Later Bogsho was taken to hospital where X-rays showed that he had a broken rib. He told Amnesty International that he asked the police to investigate the incident several times. He was reportedly told at the end that there was no point in doing anything because the attackers were teenagers. At the end of May, Bogsho saw a group of young skinheads marching around waving racist slogans in a park opposite the local police station. He told the duty officer about the demonstration. The duty officer did nothing.

Lachin Aidinov, a Meskhetian from the village of Novoukrainsk, has lived in the Krymsk District of Krasnodar Territory for more than 12 years. As a Soviet citizen resident in the Russian Federation at the time the Law of Citizenship came into force in 1992, he is entitled to Russian citizenship. However, this right continues to be denied to him. The reason is discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity. The

result is discrimination in almost every aspect of daily life including education, employment and health care.

Mikhail Madjitov is a Meskhetian living in Krymsk District, Krasnodar Territory. He has a 20-year old son who cannot get a passport. Mikhail Madjitov complained that his son's documents sat for a year at the passport office and at the end he was told that only Russian citizens can get Russian passports. As a result the son cannot go anywhere for fear of being arrested.

The Aliev family bought a tumbledown dirt-floor cottage in the village of Kievskaja in Krasnodar Territory, and next to it they constructed a habitable home. However, they later received notice that their home would be demolished as it had been constructed without official permission. The authorities failure to recognize the civil or legal rights of **Meskhetians** living in Krasnodar Territory means that they are unable to officially register house or land purchases. As a result many of them are forced to build homes illegally, which leaves them at risk of extortion by corrupt officials or having their homes demolished.

Samuel Davies, a 34-year-old community health nurse from Sierra Leone, arrived in Moscow in 1993. In 1995 he registered with the UNHCR for refugee status. On 16 March 2001 Samuel Davies was approached by three police officers who asked for his documents. He showed them the document he had received from the UNCHR but the policemen refused to recognize the document and demanded money for a fine. Samuel Davies was taken to a police station where he says he was held for four days without food in a cell without blankets or bedding. An immigration officer interviewed him on 20 March and promised to contact the UNHCR. On 28 March Samuel Davies was sent to the Severnyi camp, the main detention centre for "illegal" male foreign nationals in Moscow. He remained there for more than 10 months and was released following intervention by the UNHCR. On his release Samuel Davies required treatment for tuberculosis which he says he contacted in the detention centre.

An Iranian national arrived at Moscow's Sheremetevo II international airport in March 2001 seeking asylum. He attempted to apply for refugee status at the immigration control point inside the airport, but was told that his claim would not be considered. An appeal against this decision was lodged and in the meantime he was detained at the private detention facility run by Aeroflot, a private airline of which the majority shareholder is the Russian government, in the Sheremetevo Hotel. Despite the fact that the Moscow Office of the UNHCR informed all the relevant authorities and the airline that an appeal was pending the man was forcibly returned to Iran where he was arrested. According to information received by Amnesty International, he was arrested on his return to Iran.

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