



*Intervention to the 2006 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting by the IHF and the Russian Analytical and Information Center (SOVA)*

**WORKING SESSION 15, TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION II**

**Preventing Aggressive Nationalism, Chauvinism and Ethnic Cleansing**

**Wednesday, 11 October 2006**

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**Problem of Racist Violence in the Russian Federation**

While racism and xenophobia persist across the OSCE region, the current situation in the Russian Federation is of particular concern. Violent racist attacks are regularly reported from different parts of the country and such attacks take place in a climate in which racist and intolerant views are highly prevalent in public debate and opinion. Despite growing awareness of the problem, the authorities have been slow in responding and have so far failed to take effective measures to prevent, punish and combat manifestations of racism and xenophobia.

Statistics compiled by the Russian Analytical and Information center (SOVA) show that a total of 434 persons were victims of violence motivated by racial and ethnic hatred in Russia in 2005. Out of these 35 died because of the injuries they sustained. Attacks were reported in a total of 36 regions, but most occurred in Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>1</sup> Victims of racist violence include foreign students, asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and minority members, as well as anti-racism activists and others viewed as sympathizing with foreigners or minority groups and therefore as being “unpatriotic.”<sup>2</sup>

Racist attacks are mainly associated with so-called skinheads, a term used to depict members of various groups embracing racist and nationalist ideologies.<sup>3</sup> In recent years such groups, most of whose members are young, have become increasingly active in different parts of the country.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SOVA, “Statistics on violent attacks motivated by racial and ethnic hatred, by regions, year 2005 (updated version),” 3 February 2006, <http://xeno.sova-center.ru/6BA2468/6BB41EE/6362F81>; and updated info provided by SOVA to the IHF, September 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, *Russian Federation: Violent Racism Out of Control*, 4 May 2006, p. 1, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGEUR460162006>; Human Rights First, *Minorities under Siege – Hate Crimes and Intolerance in the Russian Federation*, June 2006, p. 15-16, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.info/pdf/06623-discrim-Minorities-Under-Siege-Russia-web.pdf#search=%22%20%22minorities%20under%20siege%22%22>.

<sup>3</sup> SOVA, *Radical Nationalism and Efforts to Oppose it in Russia in 2005*, <http://xeno.sova-center.ru/6BA2468/6BB4208/6E811ED>.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights First, *Minorities under Siege – Hate Crimes and Intolerance in the Russian Federation*, p. 22.

Authorities put the number of members of skinhead groups at about 10,000, but independent sources believe that it is several times higher.<sup>5</sup>

The perpetrators of racially and ethnically motivated hate crimes act with relative impunity as existing criminal law provisions for punishing such offenses are not adequately implemented.<sup>6</sup> Although the number of cases in which hate motives have been taken into account in the prosecution of violent assaults has increased in the last few years, the number of such cases still remains very low in comparison to the total number of attacks reported. In 2005, about 45 people are known to have been convicted of offences where racial hatred was considered a motivating factor.<sup>7</sup> In many cases, racist attacks are prosecuted as acts of “hooliganism” rather than as hate crimes and attacks are frequently not investigated, prosecuted or punished at all. The sentences handed down to those held accountable are typically lenient.<sup>8</sup>

An attack on a Tajik girl and her family members in 2004 is one of the most brutal cases of racist violence that have been reported in Russia in recent years and the lenient punishments given to the perpetrators of this attack have been widely criticized by human rights groups:

- Nine-year-old Khursheda Sulstonova from Tajikistan was stabbed to death in St. Petersburg in February 2004 as she was walking with her father and her 11-year-old cousin. A group of young men armed with bats, chains and knives attacked the three Tajiks while shouting “Russia for Russians!” Khursheda died from multiple stab wounds, while her father and cousin were injured. A 14-year-old boy was subsequently charged with murder motivated by ethnic, racial or religious hatred and seven others were charged with hooliganism. In March 2006, the city court of St. Petersburg acquitted the defendant charged with murder, and instead convicted him, together with six of his co-defendants, of hooliganism. Their sentences ranged from 18 months to five years in prison. One defendant was acquitted of all charges.<sup>9</sup> In August 2006, the Supreme Court upheld the verdict on appeal.<sup>10</sup>

According to NGOs, a considerable number of victims of attacks do not turn to police because they lack confidence that police will deal effectively with their cases or because they fear being abused, arrested or deported.<sup>11</sup> Such fears can be seen in the context of frequent reports of discrimination against foreigners and minority members by law enforcement authorities, including in the form of

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<sup>5</sup> See the chapter on the Russian Federation in IHF, *Human Rights in the OSCE Region. Report 2006 (Events of 2005)*, [http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=4255](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=4255).

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights First, *Minorities under Siege – Hate Crimes and Intolerance in the Russian Federation*, Executive Summary; ECRI, *Third Report on the Russian Federation* (adopted on 16 December 2005, made public on 16 May 2005).

<sup>7</sup> SOVA, *Radical Nationalism and Efforts to Oppose it in Russia in 2005*; and updated info provided by SOVA to the IHF, September 2006.

<sup>8</sup> SOVA, *Radical Nationalism and Efforts to Oppose it in Russia in 2005*; Amnesty International, *Russian Federation: Violent Racism Out of Control*, p. 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> Salimjon Aioubov and Bruce Pannier, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, “Verdict in Trial of Tajik Girl’s Murder Shocks Public,” 23 March 2006; Galina Stolyarova and Nabi Abdullaev, *St Petersburg Times*, “Jury Clears Teenagers of Killing Tajik,” 22 February 2006, [http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action\\_id=2&story\\_id=17095](http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=17095); *Le Monde*, “Vent de racisme meurtrier en Russie,” 25 April 2006; *BBC*, “Jail for Tajik girl’s attackers,” 30 March 2005.

<sup>10</sup> *RFE/RL*, “Appeal Rejected in Case of Tajik Girl’s Killing,” 10 August 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/08/26344025-D7FA-472E-837B-E283E53C423D.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, *Russian Federation: Violent Racism Out of Control*, p. 8, 24.

arbitrary identity checks and arrests, extortion of money and torture and ill-treatment.<sup>12</sup> For example, a recent study found that persons of non-Slavic appearance are over twenty times more likely to be stopped by police in the Moscow metro than people who look Slavic.<sup>13</sup>

A recent racist attack in Moscow reflected an unprecedented level of organization and planning and fears were expressed that this case may be only the beginning of a new stage of racist violence in the country:

- In the morning of 21 August 2006, a bomb blast at the Cherkizovsky market killed more than 10 people and injured over 40. Three young men were subsequently arrested and charged with multiple counts of racially motivated homicide. The men confessed to carrying out the attack because they believed that there were "too many people from Asia" in the market place. The home-made bomb that caused the blast detonated in a section of the market where predominantly Asian vendors were selling their products and most of the victims were from Asia. The men were reportedly not members of any nationalist or racist groups but had been in contact with "like-minded" people over the Internet. At the time of writing, no date for the trial had been set.<sup>14</sup>

A growing number of government representatives have publicly condemned manifestations of racial violence and emphasized the importance of combating racism and xenophobia.<sup>15</sup> However, such statements have rarely translated into concrete measures and overall the government has failed to take systematic and comprehensive action to counteract current trends of racism and intolerance in the country, thereby further enhancing the vulnerability of foreigners and minority members to harassment and abuse.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, racism is openly exploited by both nationalist and mainstream political movements and is a visible feature in Russian media. Foreigners and minority members are, for example, often generally held responsible for terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, unemployment and other socio-economic problems.<sup>17</sup>

The frequent negative stereotyping of migrants and minority members in public discourse helps to reinforce intolerant and xenophobic sentiments among the wider population and numerous opinion polls have shown that racist and xenophobic ideas are widespread in Russian society.<sup>18</sup> For example, surveys have shown that a majority of Russians support the slogan "Russia for Russians," and every third approve of the idea of limitations on the rights of non-ethnic Russians to reside in the country.<sup>19</sup>

At the beginning of September, suspicious and negative attitudes toward people from the Caucasus region came to violent expression in the Russian Republic of Karelia:

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<sup>12</sup> For more information, see the chapters on the Russian Federation in IHF, *Human Rights in the OSCE Region* from 2006 and 2005, [http://www.ihf-hr.org/cms/cms.php?sec\\_id=46](http://www.ihf-hr.org/cms/cms.php?sec_id=46).

<sup>13</sup> Open Society Institute, *Ethnic Profiling in the Moscow Metro*, June 2006. The report is available [http://www.soros.org/resources/articles\\_publications/publications/profiling\\_20060613](http://www.soros.org/resources/articles_publications/publications/profiling_20060613).

<sup>14</sup> *Mosnews*, "Racial Hatred Seen behind Market Bombing that Killed 10," 22 August 2006; *Moscow Times*, "2 Charged with Hate Crime in Market Blast," 23 August 2006; *RFE/RL*, "NGO Warns of New Dangers in Racist Attacks," 24 August 2006; "Market Bombers Behind 8 More Blasts," 29 August 2006.

<sup>15</sup> IHF, *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Report 2006 (Events of 2005)*.

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, *Russian Federation: Violent Racism Out of Control*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> ECRI, par. 130, 133-134.

<sup>18</sup> ECRI, par. 137.

<sup>19</sup> These survey results were reported by the Levada Center in 2005. For more information, see IHF, *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Report 2006 (Events of 2005)*.

- Agitated by nationalist activists who exploited a recent tragic incident – a fight in which several ethnic Russians were killed – to stir sentiments against people from the Caucasus region, about 2000 people gathered for a mass meeting in the Karelian city of Kondopoga on 2 September 2006, where they shouted anti-Caucasian<sup>20</sup> slogans and demanded radical measures to restore order in the city. Angry mobs also stormed through the city, attacking, robbing and throwing Molotov cocktails at Caucasian-owned businesses. Out of fear of being targeted, most residents of Caucasian origin fled the city. Police reportedly failed to take adequate measures to stem the violence at an early stage and the riots only subsided after special police troops began arresting participants, allegedly with the use of abusive tactics.<sup>21</sup> Local authorities initially denied that there was any ethnic basis for the violence, while the governor of Karelia subsequently suggested that it had been triggered by the fact that a group of immigrants from the Caucasus were "terrorizing" the city.<sup>22</sup> At the time of writing, investigations into the incident were under way. A number of people had reportedly been criminally charged in connection with the violence, and the fight that provoked it, but details of these charges were not known.<sup>23</sup>

## Recommendations

### To the **Russian authorities:**

- Publicly acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of racism and intolerance in the country and speak out firmly against any forms of racism or xenophobia. Make clear that racist behavior will not be tolerated by any actors, including government officials and political leaders;
- With active participation of civil society, elaborate and adopt a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating racism and intolerance in different areas of society and make available sufficient resources to facilitate adequate implementation of this strategy at the federal, regional and local levels;
- Establish a country-wide system for monitoring and documenting the occurrence of racist attacks and engage in efforts to encourage the victims of such attacks to report their experiences to police, including by ensuring that all complaints of discrimination at the hands of law enforcement authorities are effectively dealt with and that officials guilty of discrimination are held accountable;
- Ensure that all reported cases of racist and xenophobic violence are promptly, thoroughly and effectively investigated and prosecuted with due consideration given to the motivations of the perpetrators. With a view to facilitating the full and active application of Criminal Code provisions allowing for the prosecution of crimes with racial hatred as

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that the adjective "Caucasian" is used here as a reference to people from the Caucasus region.

<sup>21</sup> See IHF, "The Russian Authorities Must Respond Resolutely to Anti-Caucasian Pogrom," 4 September 2006, [http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=4298](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=4298).

<sup>22</sup> Victor Yasmann, *RFE/RL*, "Russia: Race Not the Only Factor Behind Karelian Violence," 8 September 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/B6116FFA-BFF8-48BB-99F4-E3125A8B21F2.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Information from SOVA to the IHF, September 2006.

an aggravating circumstance, guidelines should be adopted and trainings organized for law enforcement and judicial authorities;

- Take effective measures to promote understanding and appreciation of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Such efforts could include campaigns to raise awareness among the public of the positive contribution of migrants and minority members to Russian society, economy and culture; tolerance education for students; and trainings for journalists on how to exercise responsibility and avoid perpetuating prejudice when reporting on issues related to migrants and minority members.