

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Russian Federation: Racism and xenophobia rife in Russian society**

*"We are not considered to be people. We're like a completely separate state"*

A man from a Roma settlement near St Petersburg.

*"I didn't go to the police because I've been hearing more cases that ... even people that go to the police to make a report ... in the end it goes against them..."*

Roni Kumi from Ghana was attacked by four men in a Moscow street.

Racially-motivated killings, beatings and discrimination are on the increase in the Russian Federation, according to a new report published today. The government of the country, currently chairing the Group of the eight most-industrialized countries (G8 Group) and about to chair the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the next six months, is failing to sufficiently challenge xenophobia and intolerance.

Amnesty International's latest report *Russian Federation: Violent racism out of control* examines cases of assaults, some of them fatal, against foreign students, asylum-seekers and refugees from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America; members of ethnic groups and migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia; as well as members of the Jewish community and Roma. It reveals the failure of the authorities to prevent racially-motivated attacks through adequate policing, and to investigate and prosecute the vast majority of such attacks effectively.

"Russia's record on racism is incompatible with the country's place on the international stage and undermines its standing in the world. As a Council of Europe member about to take its chair, and head of the G8, Russia must comply with its obligations under international human rights law," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"The state has a responsibility to protect the human rights of all people on its territory -- regardless of the colour of their skin. They must challenge and bring to justice those who violate them. It is time for the Russian authorities to address the country's deteriorating human rights record and live up to their international obligations if they seek to be international players."

According to a Russian information centre (the Sova Information Analytical Centre), in 2005 alone 28 people were murdered and 366 assaulted on racial grounds. The actual figure, however, could be much higher as many racially motivated crimes are either not reported at all or not registered as such. Rather, police and prosecution authorities frequently prefer to classify them as so-called "hooliganism". The perpetrators of racist attacks often come from well-organized groups professing a racist, neo-fascist and

violent ideology. According to official figures, there are about 150 "extremist groups" with over 5000 members in Russia, while non-governmental organizations put the membership at 50,000. At the same time, organizations and people researching and campaigning against racism face real threats to their lives.

"These violent attacks are one of the most visible manifestations of deep-seated intolerance and xenophobia in many parts of Russian society. Yet turning a blind eye to race hate crimes has encouraged the growth of extreme xenophobia and neo-facism in the country," said Ms Khan.

Following large-scale violent attacks against civilians attributed to Chechen armed opposition groups, Chechens and members of other North Caucasian ethnic groups have been subjected to persecution. As members of a minority group, which may be visibly distinct from ethnic Russians, they are also particularly vulnerable to on the spot document checks, as part of so-called "counter-terrorist" measures or for the purposes of extortion by police. A monitoring project by a human rights organization in 2005 found that people of non-Slavic appearance are on average 21 times more likely to be stopped and asked for their documents than individuals of Slavic appearance, when travelling on the Moscow metro.

"Racism is an attack on the very notion of the universality of human rights. It systematically denies certain people the enjoyment of their full human rights because of their colour, race, ethnicity, descent or national origin. Under international human rights law, Russia must fight discrimination in all of its forms," said Ms Khan.

"Some regional authorities have taken initiatives to address racism, but they are woefully inadequate and isolated. The time has come for the federal government to put into action a comprehensive national plan to give the fight against racism the high priority it deserves."

**See:**

*Russian Federation: Violent racism out of control* (AI Index: EUR 46/016/2006)

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur460162006>

*Documenty! Discrimination on grounds of race in the Russian Federation* (AI Index: EUR 46/001/2003)

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur460012003>

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