



# MPC Social Services

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## Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment Annual Report 2014

### Introduction

Since 2001, the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy's Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment has interviewed people of color about racially motivated attacks and harassment they have experienced in Russia, while seeking to support and assist victims and potential victims.

In its collection of reports, the Task Force works mainly with the African community but documents all cases of physical attacks or harassment reported to it and determines their motive on a case-by-case basis. The Task Force defines *attack* as a physical assault regardless of whether or not it causes serious lasting injury to the victim. Racially motivated *harassment* takes many forms, from inappropriate staring to verbal assault and intimidation.

The Task Force gathers this information in order to understand and communicate the broader picture of violence and harassment against people of color in Russia. However, this report focuses primarily on individuals' stories, and does not attempt a statistical overview of race-motivated violence in Moscow: our current statistics represent a small sample size, being limited to those cases brought to us and authorized for use in this report, which we believe to be only a small proportion of total incidents. Harassment is reported even less frequently than physical attacks.

In 2013, we became particularly aware of the limits of self-led reporting, since we worked with a number of victims who chose not to report or to authorize use of their stories in this report. In an attempt to address this, we ran a survey over the course of two months on the experiences of migrants, particularly Africans, in Moscow. This allowed us to get a much better idea of the level at which harassment is experienced by those we work with, and therefore replaced our self-report forms for incidents of harassment. The survey also allowed us to find out about attacks which had not yet been reported, and encourage individuals to report the incident formally. We repeated this survey in June 2014, and again in December 2014. However, while the 2013 survey asked people about their experiences since their first arrival in Moscow, the later surveys were limited to experiences during 2014. We hope that by gathering regular information with a more limited timeframe, we will be able to identify patterns over the coming years. In this annual report, we begin with a summary of our survey results, before describing the particular violent incidents brought to our attention throughout the second half of 2014. The physical attacks noted are those for which we received a full report, rather than all incidents mentioned in the survey.

Please note that all names are changed in the report for the safety of the victims, but all other information including country of origin, age, etc. are accurate.

### Executive Summary

Through a survey conducted in December among 22 migrants and refugees, **77% of respondents reported experiencing harassment during 2014**. In addition, **68% had been victims of physical attacks**.

This followed a survey in June among 17 migrants and refugees, in which **94% of respondents reported experiencing harassment during the first half of 2014**. In addition, **65% had been victims of physical attacks**.

During 2014, the Task Force recorded **12 physical attacks**:

- 3 physical attacks with an articulated racist motive (accompanied by racist verbal abuse or symbols)
- 7 physical attacks suspected to be racially-motivated
- 2 physical attacks of unidentified motivation or theft

NB The number of attacks is counted by incident, not by the number of people attacked in the incident.

## **Survey Results**

In a survey conducted in December, the Task force gathered information from 22 migrants and refugees on their experiences of living in Moscow during 2014. Of those surveyed, 64% were male and 36% were female. The countries of origin of the respondents were as follows:

- Democratic Republic of Congo – 27%
- Nigeria - 23%
- Ivory Coast - 14%
- Guinea 10 %
- Cameroon - 10%
- Gambia - 4%
- Mali – 4%
- Kenya - 4%
- South Africa 4%

In a survey conducted in June, the Task force gathered information from 17 migrants and refugees on their experiences of living in Moscow during the first half of 2014. Of those surveyed, 88% were male and 12% were female (N.B. This reflects the ratio of users of our drop-in center, but we acknowledge that it does not reflect the distribution of migrants in Moscow). The countries of origin of the respondents were as follows:

- DRC – 52.9%
- Congo-Brazzaville – 17.6%
- Ivory Coast – 11.8%
- Senegal – 5.8%
- Central African Republic – 5.8%
- Mali – 5.8%

## **Harassment**

In the December survey, 77% of those surveyed said that they had personally experienced racially motivated harassment in 2014: they had been “shouted at, insulted or bothered” because of racism. 32% (of the total number surveyed) said they had experienced harassment on a daily basis; a further 18%, every month; and 27% less than once a month. This totals 50% who experienced race-based harassment every month or more.

In the June survey, 94% of those surveyed had personally experienced racially motivated harassment in 2014. 41% (of the total number surveyed) said they had experienced harassment on a daily basis; a further 18%, every week; and 12% every month. This totals 71% who experienced race-based harassment every month or more.

## **Race-based violence**

In the December survey, 68% of those surveyed had personally experienced what they believed to be racially motivated violence during 2014: they had been “hit, pushed or [physically] hurt” because of what they interpreted as racism. At least 27% had experienced physical attacks every month or more.

In the June survey, 65% of those surveyed had personally experienced what they believed to be racially motivated violence during the first half of 2014. At least 29% had experienced physical attacks more than once during the six-month period.

## **Commentary**

The overall harassment figures were lower in December than in both the June survey, and in 2013, when the figure was 100%. This may partially be explained by the increased number of women surveyed: 36% of respondents in December were female, compared to 12% in June and 11.5% in 2013. 63% of women surveyed had experienced harassment, compared to 79% of men. The majority of men who attend our drop-in center work in street-level advertising (for example, distributing flyers); the women we work with are typically less likely to have jobs which expose them on such a regular basis to street-level abuse.

The second reason for lower harassment figures may be related to the percentage reporting violence. Although 68% is not a major increase on 65% in June and 65.4% in 2013, among men, 93% said in the most recent survey they had experienced violence (compared to 50% among women). While we do not have a breakdown for violence experienced by men and women in previous surveys, the much higher proportion of male respondents previously indicates that reported violence among men was lower. The fact that 93% experienced violence in 2014 suggests that the lower harassment figures do not necessarily represent an improvement; rather, they may even indicate that more incidents that would previously have been reported as harassment have now turned violent. However, a larger sample size and further investigation would be required to verify this trend.

## **Violent Incidents**

**Around 3pm on a Thursday afternoon in January**, Victor, a 28-year-old man from the DRC, was standing alone on Kurskaya metro platform, on his way to work. A group of four Russian men (two aged 20-25; two aged 30+) came up to Victor and asked if they could take a picture with him. Since Victor did not know these men, was travelling alone and going to work, he refused. This made the men irritated, and they surrounded him so that he could not leave. When Victor attempted to force his way out, they shoved him and tore at his clothes. Eventually a train arrived and the four men boarded, leaving Victor by himself on the platform with torn-up clothing.

There were many witnesses, but nobody attempted to help Victor until after the four men had left. When the train pulled away, a few people came to help him and one man gave him a shirt to replace the torn one that he was wearing. Although there were police officers patrolling the platform, none of them came to Victor's assistance.

Although his clothes were destroyed, Victor did not sustain any physical injuries. He did not seek assistance from the police because he does not speak Russian and he has no valid migration documents. It is the first time he has been attacked during his eight months in Moscow but he experiences verbal harassment on a regular basis.

**On a weekday in February**, George, a 23-year-old man from the DRC, was riding the red metro line southbound when he noticed a commotion at one of the doors to the metro car that he was on. A Russian man around 40 years old was pushing and elbowing a young African man, obstructing his entry to the train. The two men did not seem to know each other, but the Russian was agitated

and determined to keep the African off of the train. When the African man managed to get on the train, the Russian man's agitation increased and he moved to the other end of the metro car.

Upon arriving at the other end, the man noticed that George was standing alone by the other exit. George was not in the man's way, but the man shoved and elbowed at him as if he wanted him to get off the train as well. Not wanting to escalate the situation further, George got off at the next stop to wait for another train. Although the metro car was full of people, none of the other passengers attempted to intercede.

George did not sustain any injuries and chose not to pursue any help from the police. This is the first time he has been attacked in his eight months in Moscow, but he has experienced verbal harassment on previous occasions.

**Around 1pm on a Sunday in February or March**, Imran, a 23-year-old man from Ivory Coast, was handing out advertisements near the south exit of the Kitay Gorod metro station. A 20-23 year-old Russian man, who Imran described as a 'skin-head', approached him. The man made an unprovoked obscene hand gesture towards Imran with both hands. Imran responded by asking, "Why do you do this to me?" In response, the man became irritated and started shouting at him, saying, "How dare you talk to me like that". He then punched Imran in the right eye. Immediately afterwards, the man ran away. There were many witnesses to the attack, but nobody came to assist Imran or called the police.

Imran suffered pain and swelling in his eye. He did not pursue medical help as he did not have money or a valid visa – and did not at the time know about the MPC Medical Advice Center. Instead, he used snow to soothe the wound. He did not report to the police because of his lack of valid migration documents and because he feared that he would not be paid his daily wages if he left work to seek help. It is the first time he has been attacked in his 18 months in Moscow, but he experiences verbal harassment on a regular basis.

**Around 11pm on a day in March**, Marie, a 26-year old woman from Ivory Coast, was riding the metro from Vykhino into the city center. A group of five men aged 20-25, who were white but not Russian, began talking to her while she was sitting. Two of them sat next to her, and began moving closer and squeezing her from both sides. She got up and moved away towards the doors, and they continued talking and whispering to one another. As the train pulled into Taganskaya station, the men prepared to exit. As one of them was getting off the train, he tried to poke a finger into Marie's backside. She kicked him and he stepped off the train. There were many witnesses to the incident but nobody interceded; they just laughed when she kicked the man.

Marie did not sustain any injuries, and did not report to the police. She has been attacked and harassed multiple times in her two years in Moscow.

**Around 1:30pm on 24th April**, a British woman, Joanna, was walking with Jack, an African man in his late 30s who she had just met that day. They entered the underpass at Kitay Gorod on their way to the metro, and passed a group of four men in their fifties, including one in a wheelchair, who were drinking alcohol and looked like they might be homeless. As Jack passed by, the man in a wheelchair suddenly punched him in the stomach. Jack keeled over and grabbed his stomach, but continued walking. Since Joanna had just met Jack, and did not want to make matters worse, she did not confront the attacker or suggest that Jack sought medical attention or the police. Jack acted as if nothing had happened, but clutched his stomach as he entered the metro.

**Around 9pm on 27 April**, Adam, a 30-year-old man from Guinea, exited the metro at Vykhino on his way home from work, and crossed the road to get to the bus stop. A white man aged 25-30 was crossing the road in the opposite direction, heading towards him. Suddenly, as they passed each other, the man hit Adam in the right eye with an open hand. Adam immediately covered his face with his hands in response to the pain, so did not see where the man went – but he appeared

to run away quickly. Several witnesses came to Adam's aid, helping him get to the bus safely and cursing the attacker, but nobody called the police.

Adam suffered swelling and pain in his right eye and cheek. He went to a Russian clinic but could not afford their services, so later came to MPC where he had his wound dressed and received medication. Adam was also referred to a counsellor for further consultation. This is the second time he has been attacked in his five years in Moscow: he found both incidents highly traumatic and is now afraid to be out after dark.

**Around 5pm on a weekday in July**, Dany, a 35-year-old man from Ivory Coast, was working in front of the Belarusskaya metro station, wearing a large placard and passing out flyers. Dany was approached by two young Russian-speaking men who seemed to be looking to provoke a fight. One of the men called Dany a "monkey" while the second man punched him in the chest. The two men then continued walking down the corridor until they came across a group of Central Asian men. There was a verbal exchange followed by a physical confrontation with this second group.

The violence against Dany was very brief and did not cause any serious physical harm. After the two men had left, another woman who was passing out flyers next to Dany attempted to comfort him by saying that it was normal and that he shouldn't get too upset about it. Dany did not go to the police or seek any medical attention after the incident.

He has been attacked and harassed on multiple other occasions in his three years in Moscow, including in November 2014 (see below).

**On a weekday in the summer**, Francis, a 27-year-old man from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was taking the commuter train home from work between Yaroslavskiy Station and Mitishi, when he was confronted by two Russian-speaking men on an empty carriage. One of the men (approximately 30-40 years old) made a rude hand gesture towards Francis with his middle finger while the second man (approximately 17-19 years old) told Francis that he "does not like blacks". Hoping to avoid a confrontation, Francis went to another carriage where there were many other passengers.

The young man followed Francis and continued to verbally harass him in Russian. Not speaking much Russian, Francis began responding in French, which appeared to escalate the situation further, so he decided to get off the train. When he attempted to get off at the next stop, the young man pushed him to the ground and began kicking and stomping on him. The young man reached for what appeared to be a small knife when an older Russian passenger (a man in his 50s) intervened and pulled the young man away. The older man kept the young man away from Francis until he was able to get off of the train.

The train carriage was full of people, but only one person intervened. Francis chose not to report the incident to the police because there was no major injury and because he was afraid that the police would not help him.

He has been attacked and harassed multiple times in the year he has been in Moscow.

**Around 9pm on a weekday evening in early November**, Adrien, a 45-year-old man from the Democratic Republic of Congo – was walking alone through Izmailovskiy Park on the way home from a friend's house. Adrien was stopped by a group of four Russian-speaking men who began asking him questions about where he was from and what he was doing in Moscow. The conversation started off friendly, but turned more aggressive when the group found out that Adrien had a job. One of the men shouted "Why should an African be allowed to work in our country when we can't even find work in our country?"

The group of four men then proceeded to surround Adrien and demand that he buy them alcohol.

When Adrien said that he had no money to do so, the men grabbed him and tried to steal his bag. Adrien pushed them off, but they continued to grab at him. Adrien realized that the situation was becoming hostile and dangerous, so he broke free and ran towards a group of people walking in the park. The four men did not chase him, and he was able to escape without further incident.

Adrien did not sustain any serious injuries and chose not to report the incident to the police out of fear because of his irregular migration status.

He has experienced violence and harassment multiple times during his one year in Moscow.

**Around 9am on a morning in November**, Dany, a 35-year-old man from Ivory Coast who was also attacked in July (see above), was working in front of Voykovskaya metro station, wearing an advertising placard. Dany was approached by two Russian-speaking men in their early thirties; there were many people working with flyers and placards but he was the only African and the only person the men approached. One of the men punched the placard that Dany was wearing so hard that it cracked. The two men then walked away. A witness approached Dany and expressed her sympathy, saying that not all Russians are like that and apologizing for the actions of the men.

Dany saw the men begin an altercation with a magazine vendor in the metro. Two police officers noticed the shouting and detained the young men. Although Dany had also been a victim of these two men, he chose not to come forward to the police out of fear because of his irregular migration status. He did not have any serious injuries and did not seek medical help.

He has been attacked and harassed on multiple other occasions in his three years in Moscow.

**On the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> December**, Kamara, a 34-year-old man from Gambia, was working at Vodny Stadion Metro station passing out flyers. A man approached him and swung his arm towards Kamara, saying something in Russian. Kamara had to jump to get out of the way. Other passers-by shook their heads in apparent disapproval of the man's actions, but nobody intervened. The man continued on his way. The next day, the man passed by again and repeated the action: he swung his arm and Kamara had to jump out of the way to avoid being hit. This continued every morning for two weeks. Each time Kamara was able to get out of the way in time. The attacks only ended when Kamara moved to work at a different metro station.

No physical contact was made and Kamara did not suffer any injuries or report to the police. However, he has concerns about working at the Vodny Stadion metro station in the future.

Kamara has experienced harassment on other occasions during his four months in Moscow.

**Around 11am on Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> December**, Karl, a 19-year-old man from Mali, was working in the Tushinskaya area posting flyers on the doors of apartment buildings. He was confronted by two Russian-speaking men in their mid-30s who told him to stop posting flyers and leave. One of the men struck Karl in the back of the head, causing him to fall to the ground, and then the pair proceeded to punch and kick him.

While this was taking place, one of the assailants made a phone call to some friends. Three men arrived in work uniforms (blue jumpsuits with fluorescent orange bands) and joined in beating Karl. They shouted at Karl and he shouted back, but he was not certain what the assailants were saying. Eventually, a witness got out of a vehicle and called the police and ambulance. The ambulance arrived while the assailants were walking away and Karl tried to get the medical workers to stop the men, but they refused. When the medical workers realized that Karl did not have a valid visa, they asked him to sign a sheet of paper, stopped the bleeding in his mouth, and told him to leave. The police never arrived.

Karl suffered pain and dizziness in his head, cuts and bruises to the face and hands, loose and

bloody teeth and a 10mm gash on the inside of his lip. He sought help at MPC's Medical Advice Center, and may need stitches. MPC referred him to partners to help him file a police report.

This is the fifth or sixth time that Karl has been attacked during his two and a half years in Moscow.

## **Task Force News**

The Task Force has held four Community Events this year, to provide support and advice to the African community in Moscow. In March, the event took place during Racism Awareness Week (March 21-27), and included a review of the work of the Task Force, and presentations on accessing emergency medical care and maintaining nutrition on a budget. The event also included a tasting session of nutritious, low-cost meals, and lunch, and participants were sent home with a recipe book and some ingredients. In June, the event included our survey on racial violence and harassment, a session of improvised music and drumming, and a time of lunch and fellowship. Participants were again given a recipe and ingredients for a nutritious meal. The October Community Event included a Russian lesson with useful phrases for responding to harassment, and a workshop on sexual health – as well a time of lunch and fellowship. In December, the event included our survey on racial violence and harassment, a workshop on staying safe and healthy in the cold, games, food and Christmas festivities.

In addition to the March Community Event, the Task Force marked Racism Awareness Week with several other initiatives. We created brochures for churches on racism and welcoming the stranger, which we distributed in hard copy to 17 churches and electronically to an additional 40. We also organized a flyer campaign and distributed 500 informational flyers about racism close to a metro station and three mainline railway stations.

On June 11th, we held our annual Refugee Children's Party, attended by 100 children. The event included games and activities, arts and crafts, lunch, and the distribution of gifts.

In October, we launched a new Children's Club for African children without access to education, in partnership with the Children's Center of Civic Assistance. French, English and Russian-speaking volunteers work with two age groups to improve their literacy in French and Russian, as well as teaching math and other subjects, with the aim of improving the children's readiness to apply for places in Russian schools.

## **Conclusion**

Our findings from 2014 reflect the persistent nature of racially motivated violence and harassment in Moscow, and the unprovoked and unpunished character of such abuse. While the incident reports give us insight into the precise nature and consequences of these attacks through the eyes of those targeted, the survey results help us to gain a broader picture of the experiences faced by the African community. Perhaps the most notable figure is that of the violence experienced by men: 93% of male respondents experienced violence in 2014. While reported levels of harassment were lower overall in the second survey, one plausible interpretation is that incidents that would previously have been reported as harassment began more frequently to turn violent.

Another outcome of the surveys is the identification of a difference between men's and women's experience of violence and harassment. In future research, we will seek to differentiate more explicitly between male and female experiences and to identify trends among each group.

We will continue to strive to help victims of attacks, and where possible to reduce the risk of violence against those most often targeted through training and advice. Our experience so far suggests that not all victims wish to share the full stories of the attacks they have faced, even if they are willing to report through the survey that such attacks took place. However, we continue to

place a high importance on providing an opportunity to share these stories, to give a voice to those targeted. We hope that this will in turn create a greater awareness of the experiences of Africans in Moscow, as one step towards reducing the level of racially motivated violence and harassment in the city.

If you have any questions regarding the information in this report, or would like to learn more about the work that we do to document racially motivated violence and harassment, please contact Penny Grenfell, Coordinator, MPC Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment, at [taskforce@mpcss.org](mailto:taskforce@mpcss.org).