



MPC Social Services

Serving Moscow since 1991

Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment First Biannual 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; however, while the 2013 survey asked people about their experiences since their first arrival in Moscow, the latest survey was limited to experiences during 2014. We hope that by gathering regular information with a more limited time-frame, we will be able to identify patterns over the coming years. In this biannual report, we begin with a summary of our survey results, before describing the particular violent incidents brought to our attention throughout the first 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 among 17 migrants and refugees, **94% of respondents reported experiencing harassment during the first half of 2014.** In addition, **65% had been victims of physical attacks.**

During the first half of 2014, the Task Force recorded **6 physical attacks**:

- 0 physical attacks with an articulated racist motive (accompanied by racist verbal abuse or symbols)
- 6 physical attacks suspected to be racially-motivated
- 0 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 June, the Task force gathered information from 17 migrants and refugees on their experiences of living in Moscow during 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

94% of those surveyed had personally experienced racially motivated harassment in 2014: they had been “shouted at, insulted or bothered” because of racism. 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

65% of those surveyed had personally experienced what they believed to be racially motivated violence during the first half of 2014: they had been “hit, pushed or [physically] hurt” because of what they interpreted as racism. At least 29% had experienced physical attacks more than once during the six-month period.

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.

Task Force News

The Task Force has held two Community Events so far 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.

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.

Conclusion

The results of the survey regarding the first half of 2014 are in line with our findings from the 2013 general survey, when 100% of respondents reported experiencing harassment, and 58% reported experiencing physical violence. These results, combined with our full incident reports, reflect the persistent nature of racial violence and harassment in Moscow. As previously, many African migrants in Moscow showed fear and hopelessness about seeking legal redress. This is despite the fact that their rights to ‘life, liberty and security of person’ are enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Article 3), to which Russia is a signatory. We therefore call on the Russian government to strongly condemn racially-motivated violence and harassment, and urge Russian law enforcement more actively to pursue and bring to justice perpetrators of violence, without discrimination regarding the race or status of the victim.

Meanwhile we will continue to support victims of attacks and abuse, and to help them where we can to lessen the risk of further violence. It is our hope that by giving these people a voice, we will be able to contribute to a broader discussion about the experience of migrants, as one step towards reducing the level of racially-motivated violence and harassment in Moscow.

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.