



# MPC Social Services

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## Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment 1<sup>st</sup> Biannual Report 2015

### 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.

Nevertheless, we attempt to give an overall picture of the experiences of racism *among the particular community that we serve* by running broader surveys alongside our one-to-one interviews with individual victims of race-motivated violence. In a survey in 2013, 100% of respondents claimed that they had experienced harassment during their time in Moscow, and 58% had experienced physical attacks. In later surveys we limited the period in question to the year of the report, to try and identify patterns over the course of several years. In the latest survey, we asked respondents if they had experienced violence and harassment during the first half of 2015. We also introduced a question about whether they believed the situation of racism in Moscow had improved or worsened since their arrival in Moscow.

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 2015. 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 May-June among 27 migrants and refugees, **67% of respondents reported experiencing harassment during the first half of 2015.** In addition, **59% had been victims of physical attacks.**

During the first half of 2015, the Task Force recorded **4 physical attacks**:

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

The Task Force also recorded one incident of institutional racism in the health service.

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 May-June, the Task force gathered information from 27 migrants and refugees on their experiences of living in Moscow during the first half of 2015. Of those surveyed, 23 (85%) were male and 4 (15%) were female. The countries of origin of the respondents were as follows:

- Ivory Coast: 6 (22%)
- Cameroon: 4 (15%)
- Democratic Republic of Congo: 3 (11%)
- Guinea: 3 (11%)
- Nigeria: 2 (7%)
- Mali: 2 (7%)
- Senegal: 2 (7%)
- Zimbabwe: 1 (4%)
- Ghana: 1 (4%)
- Gambia: 1 (4%)

The age breakdown was as follows:

- 15-20: 1 (3%)
- 21-30: 11 (41%)
- 31-40: 8 (30%)
- 41-50: 7 (26%)

The length of time they had been in Moscow was as follows:

- Less than one year: 8 (30%)
- 1-5 years: 11 (41%)
- 6-10 years: 2 (7%)
- 11-15 years: 1 (4%)
- 16-20 years: 1 (4%)

(2 respondents did not answer this question.)

## Harassment

In the survey, 67% of those surveyed said that they had personally experienced racially motivated harassment in 2015: they had been “shouted at, insulted or bothered” because of racism (26% said they had not experienced harassment and 7% did not answer). Among men, 74% had experienced harassment; whereas the figure was 25% among women. 19% (of the total number surveyed) said they had experienced harassment more than once a week; a further 15% every week, and 11% every month. This totals 45% who experienced race-based harassment every month or more.

67% of respondents had experienced harassment by the police in 2015, including 61% of men surveyed and 50% of women surveyed. 33% had experienced police harassment once a month or more.

## Violence

59% 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. Among men, 65% had been attacked; among women, 25% had been attacked. 33% (of the total number surveyed) had experienced physical attacks every month or more.

### Opinion on racism

Of those surveyed, 26% believed that the situation of racism had improved since their arrival in Moscow. 7% believed it had become worse. 52% believed that the situation had neither improved nor worsened since their arrival in Moscow. (15% did not answer.)

### Commentary

The overall harassment figures were lower than in 2014, when 77% reported experiencing harassment. However, the figures among men have seen less of a change: in 2014, 79% of men had experienced harassment compared to 74% in the first half of 2015. Among women, the discrepancy was much larger: 63% in 2014 and 25% in the first half of 2015. However, since the total number of women included in the latest survey was 4, no concrete conclusions can be drawn from this change.

The percentage experiencing violence was also lower in the latest survey; in 2014, 65% reported experiencing violence. While the drop to 59% in the first half of 2015 is not dramatic, among men, the percentage dropped from 93% in 2014 to 65% in the first half of 2015. On the surface, this is an encouraging change, but it should be remembered that the number of male survey participants was much larger than in the previous survey (27 compared to 14), so it is difficult to determine whether the change represents a real reduced percentage of men experiencing violence or simply a larger number and variety of survey participants. The overall *number* of men reporting violence in the latest survey was in fact higher than in the 2014 survey (15 compared to 13) and the reporting period half as long (6 months compared to 12). Further investigation will therefore be required to identify any trends.

## Violent Incidents

**On a weekday in March**, Matthew, a 45-year-old man from Zimbabwe, was walking on the street near Mayakovskaya metro station. Two white men, who Matthew described as “junkies,” stared at him in a hostile way. They got up from where they were sitting and walked against the flow of pedestrians to approach him. One of the two men used his shoulder to crash into Matthew’s shoulder. They did not say anything and continued walking in the opposite direction. Two passers-by witnessed the incident but told Matthew just to continue on.

The attack surprised Matthew, but he was not seriously injured and did not report to the police. He reports that on other occasions people have spat at him and told him to “go back to Africa.” He does not go out when it is late in order to avoid dangerous situations. This is the first time he has been attacked during his five months in Moscow.

**During the daytime in May**, Donald, a man from Cote d’Ivoire (who did not wish to give his age) was working at his job handing out fliers near the Lubyanka metro station. Three men with blond hair and light skin approached him and began hitting his arm, smacking it so that he could not hand out fliers. Donald asked why they were hitting him. They did not respond, but instead called over the local police who were standing nearby. The police asked Donald for his documentation, but he could not produce it, so they demanded that he give them a bribe of 4000 rubles.

Donald was not seriously injured, but reported that a month later a similar incident occurred when a passerby called the police over to him. When he could not present documentation, the police demanded that he pay 500 rubles, which he paid.

**At around 8pm on 2nd May**, Francois, a 47-year-old man from Cameroon, was returning home from a visit to his friend's house, a Cameroonian diplomat. He was changing metro lines at Tretyakovskaya metro station, when he was approached by three Russian men. One of them asked to take a photo with him, and he agreed. However, while posing for the photo, the man put his arm around Francois' neck, not around his waist as he would have expected. This made Francois uncomfortable and he objected. The men then started asking questions about his profession and why he was in Moscow. As the train started to approach, they suddenly began hitting him, punching his face, hands and body until he fell down. He saw some police on the platform, but they did not intervene. The men then jumped on the train.

Two Russian women helped him get up. A man approached and asked if he wanted to tell the police, but he said there was no point since the men had already left on the train. Francois suffered a swollen thumb and eye. He sought help at the MPC Medical Advice Center. It is the first time he has been attacked during his five years in Moscow.

**At around 11pm on the 25<sup>th</sup> May**, Frank, a 28-year-old man from the DRC, was walking home to his apartment near metro Bulvar Dmitri Donskogo. Three men aged 28-30 with shaved heads or short hair stopped him in the courtyard outside his building and asked if they could take a photo with him. He agreed and they took a photo. Frank then reached for his house keys and realized that he had lost them. He did not have any credit on his phone to call his housemates, so he asked the men if he could borrow a phone. They agreed and he called his friends, but nobody answered.

The men then started asking questions about where he worked and how much he earned. He told them that he hands out flyers on the streets and earns 900 rubles per day. They asked him to buy them beer, and he refused, explaining that he had not been paid that day and had no money on him. One of the men then moved behind him and grabbed him around the neck with his arm, and demanded that he give them money. The other two men started beating and kicking him in his stomach, face and hands. He tried to protect his head and didn't fight back. He managed to struggle free from them, but they grabbed his bag with his documents in, his phone and his hat. He ran, shouting in Russian that they were trying to kill him. He passed a man and tried to explain what was happening, but the man ignored him. When the attackers heard him shouting, they ran away, taking his possessions with them.

Frank suffered swelling and cuts on his hands, face, neck and stomach, and general pain in his body. He sought medical help at the MPC Medical Advice Center and was referred for an x-ray of his hand. This is the first time he has been attacked during his two years in Moscow.

### **Institutional racism**

**At around 2pm on 8<sup>th</sup> May**, Helena, a 30-year-old woman from the DRC who was 30 weeks pregnant called an ambulance from home because she was suffering from a severe asthmatic attack. The ambulance came and took her to a hospital near Partizanskaya metro. When they entered the emergency room, a male and female doctor came out and started talking with the paramedic who had brought her in the ambulance. The doctors stayed far away from her, in a way that suggested they thought she might be contagious. She could hear them discussing her case, and understood that the paramedic was trying to explain that her problem was asthma and that she did not have a fever. The doctors looked concerned and said that they don't receive Africans in that hospital. Although she could hardly breathe, she tried begging them to help her. They sent her outside so she could no longer hear the conversation.

Eventually the paramedic emerged and said they needed to go to a different hospital. Helena was very distressed and the paramedic tried to reassure her. She was still having a severe asthmatic attack. They drove to another hospital at Sokol. There they gave her something to calm her, but did not treat her and left her to wait for three hours.

Eventually, the hospital told her she had to go somewhere else. A new ambulance came and took her to a hospital at Babushkinskaya. She arrived at around 8pm, still having an asthmatic attack, and was treated immediately. She was kept overnight, but was given a small fold-out bed, much smaller than the other people in her ward. Despite her legal right to free emergency treatment, the next day she was told she had to pay 9000 roubles, and another 9000 roubles for each day she continued to stay in the hospital. Although she wasn't feeling fully better, she couldn't pay and so left the hospital.

## **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 and included a discussion on responding to race-motivated harassment and a workshop by a Playback Theatre group. In June, the event included a review of the work of the Task Force, and two interactive health workshops focusing on nutrition and exercise. Participants were sent home with reusable water bottles to help them remain hydrated during the summer months.

In addition to the March Community Event, the Task Force marked Racism Awareness Week by distributing brochures to Russian and foreign churches which discussed the issue of racism and welcoming the stranger. We organized a roundtable for church leaders from different confessions, to discuss how churches can better respond to racism as it touches their congregations. In addition, we contributed to the creation of a comic by the organization 'RESPECT', focused on the experience of African migrants in Moscow. The comic will be used to raise awareness among Russian schoolchildren and the wider public about the difficulties faced by migrants in Russia.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June, we held our annual Refugee Children's Party, attended by 50 children. The event included games, activities, crafts and snacks organized by a visiting group of students from the University of Hong Kong. Families were sent home with a bag of food supplies.

The Children's Club for French-speaking African children continues to run, in partnership with the Children's Center of Civic Assistance. 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**

The reports and survey results continue to reveal the serious nature of the problem of racism in Moscow. It is positive that some survey respondents believe that the situation of racism has improved during their time in Moscow - even if that perception is not shared by the majority of Africans that we work with. It is also positive that a smaller proportion of respondents have so far experienced harassment this year compared to last. However, it is clear that the problem of racism persists. Moreover, as shown by the incidents of police harassment and hospital discrimination, racism is not limited to an extremist minority in Russian society.

An improvement in the situation of racism rests on two factors: the punishment of perpetrators of race-motivated crimes; and the empowerment of those people in Russian society who are in principle ready to stand up to racism when they see it but don't know how to do so. Better awareness about racism in Russia, and a broader societal discussion about the issue and about the legal rights of people who experience racism, would help to motivate those passers-by who witness attacks, harassment or discrimination but are afraid or uncertain of how they can help. To this end, we will continue to record those incidents which are reported to us, endeavouring to support and give a voice to those who experience racism 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](mailto:taskforce@mpcss.org).