



MPC Social Services

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Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment 1st Biannual Report 2013

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. Victims rarely report the abuse, but when asked about it they often say they face it daily. When they do report incidents, it is usually because they have found the harassment particularly offensive or embarrassing.

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 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 reported to us, which we believe to be only a small proportion of total incidents – for example, we have worked with numerous victims of suspected race-motivated attacks who chose not to report their cases formally or to authorize use of their stories in this report.

In our reports, we make a conscious effort to remain neutral and communicate what has been described to us in the interview in order to provide a balanced portrayal of life for people of color in Russia. Thus, experiences with a positive outcome are just as important to report as those with negative outcomes.

Lastly, we would like to 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

During the 1st half of 2013, the Task Force recorded the following incidents:

3 physical attacks:

- 0 racially-motivated physical attacks
- 0 suspected racially-motivated physical attacks
- 3 physical attacks of unidentified motivation

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

0 cases of harassment.

Summary of Racial Violence and Harassment

A. Physical Attacks

On the afternoon of 29 March, John, a 28-year-old man from Guinea, returned after a break to his job distributing flyers in the underground passage of Prospekt Vernadskogo metro station. As he started working, two Russians of 25-30 years approached him holding bottles of vodka and asked, “otkuda?” (“Where are you from?”) He did not understand what they were saying. Then, one of them grabbed his coat. John pushed his hand away and caused him to drop the bottle he was holding. The bottle smashed on the ground. The man then made John understand that he had to pay for a new one, but John had no money. The man grabbed him and continued talking, but John could not understand what he was saying. The man punched him on the right side of his face. The other man punched him on the other side of the head. Two passers-by stopped and helped him escape.

His right eye was hurting, so he went to a drugstore, and was recommended to go to the nearest clinic. The clinic informed him that they did not treat eyes. He went to a second medical center, but they could not treat his eye either. They gave him the address of a third clinic. There, he was told that they only treated Moscow residents. However, a Nigerian lady in the waiting room saw him and intervened, saying he was a student, and offering her help as a translator. They agreed to examine him. His eyes were checked and he was given medication. The clinic informed him that he could get direct emergency care if his condition was due to an attack, but the attack had to be reported to the police. Being afraid of having his documents checked, John refused. They had to write down that the cause of his injury was a fall and thus could not offer him immediate treatment for free. However, he was advised to come back for an appointment the next Monday. That day, when he came, alone, he could not make himself understood and waited three hours without anybody attending him. He left and went to MPC Medical Advice Center the next day.

He suffered intense pain and swelling in his right eye and grazes on the left side of the forehead. It is the first time John has been attacked in the months he has been in Moscow (less than a year). He does not know why the two men attacked him, but it was obvious that they were drunk.

On 10 April, just before 5pm, Henry, a 39-year-old man from Ivory Coast, was walking into Polezhaevskaya metro station in order to distribute flyers. He saw a group of four Russian men beating up two other Russian men at the top of the escalator. The latter were already almost unconscious when he saw the attack. The attackers then left the two men lying on the ground. As they were walking towards the exit, they passed the place where Henry was standing and one of the men (who smelt of alcohol) punched him in the face, on the right side near the ear, and walked off. After walking about 10 meters, the man turned, saw Henry still standing at the same place and started walking back towards him. Henry started running in order to escape further attack. The attackers left.

Passers-by who had witnessed the first attack had called the police, who arrived promptly and managed to catch two of the attackers as they were leaving the station. The police then called an ambulance for the men by the escalator. Henry went back to his work.

He suffered pain in his right ear, which passed quickly. He did not notify to the police that he had been hit as well, because at the time he did not think the attack he had suffered was serious. He did not file any official report later because his documents were outdated. Henry now feels fear when he walks in the street. This is the first time Henry has been attacked in his 11 months in Moscow.

On 27 May, around 11pm, Gregory, a 25-year-old man from Congo, was moving to a new apartment, carrying his bags on the metro. He was standing on the platform of Mayakovskaya metro station, using his cell phone, when two Russian men, aged 30-35, approached him and asked him to hand them his phone. He refused, and they punched him. He fell to the ground. Three more Russians approached and together they pushed him onto the train tracks and stabbed him in the foot. Two women were with the attackers, and did not intervene. Gregory fell unconscious.

He woke up some time later at the police station at Komsomolskaya. He discovered that all his possessions had gone, including his money, phone, documents, and an official paper acknowledging that his passport had been stolen several years ago. The police did not take a report or offer any legal assistance. They called an ambulance, and he was taken to hospital. The hospital treated his wounds and let him go.

Gregory suffered a large cut to the bottom of his foot, and other cuts and bruises. This is the first time Gregory has been attacked in his two years in Moscow.

B. Harassment

No reports.

Task Force News

The Racial Task Force held several events to mark Racism Awareness Week from March 17-23. We organized a viewing of the movie, *Remember the Titans*, at the American Center, followed by a discussion about the movie and about racism in Russia. We presented the findings from our 2012 Annual Report at the UNHCR Working Group on Tolerance. In addition, we organized a community event for the African community in Moscow, with lunch and socializing, education about the work of the Task Force, statistics and information about racism in Russia, and games focused on highlighting safety tips for living in Moscow. We also created a handout giving advice to potential witnesses of an attack, which we distributed to the wider MPC community.

In February, the Racial Task Force launched a Facebook page, at www.facebook.com/MPCRacialTaskForce

The page exists to offer:

- ✓ General information about the Task Force
- ✓ Updates about our current work and upcoming events
- ✓ Volunteer and Intern opportunities
- ✓ Bi-annual and Annual Reports in English, Russian and French
- ✓ Information for individuals considering moving to Russia
- ✓ Safety tips for living in Moscow
- ✓ News on hate crime in Russia

On June 19th, we marked World Refugee Day with a party for refugee children in Moscow. The event was attended by 120 children, and included outdoor games, juggling demonstrations, face painting, and arts and crafts. Lunch was also provided.

A new Coordinator of the Racial Task Force, Penny Grenfell, was appointed in June 2013.

Conclusion

Although the number of attacks reported so far in 2013 has been low, the Task Force has worked with numerous other victims who did not wish to report, or authorize use of their reports externally. This highlights the fact that the problem is much greater than we are able to report here. Likewise, although we received no harassment reports in the first half of 2013, we know anecdotally that the problem persists. Moreover, we predict that reporting will decrease throughout the summer months because people leave to work in other Russian cities. We will be trying to document their experiences when they return to understand the situation regarding racism throughout Russia.

Given these limitations, we cannot yet make overall judgments about the improvement or deterioration of the situation regarding race-motivated violence in Moscow. We will continue to strive to improve our data-gathering techniques, while staying faithful to our desire to give a voice to individual victims of attacks by publishing their stories.

We would like to note that over the course of this year, we will be looking for trends and continuing to try to improve our reporting. This means that there may be some inconsistencies in reporting until we have communicated our work to the community well and begun to collect reports on a more regular basis.

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.