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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 February 2014]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Severe human rights violations in the North Caucasus, Russian Federation

Security issues and the danger of terrorist attacks around the Olympic Games on Sochi have given the Russian authorities the opportunity to increase its campaign of repression in the North Caucasus region. It is to be expected that the situation will worsen after the Games have ended.

Chechnya

During two wars in Chechnya with approximately 120,000 dead, most severe human rights abuses such as the deliberate shelling of civilian targets such as refugees, schools and hospitals, the „cleansing“ of villages, murders, rapes and enforced disappearances were committed until the year 2009. The perpetrators both on the Russian as well as on the Chechen side were not brought to justice. Impunity reigned.

Starting five years ago, the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrow has established a dictatorship in Chechnya. Kadyrow's reign is characterized by a massive personality cult, the missing of any democratic structures such as a functioning parliament, an independent justice system and free press, the far-reaching intrusions into the religious and private life as well as the collective punishment of those deemed to be supporting, sympathizing or having family ties with rebels.

Since the beginning of 2014 Ramzan Kadyrow has given several statements on so-called Salafists or Wahabis. He portrayed all those who wear a beard or a „non-traditional“ Hijab as terrorists. Following his statements local security officers felt compelled to detain young men with beards directly after the Friday sermons. At the entrance of the University of Grozny the clothing of female students are being controlled. If they wear a black Hijab which covers the face „too much“, they are being lectured. Cell phones of young mosque visitors are confiscated and scanned for the preachings of Salafists.

In recent weeks Ramzan Kadyrow warned all those who do not adhere to „his“ version of Islam: „Not only will Wahhabism, Hanbalism and other teachings that contradict the Quran, Sunna and Shari'ah never exist in Chechnya, but also their very trace will be eradicated.“

Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply concerned about the increasing curtailment of civil rights, the right to practice one's religion freely. The call for kin liability is deeply troubling.

Refugees from Chechnya report on the reasons for them fleeing their homes:

- Arbitrary Imprisonment of people by the militia without any reason
- People are suspected of being terrorists, to sympathize or to be related with them. The intelligence services arrests them
- There are reports about persecution by warring party, especially if someone refuses to support them
- Women report about rapes and domestic violence
- The relatives are scared of government actions (imprisonment or disappearance) because of their contacts to the warriors (family relation)
- Refugees reported about abduction by men dressed in black
- Confessions are forced by torture, which lead to long imprisonments
- Family members are facing charges by the Russian authorities, because they fought during the civil war

- People are requested to work with President Ramzan Kadyrow, otherwise they are threatened, persecuted and put under pressure

Dagestan

Dagestan has evolved into the main scene of terroristic violence and state counter violence in the North Caucasus. The republic has the highest number of active Wahabi communities, known as Jamates. Official Russian reports stated that about 70% of all assaults take place in Dagestan. Furthermore, the internet portal Kavkaskij Uzel reported that 946 people were killed in assassinations in the North Caucasus in 2013; 641 of them were in Dagestan.

There is no doubt that Islam has gained major influence and popularity. It is however important to distinguish between people who adopted a non-traditional Arab form of the Islamic religion like Salafism and live in peace, and the people who take Salafism as an argument to arm themselves and join the underground movement. But this distinction is often neglected by the media and politics of Dagestan, which leads to stigmatization of everyone, who is deemed Salafist or Wahabi. In 2012, the government organized a commission of rehabilitation and amnesty for former underground fighters and arranged a dialogue between peaceful Salafists and Sufis. But in 2013 the situation worsened. The previous openness to dialogue had lead to a measurable decline of assassinations.

Yet there were still so called cleansings in 2013 in Dagestani villages such as the village of Gimri in April 2013; many cafés, restaurants and schools, which were deemed Salafi were raided; dozens of peoples were temporarily detained and their identifications were recorded. Journalists and human right activists are again and again targeted by violence, especially after the publication of a “black lists” with their names in September 2013. The well-known journalist Achmednabi Achmednabiev was murdered on the 9th of July 2013.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to:

- Urge the Government of the Russian Federation to end impunity for human rights abuses and killings
 - Urge the Government of the Russian Federation to increase its support for human rights campaigners and free media
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