

Russia : Stop Mass Arrests of Migrants - "Migrants are now being targeted at all fronts"

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Paris, 31 October 2014 - Between 23 October and 2 November 2014 the authorities of Moscow are implementing "Operation Migrant 2014", aimed at cracking down on "illegal" migration. 7000 migrants were arrested in the first four days during mass raids in which police have used violence. FIDH and ADC « Memorial » call on the Russian authorities to immediately suspend the operation and instead to explore measures to enable migrants to regularise their situations and to work in Russia legally.

The operation referred to as "Comprehensive, preventive Operation Migrant 2014" is a joint initiative by Moscow's departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Migration Service, the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the authorities of Moscow. According to the press office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in four days they have checked the administrative status of 14,000 migrants and arrested 7,000 people. Criminal charges such as robbery, assault, forgery, fraud and drug trafficking have been brought against 20 individuals, while over 500 migrants face administrative charges.

"The scope of this operation is dramatic", said Tolekan Ismailova, FIDH Vice-President. "People have been unexpectedly stopped at work, in their houses, and taken to some unknown location, often separated from children. This is simply an institutionalised way of intimidating migrants and their families. The operation violates Russia's international obligations to respect human dignity and ban the practice of arbitrary detentions", she added.

"Operation Migrant 2014" is the latest manifestation of the xenophobic and anti-migrant policy implemented by the Russian authorities. A similar operation, named "Operation Illegal 2014", was conducted in St Petersburg from 22 September until 10 October 2014. The operation resulted in 437 migrants facing criminal charges. Most recently, on 26 October 2014, the Russian State Duma considered a new law increasing the penalties for exceeding the legal term of stay in Russia. According to the draft law, foreign citizens who exceed it the maximum period by more than one year will be banned from entering Russia for ten years.

FIDH and ADC « Memorial » are deeply concerned by measures aimed at encouraging citizens to denounce migrants in an irregular situation. Russian authorities incite citizens to report migrants they suspect of working illegally to a special hotline which passes the information to the police.

"Migrants are now being targeted at all fronts. They face increasing discrimination and persecution. The very names of such operations - "Migrant 2014" and "Illegal 2014" - reflect a xenophobic approach to migration : they suggest that all migrants are suspect of violating the law", said Stefania Kulaeva, Head of ADC « Memorial ».

"These raids take place just before the 4 November, celebrated as 'Unity Day' in Russia, which is

regularly marked by massive nationalist and anti-migrant demonstrations in Moscow and Saint Petersburg”, she added.

Last year “Unity Day” was preceded by violent riots in the southern Biryulyovo residential district of Moscow after an ethnic Azeri was alleged to have killed an ethnic Russian, leading to outcry by Russian nationalists. Angry mobs destroyed cars, vandalised shops and fruit stands and chanted ‘Russia for Russians’ as they stormed a warehouse in search of the suspect. ‘Pre-emptive’ raids on migrants followed, with over a thousand migrants arrested, while police arrested only two Russian nationalists. On 4 November 2013, a migrant of Uzbek origin was killed in the Saint Petersburg metro. Such events have not been adequately investigated by the authorities who have continued to use xenophobic rhetoric and implement anti-migration policies, contributing to a climate which favours the repetition of such violence.

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

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<http://www.fidh.org/en/eastern-europe-central-asia/russia/16382-russia-fidh-and-adc-memorial-call-to-stop-mass-arrests-of-migrants>