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# Moscow's Muslim Slums Now Breeding Grounds for Despair

By Paul Goble

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VIENNA &mdash An increasing number of Muslim guest workers in the Russian capital "are living in inhuman conditions, suffering from cold, hunger and disease," harassed by government officials, and largely ignored by the traditional Muslim hierarchies, a combination that is turning them into breeding grounds for despair and possible radicalization.

In a report carried on the Islamnews.ru portal, Rustam Dzhalilov describes the settlement of Chelobityevo, where some 3,000 Muslims from Central Asia, whose misfortunes people in Moscow "either do not know or do not want to know," live only 200 meters from the Garden Ring Road.

Many of the buildings there are little more than crude huts, the journalist notes, assembled from found materials, lack any indoor plumbing or heating and often have as many as ten people to a room. The migrants there at one point did manage to purchase an electric

generator, but militia officers took it away.

Dzhalilov spoke with Firuza, a woman from Kyrgyzstan living in one of the huts with her three children. She and her husband came to Russia to work 12 years ago, but then six years later, the family lost its apartment and took to sleeping in a Moscow railway station. Shortly thereafter, they came to Chelobityevo and built the hut she lives in now.

Her husband continued to work at a construction site, but then he suffered an accident and had to return home to Tajikistan. "But [Firuza] could not return: There was no home, apartment or means for existence" for her there. As a result, she remains in the settlement with two teenage boys and a 6-year-old daughter. None of them are in school.

The family lacks the money for medicine, but the people of the settlement do what they can to help one another. Unfortunately, even though some have jobs, that is not easy, especially since OMON officers frequently demand bribes, regardless of whether they have passports or not, and the Muslim spiritual directorate (MSD) does nothing to help.

Bakhrom Khamroyev, a human rights activist, told Dhzalilov that people in Chelobityevo have learned not to show their passports because if they say they don't have any, then they only have to pay 500 rubles ($16 dollars) to the militia, whereas if they show passports, they have to pay up to 1500 rubles ($50 dollars).

Asked whether the MSD does anything to help, Firuza said, "Some of our young lads regularly take part in prayers. They turned for help to the main Moscow mosque, but the mosque bureaucrats responded: 'We do not provide such services; we do not help the needy.'"

Consequently, it has worked out for the residents of the settlement that only individual Muslims are providing any help. But efforts to organize a Muslim community in Chelobityevo have been impeded by the civil authorities. Some young people organized a mosque, but the OMON forced them to disperse, apparently brutally, "and the mosque [itself] soon burned."

Another resident of the settlement, Babur Rakhmonaliyev, who had to flee Kyrgyzstan because of his human rights work &mdash the powers that be there planted drugs on him in order to convict him, he told Dzhalilov &mdash is slightly better off than his neighbors because he has rented a cafe where at least there is water and heat.

Rakhmonaliyev said that next door to his cafe was a "modest *musalla*" &mdash a place for prayer &mdash but added that he was "certain" that the only way the residents of Chelobityevo were going to escape their current problems of "constant need" was to "observe the principles of Islam in all things" on their own.

Dzhalilov writes that he left Chelobityeva "with a heavy heart," recognizing that after "20 years" of "a capitalist economic system," most Russians have become indifferent to the fate of anyone except themselves and react with indifference even to those who have "to live in a cardboard box" as many in this settlement on the outskirts of Moscow do.

But he says that he is appalled by Russia's Muslim "leaders." The latter, he adds, are not real "representatives" of the *umma* "or defenders and exponents of [its] interests. Only Muslims

themselves, voluntarily following the injunctions of their faith, can form unions that will be concerned about the interests of the entire umma, including those'' in places like Chelobityeva.

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