

Memorial Frets About Moscow Abductions

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The  **Moscow Times**

The Memorial human rights group accused law enforcement agencies on Friday of kidnapping and torturing ordinary Muslims in Moscow as part of the government's broadening fight against Islamist extremism.

Memorial said in a report that at least eight Russian citizens from the North Caucasus had been kidnapped since September by law enforcement agencies in Moscow.

"People are picked up on the street or outside metro stations," Svetlana Gannushkina, in charge of migration rights at the group, said in an interview.

"Whether it's the police or other law enforcement agencies, it's done in the name of fighting extremism. But no one tries to differentiate between extremists and Islamists and people who peacefully practice their religion," she said.

She said that before the recent cases, kidnappings happened so rarely that Memorial did not feel the need to count them.

Neither the Federal Security Service nor the police was immediately available for comment on the report.

Memorial said many of those kidnapped were laborers from the North Caucasus who came to Moscow looking for work. It is unclear whether any of the victims might be linked to the insurgency.

In October, two Dagestani natives were kidnapped in Moscow after police street checks, Memorial said in the report, citing one of the men who was later released.

Makhmood R., as he was identified in the report, said he and his friend, Mirza Mamayev, were stopped by law enforcement officers outside a metro station and led away where they were beaten unconscious by men in camouflage police uniforms.

They were kept for seven days in a single dark cell with their hands and feet tied, until Makhmood R. was released.

Memorial chairman Oleg Orlov said the group was planning on taking several such cases to the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights in the coming months.

He said, "We will be taking the cases to the court showing that the kidnappings are being carried out on purpose."

The report comes as the federal government struggles to contain violence in the North Caucasus — a region where an increasingly tough insurgency killed 1,000 people in 2009.

The North Caucasus remains volatile a decade after federal forces drove separatists out of power in the second of two wars in Chechnya. Many law enforcement officers working in Moscow are veterans of one of those wars.

During the Kurban Bairam Muslim holiday last November, Muslims in Moscow complained of being manhandled by police nearby their mosques, which were overflowing with worshippers.

In December, Moscow police struggled to tame 7,000 angry young people who gathered near Red Square, shouting racist slogans and attacking passers-by who appeared to look non-Slavic.

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