

A Good Cause: Helping the Racially Abused

By [Christopher Brennan](#)

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Jen Voecks is a 23-year-old American expat originally from Wisconsin working at Interfax. In her spare time, she coordinates the Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment for the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy. The task force will publish its first quarterly report under Voeck's coordination next week.

Q: How did you get involved in the Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment?

A: The fact that racism is a very large issue here in Moscow compelled me to want to work on it. I went to the parish center, which is a safe haven for people [who have been attacked]. Most of whom are Africans. Seeing that inspired me.

Q: What work does the task force do?

A: The main thing the Task Force does is collect reports.

We document the stories of victims of attack. Physical violence but also harassment. We document the stories and work with the victims.

We don't just want to say that's it. We want to help them.

Sometimes we'll refer them to the repatriation committee. We also have a medical clinic that we refer most of our victims to because most of their visas have expired so they can't seek medical attention elsewhere.

Q: What are some goals for the task force in the near future?

A: We are trying to connect more with Russian society because you can't do much if Russian society doesn't understand the problem or seek the changes that need to be made.

Q: What's challenging about combating racism in Russia?

A: We're still trying to get more people to call us individually and report on attacks. A large sentiment is that it's not going to do anything; it's not going to change anything.

They've seen the police response to attacks, to their complaints, and it's been overall pretty negative for them.

Q: What do you find the most rewarding about coordinating the task force?

A: A lot of times you say when you work for a charity that it's been really rewarding because you see the result. But here you don't see the results as quickly.

This is an issue that takes time. It's so hard because it's not enough, but what's been rewarding has been the fact that when I go to the parish center the people are interested in knowing what's going on, that they have faith and trust in me.

I think our point here is to contribute to Russian society, to improve it, and make change.

See <http://www.mpcrussia.org/tforce.html> for more information on the Task Force on Racial Violence and Harassment.

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