The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

'Migrant Camp' Inspires New Facilities

By Yekaterina Kravtsova

August 05, 2013



The Federal Migration Service building in Moscow.

The Federal Migration Service has drafted a bill to set up 83 new detention centers for illegal immigrants across the country as Moscow's three holding facilities run out of space following a week of raids on city markets.

Some 1,400 alleged illegal immigrants from Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Syria, Morocco, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Egypt were arrested last Wednesday, 614 of whom are now residing in a makeshift tent camp in the Galyanovo district in Eastern Moscow, while others are still in police precincts awaiting trial for immigration violations.

The raids began last Monday, with police inspecting Moscow's markets for illegal immigrants as the result of a violent encounter at the Matveyevsky market on July 27 between the police and the relatives of rape suspect Magomed Magomedov. One police officer was hospitalized with a fractured skull as a result of that fight.

Anton Tsvetkov, the head of Officers of Russia, an organization affiliated with law

enforcement, said all immigrants that had been detained were being given meals three times a day — at a price tag of 60,000 rubles each day for the city. And even though the immigrants were not allowed to leave the camp area, he said, they could go for walks, take a shower and eat at any time they wanted, in conditions he said were much better than those they lived in when they were "literally in slavery."

The camp is located behind a huge fence on the territory of a warehouse, in which, according to police, most of the immigrants worked and lived. There are two areas of tents, with males and females separated. The men have bunk beds and the females single beds. Most of the women said it was difficult for them to stay in the tent, though they could not say what specifically made it difficult — though several of the women were visibly pregnant.

As for a typical day in the camp, there is no official schedule; most of the immigrants just sit by their tents or inside the whole day.

There are four showers and a place for washing clothes, as well as a kitchen.

According to Tsvetkov, the conditions are better than what most would expect when hearing the phrase "deportation camp."

"Such conditions are very good, the camp was organized by the Emergency Ministry that has an experience of creating such temporary camps," he said.

Tsvetkov said that in order for the Vietnamese immigrants to come to work in Russia, they had to pay $2,000, but as most of them didn't have money, they wound up becoming slaves instead — a modern day indentured servitude. The scheme was organized by Vietnamese citizens, he said, and likely with support from the Vietnam Embassy in Moscow.

Representatives of Officers of Russia stressed that most of the immigrants had no passports, because they were taken from them by their employers, which is another common practice in such slave-labor schemes.

On Monday morning, a Vietnamese woman's 11-month old child was taken to a hospital by police for medical examination. The child had been living in unsanitary conditions at an illegal clothing factory.

The child's mother said she didn't know why her child was taken away, however. Representatives of Officers of Russia said they would find out the location of the child after journalists began asking.

Most of the immigrants interviewed by The Moscow Times denied that they were slaves, saying that they considered their stay in Russia legal.

Makhamat Yunos, an Afghani native, said he had refugee status and had been living in Russia for six years, but police refused to consider his documents, and a court issued him a fine of 2,000 rubles and ordered deportation.

Nusrat, from Tajikistan, said he had been working in Russia as an electrician and had a legal work permit. He said he was detained by police while on his way to work, not far from the Izmailovskaya metro station. After a court ruled to deport him, he told police he had enough

money to leave the country, but he was put in the camp before he could do so. He said his wife and children lived with him in Moscow.

Most of those living at the camp also said conditions were poor, as they didn't get much food and the food that they did get was bad. In addition, they said, conditions were making it difficult to keep good hygiene.

Officers of Russia delivered two tons of rice and noodles to the camp on Monday, as well as toothbrushes and shampoo.

The new supplies may ease the concerns of representatives of the Vietnam Embassy, who called conditions at the camp inhumane after visiting over the weekend.

But while the donations from the Officers of Russia may have helped improve one condition at the camp — hygiene — there were widespread concerns about another, prompting both the Kremlin's human rights council and the Vietnam Embassy to voice their dissatisfaction.

"It is inhumane to put 40 people in one area of 50 square meters," the Vietnam Embassy's top official, Le Hong Truong, said Monday, Interfax reported.

Tsvetkov said that those immigrants kept in the camp had already been slated for deportation, and the court's decision would come into effect in 10 days. But they wouldn't be able to leave the camp without documents, and the terms of their deportation depended on the Vietnam Embassy, which must provide them with new passports.

Human Rights Council member Vladimir Shaposhnikov said the council was concerned by another matter, however, namely how long the immigrants would live in the camp before they could leave.

However long it takes though, Russia has agreed to foot the bill, Tsvetkov said. It is expected to cost more than 30,000 rubles of budget money for each immigrant.

Contact the author at e.kravtsova@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/08/05/migrant-camp-inspires-new-facilities-a26482