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Salafis in Dagestan Asked to Notify Police of Travel Plans

By Allison Quinn

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Police in the Karabudakhkenstky district of Dagestan just south of Makachkala have reportedly asked members of the religious Salafi community — a strict form of Islam often associated with insurgents — to sign documents vowing to notify police if they leave the republic.

Yelena Denisenko, a representative for the Memorial human rights group in Dagestan, told the Kavkazsky Uzel news agency late last week that "they gave out forms with printed text saying 'I, so and so, am obligated to inform police within three days if I take a trip outside of the republic ... 'and on top of that the person is required to indicate what form of transportation they'll be taking, for what purpose, etc."

"I was told that one girl tried to travel to Rostov for medical treatment, but she was not allowed to leave the republic, although she had a medical aim," Denisenko said.

The report comes amid heightened security throughout the North Caucasus ahead of the Olympic Games in neighboring Sochi, and more than a week after a media frenzy over reports of a "black widow" suicide bomber somehow getting into the city despite heightened security.

Dagestan is considered Russia's epicenter of insurgent activity, with many suicide bombers tracing their roots to the volatile republic. The suspects in the recent Volgograd bombings are reportedly Dagestan residents.

The head of Karabudekhkentsky district's police dispatch center, who was not identified by name, defended the measure, however, saying in comments carried by Kavkazsky Uzel that it was part of wider "preventative measures" ordered by the Interior Ministry.

"There are heinous crimes being committed on the territory of the Russian Federation, including those of a terroristic character. In connection with this, there is an order for all Dagestanis who are on file with the police to warn us about their intentions to travel outside the republic," he said. It is unclear if he made a distinction between Salafi residents and Dagestanis generally.

The police official added that "no one is prohibited from leaving; they can go wherever they want — Moscow, Vorkuta, Stavropol — but we need to know about it."

Despite increasing concerns over security for the Winter Olympics, he said the move was not in any way connected with the upcoming games, adding that "it will continue even after the games."

No one was forced to sign the documents, he said, and it was all done voluntarily.

"We went from home to home, discussed the matter, explained that this is being done for security reasons and so that these people wouldn't be tormented with checks in other regions," he said.

Residents of the republic of Ingushetia found themselves facing similar restrictions in early January, when they were advised by the republic's Security Council to avoid taking trips to Sochi's Krasnodar region unless it was absolutely necessary.

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