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Chechens Flee Russia in Increasing Numbers, Rights Group Says

By Allison Quinn

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A growing number of Chechens are seeking asylum in Europe over fears of persecution and lawlessness at home, a prominent human rights activist with the Memorial organization said Thursday

"In 2012, 20,000 Russians requested asylum in Europe. In 2013 there were more than 40,000, and in Germany alone there were 15,000. It's mainly Chechens," Svetlana Gannushkina, whose organization on Monday released a report on the issue, said in comments carried by Caucasus-focused news site Kavkazsky Uzel.

Memorial's report concerned both Chechens that had been living in the Chechen republic and those living elsewhere in Russia, and sought to answer the frequently asked question of why Chechens are seeking asylum in Europe.

"In this report we speak of the level of fear in Chechnya, the state of mind in which people there live. I have stressed many times that this is the kind of fear that becomes a part of the individual," said Gannushkina, the report's main editor.

"In Chechnya there is no Russian Constitution. In Chechnya there is only one law, and it consists of two words: Ramzan's orders," she said, referring to the republic's leader, Ramzan Kadyrov.

The Memorial report's authors warned that the Dec. 4 terrorist attack in Grozny created a critical situation that may have "unpredictable effects on the overall situation of Chechens in Russia."

The report also expresses concerns about a deteriorating situation for women, "pervasive corruption penetrating all spheres of life," arbitrary rule of law and illegal persecution, as well as abductions.

"Every person in Chechnya faces the risk of illegal persecution, regardless of gender, age, health and social status," the report said.

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