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Russia Denies United Nations Report of Nearly 100 Drug Addicts Dying in Crimea

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Russia's Health Ministry has denied a United Nations report that nearly 100 recovering drug addicts have died in Crimea since Russia abolished methadone therapy on the annexed peninsula, and claimed that the number of deaths there has actually decreased under Moscow's rule.

Dismissing the U.N. figures, Health Ministry spokesman Oleg Salagai claimed Wednesday that seven former participants of the methadone program died in Crimea between the March 2014 annexation and the end of the year, compared with 16 people in 2013 and 24 people in 2012, the Interfax news agency reported.

"Therefore, based on the results of 2014, the mortality rate among former participants of the replacement therapy has not only failed to increase, but has decreased," Salagai was quoted as saying.

Earlier on Wednesday, the United Nations' AIDS envoy Michel Kazatchkine said that out of the 805 people who were receiving methadone therapy for opiate addiction under Ukrainian rule, "between 80 and 100" have died since Russia took over and abolished the program, Agence France-Presse reported.

"The causes of death, from what we have been hearing, are mainly from suicide and overdose," Michel Kazatchkine was quoted as saying.

Salagai, however, claimed that not a single death from drug overdose or suicide was registered among former program participants in Crimea last year, Interfax reported.

The report did not specify the causes of the seven deaths that Russia has recorded in Crimea since March.

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