

Widespread Torture, Extortion Detailed in St. Petersburg Prisons

August 07, 2018



Moscow prison inspection/ Andrei Lyubimov/ Moskva News Agency

Independent prison monitors have uncovered widespread abuse at several prisons and detention centers in St. Petersburg that they say are part of a broader pattern of ill-treatment.

Allegations of torture in correctional facilities across Russia have [gained](#) national attention after a leaked video showed the violent beating of an inmate at a prison in Yaroslavl. A number of prison guards and wardens have since been detained and some convicted, while the Federal Prison Service [vowed](#) to launch a nationwide inspection of correctional facilities.

The St. Petersburg branch of the prison watchdog Public Monitoring Commission (PMC) published excerpts of its field report detailing alleged violence and “inhuman conditions” dating back to 2015. The abuse includes beatings, torture using electric shock and the systematic ignoring of complaints from detainees.

“This is very alarming, since it could mean that the prisoners are intimidated or don’t feel

safe to report abuse, and are afraid of being plaintiffs or witnesses," the group [detailed](#) in a report released Monday on the Team 29 legal association's website.

Its authors say they are convinced the 13 cases documented in the report are "only a small part" of a larger pattern of abuse, with most allegations coming in anonymously.

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At least two prisoners have recently died at the Penal Colony-7 in western St. Petersburg, one from poisoning by an unknown substance in 2015 and another, known only as K, after being beaten by fellow inmates in 2017, the report writes.

"K's body laid in the morgue for a long time. A strong smell emanated from the boarded-up coffin. The relatives were advised to bury K quickly, so they didn't see the body," PMC said.

At Penal Colony-6 in southeastern St. Petersburg, a prisoner was hospitalized this spring after mutilating himself to escape electrocution by a prison guard, PMC said. The convict complained about his treatment and was placed in solitary confinement after refusing repeated requests to retract his statement, PMC learned.

At the crowded pre-trial detention center southwest of St. Petersburg, PMC said a "privileged" group of prisoners wields violence to pressure some suspects into testifying against their interests, and extorts money from others.

The PMC said its investigators met with multiple constraints while compiling their report. Prison staffers did not allow PMC members to review documents or surveillance footage and imposed bans on filming during visits.

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