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Head of Russian Anti-Slavery NGO Reports Being Stabbed

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Oleg Melnikov / Vkontakte

The founder and head of a Russian anti-slavery NGO was reportedly stabbed by a masked assailant on Sunday evening outside of his apartment building near Moscow.

Alternativa is a Moscow-based volunteer organization founded in 2011 that reports having helped free over 700 people from sexual and economic slavery. Nearly 800,000 people live as modern-day slaves in Russia, working under conditions of forced labor, debt bondage and human trafficking, according to the 2018 Global Slavery Index, a worldwide analysis of slavery.

Related article: 800,000 Modern-Day Slaves Are Living in Russia, Report Says

Oleg Melnikov, the head of Alternativa, reported being stabbed in the back three times outside of his apartment block on Sunday evening by a masked man who had asked him for a cigarette.

“I think this man was waiting for me and knew where I lived. He addressed me several times to make sure that it was me,” Melnikov was cited as saying on Alternativa's Vkontakte social media page.

The NGO reported that Melnikov was currently recovering and was cooperating with police to identify the attacker, who have launched an investigation into the incident, the RBC news website reported Monday.

Yulia Luganskaya, the press secretary of the organization, told the MBKh media outlet that the attack may be linked to Melinkov’s human rights work.

“It feels like he [the attacker] was waiting for him. He made sure that it was Melnikov, he chose a place without cameras,” Luganskaya said, adding that the attacker did not rob the activist.

According to a report published earlier this year by the Agora human rights group, an increasing number of civil activists, politicians and journalists have been assaulted in Russia since 2015.

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