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**2006: A Year in Review**  
**Anti-Semitism in the Russian Federation**  
February 2007

**Introduction**

For ethnic minorities in Russia, 2006 was marked by religious, ethnic, and nationalistic unrest and violence. As in 2005, the number of targeted attacks against the Jewish population, in 2006, increased. In addition to anti-Semitism, attacks against minorities from the Caucasus regions, Africa, and Asia continue. Levels of xenophobia and intolerance in Russia are rising.

While the widespread attacks are a definite cause for concern, the Russian government made some progress in 2006 in addressing these issues. The government acknowledges that extremism is a problem in Russian society. The Duma has recently introduced and discussed anti-extremism legislation. President Putin directly addressed the issue on January 31, 2007, saying that combating hatred “is important not only to ensure law and order, but also to protect society from attempts to bring ideologies of extremism, ethnic, and religious intolerance to the social and political field.”

The Russian government must take further steps to fight anti-Semitism and xenophobia, firmly opposing bigotry and implementing assertive measures that address the core of the problem. Reactive legislation in response to domestic and international outcry is not sufficient. Rather, the Russian government must commit to proactively preventing extremism and eliminating hatred and intolerance from Russian society.

**Chronology**

In 2006, numerous attacks occurred against Jews, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries:

- January 10: As 2006 unfolded, the most violent anti-Semitic attack in recent years took place at a Moscow synagogue. During evening prayer services, 20-year-old Alexander Koptsev entered the Moscow’s Bolshaya Bronnoya Synagogue and stabbed worshippers indiscriminately, seriously wounding ten people. In September, Koptsev was sentenced to a 16-year prison term for attempted murder and “inciting racial hatred.” The Russian courts’ determination that this attack was a hate crime, and not mere ‘hooliganism’, marks progress in the legal system’s prosecution of anti-Semitic crimes.

- January 16: In a copycat attack, a 19-year-old waving a broken bottle forcefully entered the Rostov-on-Don synagogue and attempted to attack worshippers; he was apprehended before anyone was seriously injured. A search of his apartment revealed nationalist and anti-Semitic literature. He was charged with “hooliganism,” illustrating that ethnically-motivated crimes are inconsistently prosecuted.
- March 13: An attacker opened fire on a man dropping his daughter off at a Jewish day school. No one was hit, and the attacker escaped. The police investigation focused on anti-Semitism as a motive.
- mid-March: The Federation of Jewish Communities protested the 9th National Russian Book Fair’s inclusion of openly xenophobic and anti-Semitic publishers, charging that the publishers’ participation helped “to sow national and inter-religious hostility.”
- April 20: On Hitler’s birthday, a neo-Nazi skinhead gang vandalized a synagogue in Orenburg. Shouting anti-Semitic slurs, the men damaged the synagogue’s exterior by throwing stones, breaking the windows with metal bars, and painting swastikas. Police were able to detain one of the suspects and opened an investigation.
- April 21: Vandalism was discovered in a Jewish cemetery in the Siberian town of Omsk; swastikas were found on ten graves.
- late June: The Great Synagogue of Tomsk was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti, just after the synagogue had undergone renovations and repaired exterior walls.
- mid-July: The Russian Federal Security Service thwarted a 22-year-old’s plan to destroy the Saratov synagogue using an explosive device. The suspect belonged to a local pro-Fascist group and had been seeking help in building the device. Police discovered his motives, but he escaped charges since his confession was voluntary.
- August 13: An unidentified person threw a Molotov cocktail at the entrance to a synagogue in Khabarovsk. No one was injured and the synagogue suffered only minor burn damage to the steps.
- September 22: The eve of Rosh Hashanah coincided with three anti-Semitic incidents. In Astrakhan, the windows of a Sephardic synagogue were smashed in by a group of men, all of whom escaped. In Khabarovsk, four perpetrators threw rocks at a synagogue, resulting in broken windows and glass doors. And in Moscow, the leader of a small Jewish congregation was violently attacked in broad daylight near his home. His attacker assaulted him after asking if he was a Jew. He sustained only minor injuries and reported the attack to police.
- September 24: The Or Avner Jewish School in Volgograd was vandalized. Assailants broke a window, painted a swastika, and wrote the slogan “For the purity of the nation.” A guard on duty was severely injured.

- September 27: On the 65th anniversary of the World War II mass-murder of Jews in Babi Yar, Ukraine, thirty gravestones were destroyed in a Jewish cemetery in Volgograd.
- October 2: On Yom Kippur, over 80 headstones a Jewish cemetery in Tver were either destroyed or marked by swastikas. In addition, anti-Semitic fliers picturing swastikas, caricatures of Jews, and nationalist slogans such as “Russia is for Russians” were found in the city.
- October 26: A synagogue was defaced in Vladivostok. Vandals painted swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti on synagogue’s walls and doors, including the slogan “Jews, go to Israel.”
- November 5: The Jewish community office in Surgut was attacked. Assailants threw Molotov cocktails at the building and left anti-Semitic fliers. The fire was easily contained, but the building suffered minor burn damage and a broken window.
- December 26: A note outside the Chabad house in Ulyanovsk was discovered, pinned to a tree by a swastika-engraved dagger, which read, “We should kill the Jews or teach our children to kill them.” The threat coincided with Chabad’s recent negotiations to purchase buildings in the center of the city for a new Jewish center.

Anti-Semitic attacks have already occurred in 2007, foreshadowing another year of violence:

- January 10: The Chesed Jewish Center in Murmansk was vandalized with anti-Semitic slogans. The phrases included “Beat the Kikes” and “Holocaust 2007.”
- January 10: Two drunken teenagers forcefully entered the Jewish Center in Ulyanovsk, screaming death threats and smashing windows before leaving. The next day, the mayor of Ulyanovsk visited the synagogue and condemned the attack.

### **Action Recommendations**

To help end ethnic hatred and violence, the Russian government must strengthen its democratic institutions. It must undertake a comprehensive and sustained campaign to counteract increasingly vocal voices of intolerance and divisiveness. Such a campaign must be waged through legislation, law enforcement, media, and education.

1. *Legislation and Law Enforcement* The government must enact precise hate crime and hate speech legislation and train law enforcement to properly implement the law, including how to distinguish between hate crimes and hooliganism. The Russian legal system also needs to be reformed to eliminate misidentification and ‘under-prosecution’ of ethnically-motivated crimes.

2. *Mass Media* To build on legislation and government promotion of tolerance, popular television programs can integrate messages of anti-hate and unity. Using mass media, educational programs can reach schoolchildren, and disenfranchised segments of the population most likely to scapegoat Jews and other minorities.
3. *Educational Initiatives* It is imperative that bigotry and prejudice not be passed down to the next generation. School curriculums should include messages of diversity, acceptance, and inter-ethnic harmony. Cultural programs can bring children and youth from different backgrounds together to interact and find common ground.

Combating anti-Semitism and xenophobia must begin with a Russian government waging a spirited social campaign with a central message of acceptance and tolerance. This campaign needs to target all areas of society, in order to introduce values of acceptance to younger generations and to modify the views of generations who have only lived with intolerance. To ensure that this message is communicated consistently, hate crimes need to be appropriately prosecuted and recognized as such. Only a “zero tolerance” approach to anti-Semitism, as well as racism and xenophobia in general, will yield results and set Russia on a path to a society free of hatred and ethnic strife.