



**CHURCH WORLD SERVICE**

## **Meskhetian Turk resettlement: background information**

Meskhetian Turks living in Krasnodar Krai, a regional subdivision in southern Russia, make up one of the largest groups of refugees ready for resettlement in the United States right now. As of May 12, 2005, 1,397 Meskhetian Turks had been resettled in the United States. In June-September 2005, with the help of supplemental funding for resettlement in FY 2005, another 6,000 individuals are expected. August and September could see 2,000 arrivals each month. In FY 2006 (Oct. 1, 2005-Sept. 30, 2006), another 12,000 Meskhetian Turks are to come (about 1,000 a month). Church World Service is among U.S. voluntary agencies resettling Meskhetians.

### **A History of Persecution and Displacement**

The Meskhetian Turks are Turkish in origin, gaining the “Meskhetian” prefix from their native region, Meskhetia, in southwest Georgia. They have suffered persecution and repeated displacement for 60 years. In 1944, Josef Stalin ordered 100,000 of them deported from Meskhetia to Uzbekistan. Unlike people of other ethnicities deported by Stalin, the Meskhetians were never accused of a specific treachery, nor were they “rehabilitated” once Stalin died.

In the summer of 1989, ethnic violence between Meskhetians and Uzbeks in the Ferghana Valley culminated in a pogrom killing at least 100 people. The Soviet Army assisted in removing the Meskhetian Turks from the Ferghana Valley to western Russia. Over the next year, most of the Meskhetians were relocated out of Uzbekistan, though some stayed behind, mainly those who had assimilated into the Central Asian republics (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) through marriage.

The Soviet relocation of the Meskhetians to western Russia was swift. The Meskhetians were not able to sell their property and prepare, and consequently, some left without their proper documents or following the established procedures for departing an area set up in the Soviet Union. This lack of documents and departure proceedings would come to haunt the Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar Krai.

### **The Krasnodar Krai**

The Krasnodar Krai was not one of the areas to which the Meskhetians were relocated after the events in Uzbekistan. The Meskhetians in Krasnodar Krai made their way there from other areas, preferring southern Russia’s warm weather to western Russia’s Siberian cold weather.

The Krasnodar Krai is approximately the size of Pennsylvania and contains very fertile land for agriculture. There are some 18,000 Meskhetian Turks residing in the Krasnodar Krai in compact rural villages between the Krai capital, Krasnodar, and the Black Sea, the western-most boundary of the Krai. The Meskhetian Turks are predominantly involved in agriculture and small economic commerce in the villages in which they live.

The biggest impediment for the Meskhetian Turks is the hostile administrative authorities and the paramilitary Cossacks that harass and bother the Meskhetians. The Cossacks are fiercely

nationalist Russians who have traditionally seen themselves as playing a pacifying role in the northern Caucasus for Russian authorities. With the downfall of the Soviet Union, the Cossacks in the Krasnodar Krai have been able to reconstitute themselves as a paramilitary force and view the Krai as their land. In fact, Catherine the Great presented the city of Krasnodar to the Cossacks as a gift for their loyal service to the Tsars. In Soviet times, Krasnodar was known as Ekaterinodar, or, "Gift from Catherine." The Cossacks do not accept Meskhetians as residents, referring to them as guests.

The hostility towards the Meskhetians is greatest of all the Caucasian nationalities (i.e., those from the Caucasus, not Caucasian as used in the U.S.), though generally all persons who are non-white suffer from the xenophobia present in the Krai. Complicit in the administration's hostility is the broadcast of the administration's point of view through controlled media to the residents of the Krai. There is a lack of interaction between ethnic Russians and the Meskhetian Turks, which allows for the internalization of the stereotypes perpetuated by the media in the Krai.

According to the 1991 citizenship law, Meskhetian Turks should be granted citizenship based on the criteria of primary residence in the Russian Federation and not revoking the right to citizenship. In other areas of Russia, Meskhetian Turks gained citizenship and legal status, but not so in the Krasnodar Krai – the Meskhetian Turks are still denied their rights in the Krai.

Because the Meskhetian Turks lack citizenship and residence status, they are unable to fully access social services in Russia or work in formal economic sectors. There have been reports of discrimination in medical services at hospitals in the Krasnodar Krai for Meskhetians and their ability to access schooling is limited compared to Russians. Their children have been allowed to go to school but have been segregated in some cases and are not encouraged to finish the last two years of schooling in Russia. (In Russian schools, grades one through nine make up primary education, while grades ten and eleven finish high school and allow children to move into colleges and universities.) Meskhetians have also been evicted from their houses because of a lack of formal ownership or documents, and employers face pressure from Cossacks and authorities for employing Meskhetians in labor. In addition, there have been spats of violence against Meskhetians in the Krasnodar Krai.

-----

#### Credits/sources:

- *Resettlement projections were reported by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) during a May 12 conference call with the Refugee Council USA's resettlement committee.*
- *"A History of Persecution and Displacement" and "The Krasnodar Krai" were written by Matthew Hoover for the International Organization for Migration. Contact him at mah2113@columbia.edu*

---

*For media inquiries, please contact: Ann Walle, CWS/New York, 212-870-2654; [awalle@churchworldservice.org](mailto:awalle@churchworldservice.org); all others please contact Carol Fouke-Mpoyo, CWS Immigration and Refugee Program/New York, 212-870-2673; [cfouke@churchworldservice.org](mailto:cfouke@churchworldservice.org)*

**[www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org)**