



**CHURCH WORLD SERVICE**

## **Meskhetian Turk resettlement: a brief overview**

Meskhetian Turks make up one of the largest groups of refugees ready for resettlement in the United States right now. As of May 12, 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, PRM staff said. 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 each month). Church World Service is among U.S. voluntary agencies resettling Meskhetians.

The Meskhetian Turks have suffered persecution and repeated displacement for 60 years, wrote Matthew Hoover for the International Organization for Migration. In 1944, Josef Stalin ordered 100,000 of them deported from their native Meskhetia, in southwest Georgia, to Uzbekistan. In 1989, after ethnic violence culminated in a pogrom, they were removed to western Russia.

Many eventually made their way to the warmer climate of Krasnodar Krai, a territory about the size of Pennsylvania, where they took up farming and small economic commerce, Hoover said. But Krasnodar Krai also is home to fiercely nationalist Russian Cossacks, who, after the fall of the Soviet Union, reconstituted as a paramilitary force. They harass the Meskhetians constantly.

Moreover, the Meskhetians have been denied citizenship and residence status, so are unable to fully access social services. The hostility of the region's administrative authorities; media reinforcement of anti-Meskhetian xenophobia; widespread discrimination in education, employment, and medical services, and spats of violence have made life unbearable for the Meskhetians, Hoover concluded.

"As a refugee resettlement community, our most important goal is to bring the Meskhetians out of that misery to safety," commented Viktor Sokolyuk, Program Coordinator for the Virginia Council of Churches' Refugee Resettlement Program in Harrisonburg, Va., which received its first two Meskhetian families this spring. "We are saving lives."

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*A backgrounder on the Meskhetian Turks including Hoover's "brief" is available at [www.churchworldservice.org/Immigration](http://www.churchworldservice.org/Immigration)*

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