

Journalists Focus on Conflict Resolution

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A new media initiative aims to promote cross-border contacts between Ingush and Ossetian journalists

Ingush and Ossetian journalists have taken part in a series of landmark meetings which could play a major role in resolving the dormant conflict between the two neighbouring republics.

More than 30 correspondents from newspapers, TV and radio stations in Vladikavkaz, Nazran and Magas have come together for the first time in eight years to discuss "constructive approaches" to the territorial dispute.

Back in 1992, the media were widely blamed for whipping up ethnic hatred in the Prigorodny region of North Ossetia where thousands of Ingush were driven from their homes during weeks of bitter fighting.

Eight years on, the fate of 8,000 Ingush refugees still hangs in the balance. Attempts have been made to return families to their former villages but many have found their homes occupied by settlers from South Ossetia.

Since the war, not a single North Ossetian journalist has visited Ingushetia whilst only a handful of Ingush correspondents have reported from the Prigorodny region. The capitals of Ingushetia and North Ossetia are just 20km apart.

Consequently, the Caucasus Forum and the Caucasus Council for Refugees has organised a series of seminars and cross-border visits for members of the local press. The initiative has been financed by the OSI.

The organisers say that they hope to erase negative ethnic stereotypes by encouraging greater interaction between Ingush and North Ossetian journalists.

They believe that the press should have a greater involvement in the peace process which has so far been confined to sporadic dialogue between President Ruslan Aushev and his Ossetian counterpart, Alexander Dzasokhov.

Recently, further peace talks were hosted in Yessentuki by General Victor Kazantsev, governor of the Southern Federal Okrug - and journalists were fully briefed on all developments.

In the first media seminars held earlier this year, delegates focused on the responsibilities of journalists working in conflict zones. They visited the Centre for the Temporary Accommodation of Ingush Refugees in Maiskoe, Northern Ossetia, then crossed the border into Ingushetia.

Many of the discussions and seminars have been broadcast on local television in North Ossetia and Ingushetia. They have also prompted a series of articles and TV programmes in both republics examining the roots of the conflict and possible solutions.

Initial results have been encouraging. Several newspapers including Narody Kavkaza (Peoples of the Caucasus), Severny Kavkaz (North Caucasus) and Yuzhny Federalny (Southern Federal) - have thrown their weight behind the initiatives while A Malsagov, chairman of the Ingush government, has announced plans to hold a five day seminar in Nazran later this spring.

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Location: Caucasus
Stavropol
South Ossetia
North Ossetia

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