

## **Ossetians Angered by Ingush Return**

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Tensions between Ossetians and Ingush remain despite recent friendship agreement between the two nations.

"Let (the president of North Ossetia Alexander) Dzasokhov come here and talk to us, why did he sign this?" protested the headmaster of an Ossetian school in the ethnically mixed village of Chermen in the Prigorodny region. "The Ingush will come and do the same things to us as they did in 1992."

He was responding to the October 11 agreement on cooperation and good neighbourliness between Ingushetia and North Ossetia. The leaders of both republics said the accord signaled the end of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict, which broke out about a decade ago, but in areas that were badly hit by the fighting wounds have been slow to heal.

Chermen, whose Ossetian population probably suffered most, has three schools, two of them are attended by Ossetian children and one by Ingush. Numerous attempts by the authorities to get the students to go to the same school have failed so far.

The village is situated half way between the capitals of North Ossetia and Ingushetia, Vladikavkaz and Nazran respectively. It is divided now into three parts. The central one is occupied by Ossetians with the northern and southern sections inhabited by Ingush. Although ten years have passed since the conflict, the village has yet to regain its pre-war population of around 10,000.

Over 40 mainly unarmed villagers were killed and many of the Ossetian hostages taken to the then Ingush capital Nazran were from Chermen.

There is still a Russian checkpoint between the village's two communities, although relations between them are much less strained than they were several years ago and people can move freely back and forth if they wish to.

Fighting over disputed parts of Prigorodny district and Vladikavkaz lasted for five days in the autumn of 1992. As a result, hundreds of people, mainly civilians, were killed, thousands of homes were looted and burnt down and tens of thousands people, mainly Ingush, were displaced. After the fighting subsided, there was a continuous string of killings and kidnappings.

According to different estimates, between 30,000 and 60,000 Ingush fled North Ossetia to Ingushetia following the conflict, while some 5,000 Ossetians were forced to leave areas adjacent to Ingushetia. As a result, the main focus of the post-conflict settlement has been the return of displaced Ingush. While the latter have been eager to go back, Ossetians have been very reluctant to receive them, claiming that they cannot live on the same soil with the people they fought only a few years ago.

Vladislav Kabolov, the chairman of the North Ossetian government committee for refugees and IDP (internally displaced persons) affairs, told IWPR, "Today we are talking about no more than four to six thousand IDPs left in Ingushetia that are eligible for resettlement in North Ossetia. Around six thousand remained in North Ossetia, and around 22,000 returned to their homes. The Ingush government gives us different figures of remaining Ingush IDPs, from 22,000 to 38,000, but it has been decided to recount the number, so at the beginning of December we hope to have this controversy solved as well."

However, according to a body known as the special representative of the Russian president in the Ossetian-Ingush conflict zone, which deals among other things with distributing compensation to people who lost property during the conflict, there are at least other 45,000 applications waiting to be dealt with. It receives approximately 6.3 million US dollars from the federal Russian budget annually.

Kabolov claims the compensation claim figure is excessive. "We are all humans, of course, any bureaucrat is interested in having his job last as long as possible," he said. "So the bureaucrats allow a deliberate increase in the number of applications, there is no need any more for the special representative (from Moscow for the conflict) and I have no doubt it will soon be either closed down or at least drastically reformed."

North Ossetian political scientist Alan Pliev, the director of the Institute for Humanitarian and Social Research, is less optimistic. He approves of the agreement between the two republics, but is critical of the absence of limits on the return of Ingush IDPs.

And Valery Dzidzoyev, head of the political science department at North Ossetian State University, warned that the wording of the accord might allow the Ingush authorities to lay claim to disputed territories.

The fighting may be over, but tensions between the two nations clearly remain. An Ossetian was killed in an explosion after his car hit a landmine near the Ossetia-Ingush border on November 3 - just weeks after the agreement was signed.

Meanwhile, in one of the schools in Prigorodny that managed to get children from both communities to attend, lingering problems are disturbingly evident.

"What we get is constant fighting. When they were talking us into accepting Ingush children, they promised to provide security measures - but these are not working properly," said the headmaster of a Kurtat village school. "Wherever they fight - inside or outside the school - we, the teachers, always get the blame. The adults have not resolved their problems and the children bring them into schools."

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