

Violence Plagues Kofarnikhon

Author: [Vladimir Davlatov](#)

Four years after the end of the Tajik civil war, Kofarnikhon is still blighted by gun battles

The inhabitants of Kofarnikhon live in fear that skirmishes between criminal and police could escalate into a wider conflict.

The district, 20 kilometres east of Dushanbe and home to some 230,000 people, was caught up in some of the worst fighting during the war and remains awash with weapons to this day.

"In the Kofarnikhon area, everyone is fighting for control," said a local analyst, who wishes to remain anonymous. "Everyone with access to firearms is involved, including the law enforcement bodies and former UTO (United Tajik Opposition) activists."

Since the end of the conflict, some Tajik opposition fighters have been integrated into a national anti-terrorist force, but others have joined criminal gangs which have proliferated in the area.

The gun battles have increased in frequency this year. In April, the deputy interior minister Khabib Sanginov, a former UTO fighter, was killed in a skirmish between the local militia and criminals.

The gangsters subsequently kidnapped seven militiamen. Three were later released. Attempts to free the remaining men ended in tragedy when three children were accidentally killed by a grenade explosion. The criminals then executed three of the hostages and beat up the fourth before letting him go.

The local community was outraged by the tragedy and decided to stage a rally to demand an end to the fighting. Local elders intervened persuading the angry residents to cancel the event which they feared would exacerbate tensions. The official line is that all is well in Kofarnikhon. "Everything is fine here, everything is quiet and calm, people live and work as usual," Ismoiljon Gulov, head of the local government, told IWPR.

But senior officials at the UN office for the Tajik peace process acknowledge there are problems in the region, whatever the government may be saying.

"We know things have gone wrong in the Kofarnikhon area and we are alarmed, despite the fact that everyone tries to reassure us that everything is quiet and under control down here," said Ivo Petrov, the UN secretary general's special envoy to Tajikistan.

Speaking at a news conference in Dushanbe, Petrov unveiled a UN plan to carry out a series of projects in the Kofarnikhon area, including restoring the local hospital, building roads and a school. Funding has already been approved.

"The important thing is that we are planning to get the former fighters involved, and we are going to pay them well," he said. "Let them choose between chaos on the one hand, and stability and a good job on the other."

Meanwhile, most international organisations and embassies based in Tajikistan have cautioned employees against visiting the Kofarnikhon area.

The skirmishing has frustrated attempts to resuscitate the local economy. Key industries are moribund. Unemployment has left local people eking out a living from their vegetable patches and farm animals. Some operate small trade businesses, buying goods in Dushanbe to sell locally.

"Life has been very hard in Kofarnikhon in recent times - it's not just the criminals, the local militia is involved in criminal activity too," complained Khamid Alimov. "I got a job as a locksmith in a wealthy household. When the militia found out, they started extorting money from me. They threatened to fit me up on drug charges unless I handed over a share of my wages."

Most of Kofarnikhon's residents would readily leave for Dushanbe, but very few can get the money together to buy a place there.

Despite all their problems, people from Kofarnikhon are glad that the civil war is over. Although violence continues, it is nowhere near the scale witnessed during the conflict, when dozens were killed every day. "There will be no war, but rival groups will probably keep fighting for years," said one observer who wished to remain anonymous.

Vladimir Davlatov is a pseudonym of a journalist in Tajikistan

Location: Tajikistan

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/violence-plagues-kofarnikhon>