

Despite the constitutional guarantee of freedom of movement/residency for all Russian citizens, the spirit and practice of the Soviet "propiska" (registration) regime live on in varying guises. In Moscow this has taken the form of an "administrative surcharge" to acquire residency, one well beyond the practical means of most citizens. Intimidating document checks remain common in many cities, especially for those with darker skin.

The Russian law on freedom of conscience and religion deprives certain minority groups of legal status until they meet a 15 year threshold of activity in Russia. Without legal status, the activities of Western missionary and charitable groups could be severely restricted especially in outlying regions where local officials interpret the law as they see fit.

Discrimination against many minority groups is widespread. Manifestations of anti-Semitism are common and range from graffiti to the bombing of a Moscow synagogue. Recent public anti-Semitic comments by Russian Communist Party Duma deputy Makashov have focused attention on this issue. Russia's indigenous peoples are still struggling to cope with the disastrous legacy of the Soviet period, during which many saw their traditional nomadic way of life forcibly transformed into "progressive" sedentary pursuits which are not economically viable. Indigenous groups, particularly in the north, have been hard hit by the economic crisis.

Women continue to be particularly hard hit by the difficulties of Russia's economic transition and are often chosen before men when layoffs are enacted. Victims of deep-seated cultural attitudes which take domestic violence as a given, women are particularly hesitant to report rape and abuse to Russian authorities. Trafficking of women for sexual exploitation remains an area of concern to Russian and western observers. Unaccompanied children are amongst the most vulnerable groups in Russia today. Overcrowded orphanages struggle to deal with the effects of extreme environmental pollution, high alcohol and substance abuse, limited access to contraception, and the general economic difficulties. There are large numbers of homeless children and youth in Russian cities.

### CANADIAN POSITION

Canadian officials continue to monitor the human rights situation in Russia. Issues such as the law on religion, judicial backlogs, and state security harassment remain high on our bilateral agenda. Canada is seeking to assist the most vulnerable groups during this period of economic hardship through shipments of humanitarian aid to Arctic peoples.

Canadian officials continue to raise the human rights situation in Chechnya, and the lack of movement in the investigation into the December 1996 murder of Red Cross workers (including Canadian Nancy Malloy), with Russian officials. A Canadian embassy representative was present at the Nikitin trial and this issue has been raised by Canada at the OSCE and other high-level fora.