

## **Ethnic Minorities in Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments**

**Mission Report by the  
International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and Memorial**

**International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF)  
and Memorial**

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## 1. Foreword

In May 2006, the International Helsinki Federation (IHF) and the Human Rights Center “Memorial,” undertook a fact-finding mission to Kyrgyzstan, visiting the towns of Jalal-Abad, Kara-Suu and Osh in Ferghana Valley on 15-17 May, and the Issyk Kul area and the regions east of Bishkek on 18 May. The aim of the mission was to get acquainted with the situation of the large Uzbek minority living in southern Kyrgyzstan, and also with the Russian, Uighur and Dungan minorities. Jalal-Abad and Osh regions are traditionally restless regions where serious ethnically motivated disturbances took place in 1990 in protest against a government-implemented land redistribution, and serious protests during the so-called Tulip Revolution against the regime of President Akayev in 2005.

This report does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the situation of ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan but rather aims to offer a general overview of the current situation. The report is based on information gathered during meetings with authorities, NGOs, media representatives, local leaders and private persons during the mission, including Valery Uleev, head of the Jalal-Abad-based NGO “Justice”; Shakirjan Hamrabaev, vice-director of the Uzbek Cultural Center in Jalal-Abad; Muhammad Rafik Kamalov, imam of Kara-Suu (killed on 6 August 2006); Izzatilla Rahmatullaev, director of the Osh-based NGO “Law and Order”; Elmurad Dzhusupaliev, journalist; Alisher Saipov, journalist; Aibek Alimjanov (killed on 15 October 2006), president of the Uzbek National Center in Osh; Mr. Anaskhan, president of the central mosque in Osh; Kabuldzhan Alimov, vice-president of the Uzbek National Cultural Center; staff of the House of Friendship in the city of Tokmok; and Nurbjubju Kerimova, head of the public fund “Danko”, village of Balykchi, Issyk-Kul.

## 2. Introduction

Already during the Soviet era, the relationships between the ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations were characterized by intolerance. Despite their common Turko-Muslim background – their languages are closely related and both groups are Muslims – their mentality is considered to be different. The Kyrgyz preserved a nomadic culture and way of life much longer than the Uzbeks who settled down and formed a closed culture of their own. Ethnic Uzbeks generally enjoy a better standard of living than Kyrgyz. In contrast to them, the Kyrgyz have traditionally tended their herds and consumed virtually everything they have produced. At bazaars, the vendors have traditionally been Uzbeks but at markets, most vendors are Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz living in the mountains are usually poor and have big families, although the situation has been changing recently. Most property is owned by the Kyrgyz and most employees in public administration are ethnic Kyrgyz.

Kyrgyzstan’s economic situation is difficult, but the state has managed to pay salaries and pensions in due time and has thus managed to prevent a breakout of serious social unrest. With virtually no industry to offer work places, in the past few years a large part of the country’s working-age population has left mainly for Russia in search for work. The income they bring or send back to Kyrgyzstan is equivalent to the annual Kyrgyz state budget.

Since the clashes in Osh region over land distribution in 1990, there have been only minor similar incidents and the situation has generally remained calm – until very recently.

- In January 2006 an Uzbek restaurant in Jalal-Abad called “Navrus” was attacked and destroyed by a group of around 30 drunken Kyrgyz young men, and the staff threatened and beaten.

The central government appears to regard Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan as a threat and therefore does not trust them. Consequently, all efforts to unite ethnic Uzbeks are also considered a threat to national security. The vice minister of internal affairs, Shekrozi Mirzakarimov, who is of Uzbek origin, was at

the time of the mission on the verge of being forced to step down.

On the other hand, ethnic Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan are aware of the unpredictability of the neighbouring Uzbekistan and prefer not to draw too much attention to themselves – and therefore have decided to endure discrimination rather than live under the dictatorship of President Karimov, as many of them told the IHF/Memorial delegation.

The situation of Uzbeks in the Jalal-Abad region has deteriorated since 2005. For example, in bazaars people keep telling them to go back home to Uzbekistan. In the evenings only Kyrgyz families can be found in restaurants and on the streets since Uzbeks are afraid to go out because of groups of young Kyrgyz who go about harassing them. In fights between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks, the police always arrest only Uzbeks, no matter who is the perpetrator.

Following the “Tulip Revolution,” a group of Kyrgyz women demanded that local government officials in Jalal-Abad stop paying social benefits to the Uzbeks.

Interethnic intolerance is widespread in daily life: for example, unlike in the past, mixed marriages are now becoming rare. However, more Russians are returning back to the region.

### 3. Ethnic Makeup

According to the latest census conducted in 1999, the ethnic makeup of Kyrgyzstan was the following:<sup>1</sup>

| <b>Ethnic groups</b> | <b>Number of permanent residents</b> | <b>%</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Kyrgyz               | 3,128,100                            | 64.9%    |
| Uzbeks               | 679,000                              | 13.8%    |
| Russians             | 665,000                              | 14.1%    |
| Ukrainians           | 50,400                               | 1.0%     |
| Tatars               | 45,400                               | 0.9%     |
| Germans              | 21,500                               | 0.4%     |
| Kazakhs              | 42,700                               | 0.9%     |
| Tajiks               | 42,600                               | 0.9%     |
| Azerbaijanis         | 4,000                                | 0.3%     |
| Belarussians         | 3,200                                | 0.07%    |
| Armenians            | 1,400                                | 0.03%    |
| Jews                 | 1,600                                | 0.03%    |
| Others               | 128,000                              | 2.7%     |

The main tendency in the past several years is the increase in the number of ethnic Kyrgyz and the decrease in that of minorities because of the high level of migration of minority members. The next census will be conducted in 2009.

Several state agencies are in charge of dealing with ethnic issues:

*The People’s Assembly of Kyrgyzstan* (PAK), established in 1994, has a status of a consultative and advisory council under the president of the Kyrgyz Republic on interethnic relations and national

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://demoscope.host.net/kg/?ext=10statya.htm&new\\_lang=ru](http://demoscope.host.net/kg/?ext=10statya.htm&new_lang=ru)

policy. The PAK, which is headed by Isa Tokoev, has two branches, one in Osh and another in Jalal-Abad, and 31 cultural and public organizations. Their main activities are cultural; they do not have real influence on minority issues, nor do they render aid in tense inter-ethnic situations.

*The Committee on Human Rights* of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic deals with questions of religious tolerance and religious minorities.

*The Institute of Ethnic Policy* (IEP) conducts research and various projects and publishing activities, the aims of which are inter alia to promote good inter-ethnic relations and support ethnic and cultural variety in Kyrgyzstan. The IEP was established in January 2003 on the basis of the Informational and Research Center of the PAK, with PAK and the Social Fund on Support of Development Programs as its founders.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. The Uzbek Minority in Kyrgyzstan**

The official number of ethnic Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan is almost 700,000, but the real number is most likely approximately one million. About 680,000 (25%) live in the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan; 27,000 in Bishkek and Chuj region (less than 2%); and 6,000 in the Issyk Kul, Naryn and Talass regions (less than 1%). Thus the Uzbeks constitute a significant minority in a country with a total population of five million. The reason for their existence in Kyrgyzstan is an old Soviet-era border demarcation line drawn between the then Uzbek and Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republics.

Ethnic Uzbeks living in southern Uzbekistan are settled mostly in urban areas: 400,000 in the Osh region (34%), 240,000 in the Jalal-Abad region (25%), and 60,000 in the Batken region (14%).

The town of Kara-Suu used to be one single town during the Soviet period, but is now divided into two parts – one belonging to Kyrgyzstan and the other to Uzbekistan, separated by a river. The majority of the residents in the Kyrgyz part of Kara-Suu are Uzbeks (90% of the residents). Kara-Suu is also considered the center of Islamic radicalism in Kyrgyzstan. The killing on 6 August 2006 in Kara-Suu of the local Islamic leader Muhammad Rafik Kamalov – with whom the IHF/Memorial delegation met – by Kyrgyz law enforcement officers characterizes the unstable situation in this area.

#### **5. Minority Representation in Public and Economic Life**

During the Soviet era, there was a secret quota for Uzbeks to be represented in state bodies of this Soviet Republic, however, today nearly all public officials are ethnic Kyrgyz (98%). Only one member of the current government is ethnic Uzbek – the deputy minister of interior, Mr. Mirzakarimov.

The representation of ethnic Uzbeks in public life has deteriorated in the last year. For example, law enforcement forces and courts very rarely hire ethnic Uzbeks. In addition, law enforcement bodies have made use of the current tense inter-ethnic situation to oust Uzbeks from economically profitable regions.

Discrimination against ethnic Uzbeks is a fact that is frequently criticized among the Uzbek community, but not openly, even by wealthy and powerful Uzbek businessmen who fear that criticism would harm their businesses.

On 8 January 2006 the *Uzbek National-Cultural Center* (UNCC) in Jalal-Abad issued an appeal to the president of Kyrgyzstan, signed by the 250 participants of the seventh *kurultaj* (meeting) of the

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<sup>2</sup> The website of the IEP is at [http://www.assambleya.kg/epi\\_engl.htm](http://www.assambleya.kg/epi_engl.htm)

UNCC, criticizing the continued discrimination against Uzbeks in the country and demanding that the Uzbek language be given official status. The appeal was published in the local newspaper *Jalal-Abad tongi* (Morning of Jalal-Abad). It emphasized that economic development was not possible if ethnic groups continued to be treated unequally. Additionally, the participants reminded that almost no Uzbeks are serving in law enforcement bodies and in public administration in Kyrgyzstan. The governor of Jalal-Abad denied the accusations as groundless and there was no reaction from the central government in Bishkek to the appeal.

### Jalal-Abad Region

There are no Uzbeks in the city and province administration of the police and the financial police in the Jalal-Abad region while the National Security Service (SNS) has a few ethnic Uzbek officers. One deputy of the province governor and the chair of the Jalal-Abad City Council are Uzbeks but they have no real influence on the personnel politics in the region.

### Osh Region

In the Osh region, less than 1% of the officials in the regional department of the Ministry of Interior are ethnic Uzbeks: two Uzbeks are working in the province administration of the SNS; one Uzbek in the financial police; there are no Uzbeks in law enforcement bodies; one Uzbek works in the city and province public prosecutor's offices each; and two Uzbeks are represented in the Osh city administration (the deputy mayor and the chair of the city council).

In Osh, all 17 judges are ethnic Kyrgyz. One police investigator in the Osh province is ethnic Russian. On the other hand, most human rights defenders in Osh are Uzbeks.

Almost all cooks in restaurants, hairdressers and taxi drivers in Osh are Uzbeks but market vendors mainly Kyrgyz.

The head of the Anti-Terror Department of the Ministry of interior is ethnic Uzbek (Khakim Razzykov) as is the head of the Anti-Terror Office in the local department of Ministry of Interior (Shakhir Zulimov). The first deputy head of the city department of the Ministry of Interior, the first deputy mayor in Osh, the head of the city council, and five deputies of the city council are ethnic Uzbeks.

In a new trend, thousands of Uighurs have arrived in Osh to trade at local markets. It is claimed that many of them marry local young women in order to be granted Kyrgyz citizenship.

### Kara-Suu Region

In the Kara-Suu region, there are no Uzbeks in law enforcement bodies – all officers are ethnic Kyrgyz. The same applies to administrative bodies. Otherwise the situation of Uzbeks in this particular region is satisfactory, the IHF/Memorial delegation was told.

### The Armed Forces

The Kyrgyz armed forces are almost entirely ethnic Kyrgyz: only a few ethnic Uzbeks or Russians serve in the forces. Uzbeks are not eager to serve in the army since they easily end up falling victim to hazing (*dedovshina*). Many of them pay bribes in order to be exempted from military service.



## **6. Language Rights and Education**

A new government policy is to introduce the Kyrgyz language everywhere in the public sector, especially in state administration. The only language of legal proceeding is Kyrgyz due to the fact that no interpreters are available for other languages. It is, however, possible to file charges in the Russian language. While many young Kyrgyz no longer speak Russian, many parents want their children to attend Russian-language schools, but competition is hard and it is difficult to enrol even in bigger cities.

Generally, many ethnic Uzbeks wish that the Uzbek language be granted official status.

The *Uzbek National-Cultural Center* (UNCC) in Jalal-Abad was established and is run by Kadyrjan Batyrov, a wealthy Uzbek businessman. He was elected to the Kyrgyz parliament in 2005 as the first ethnic Uzbek from the Jalal-Abad region in the past ten years (the other Uzbek member of the parliament from that region is M. Khakimov). The UNCC used to be under complete control of the local administration but has recently become more independent. After the “Tulip Revolution” the UNCC has organized several conferences and has a political agenda, which includes promoting the adoption of Uzbek as an official language in Kyrgyzstan.

Recently, three draft amendments to the Kyrgyz constitution with regard to the status of the Russian language were published. If adopted, Russian will most probably lose its status as an official language. President Bakiev and about half a million Russian-speaking residents of the country oppose the draft amendments.

### Education

The main problem of the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan is preserving their own language. Uzbek-language education in Kyrgyz schools is insufficient, the main problem being a serious lack of schoolbooks in Uzbek-language schools.

The shortage of Uzbek-language schoolbooks is so serious that many Uzbek schools are under the danger of closure for the lack of teaching materials. For example, no Uzbek-language books are available for English and Kyrgyz language instruction – nor are there enough classes for the instruction of the Kyrgyz language in ethnic Uzbek schools. It is of utmost importance to ensure the instruction of the Kyrgyz and Russian languages for the Uzbek minority since without the knowledge of these languages its members would have great difficulties finding a job.

In Kyrgyz schools, only one hour per week is devoted to the instruction of the Uzbek language, which is clearly insufficient for Uzbek speaking pupils.

Uzbek-language schools used to receive assistance from Uzbekistan – and the Uzbek Ombudsman in a recent meeting promised to give such assistance to ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan – but this has not happened so far.

### Jalal-Abad Region

The region of Jalal-Abad has 6-7 Uzbek schools, but they, too, face serious problems in acquiring schoolbooks. The available books are totally outdated and in poor condition but there is no money available to publish new ones. Most of the Uzbek children in the border zone go to school in Uzbekistan because there are only Kyrgyz-language schools on the Kyrgyz side of the border. No new schools are being opened. Another problem is the lack of qualified teachers – mainly due to miserable salaries. In most cases, only elderly people and students – both without adequate training – work as

teachers in Uzbek-language schools.

### Osh Region

There are about around 6,070 schools in the Osh region and about half of them give instruction in three languages – introducing a new trend in the country. A Turkish school is in operation in Osh since 1993, providing education in Turkish and English up from grade six. A *medrese*, an Islamic school, is currently under construction in Osh.

The situation of Uzbek schools in the Osh region is even worse than in other regions: their number has recently radically diminished, going down from 40 to 28. All schools are lacking books – no new books are being printed – and the old books (15-20 years old) are outdated, worn out and expensive. The state of Uzbekistan used to provide schools in Kyrgyzstan with Uzbek-language text books, but this is no longer possible after Uzbekistan began to use Latin script.

There are two Uzbek-language institutes of higher education in Osh. Many Uzbeks study at the faculty of law but cannot find employment in Kyrgyzstan after graduation. Many of them end up working as private lawyers or human rights defenders, others leave for Russia.

There is also an Uzbek Pedagogic Institute in Osh but its level of training is very low. The Kyrgyz-Uzbek University has published and printed books but their quality is low too.

### Kara-Suu Region

The Kara-Suu region, exceptionally, has enough Uzbek-language schoolbooks because it managed to buy old schoolbooks from Uzbekistan at the moment when the Latin alphabet became official in Uzbekistan and the old books became redundant.

### Higher Education

The language of instruction in universities is usually Kyrgyz or Russian, but a few faculties provide instruction in Uzbek. In 1999, the University of People's Friendship was inaugurated by the head of the Uzbek National Cultural Center, K. Batyrov. It provides education to about 1,700 students and is one of the three universities in Kyrgyzstan that offer Uzbek-language higher level education. The other two are the Kyrgyz-Uzbek University in Osh and the Uzbek Humanitarian-Pedagogic Institute within the Osh State University.

Nearly all universities in Kyrgyzstan have obligatory tuition fees and bribing is widespread practice: it is generally considered to be easier to “buy a diploma” than to study several years for it. This practice has resulted in a high number of university graduates from the more than 150 faculties all over the country, which, again, has led to high unemployment rates among the graduates. Recently, around 20,000 lawyers graduated during one single year. The level of education at the universities is generally low.

## **7. Freedom of Religion and Religious Tolerance**

Ethnic Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan are under constant surveillance by the authorities because they are suspected of being “Wahhabis” – a term used by authorities to refer to Islamic “fundamentalists” – due to their relatively strict interpretation of Islam. People, who begin to practice Islam in their daily lives are immediately treated suspiciously, can be arbitrarily arrested and many have been imprisoned for 3-5 years. In the past fifteen years, the number of mosques has doubled, with Saudi Arabia and

Pakistan financing most construction works.

In Osh, there is one small Orthodox church and another is located in Jalal-Abad, both with very poor congregations. There are also Hare Krishna followers and Baptists in Jalal-Abad. Local authorities regard proselytism to Baptism as a serious problem that is believed to cause conflicts among the population. In Talas, many women in particular are interested in Islam, especially in the activities of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a political party that aims at establishing a caliphate in Central Asia. Virtually all supporters of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are ethnic Uzbeks. There are also groups of so-called “new Muslims” who carry out missionary work in villages.

The US-based Freedom Support Act provides financial support to young people to go to study in the United States. Upon return, many of them have adopted a radically religious worldview. Religion is on the rise among young people and not only Islam: groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ the Latter Day Saints (“Mormons”) and the Baptists are also spreading. In general, nationalism and radicalism among the young is gaining more ground.

There are 49 mosques in Osh, the central mosque in Osh city being the oldest (built in 1605) and largest. It was closed down in the 1930s and was reopened in 1943. Many of the imams in Osh have not received specific religious training for this position, however, 3-4 imams working in the region have studied abroad, either in Tashkent or Bukhara. Ten imams are ethnic Kyrgyz.

In Osh there is no possibility for women to go to mosque.

## **8. Uzbek-Language Media**

In contrast to public administration and law enforcement, ethnic Uzbeks are well represented in the mass media in Osh and in the south in general. In the Osh region, 60% of broadcast media professionals are Uzbeks.

### Broadcast Media

The nationwide state television broadcast news in the Uzbek language since 2005, but only five minutes daily. There are also two Uzbek-language radio broadcast programs: “Almaz” and “Khamro.” Many people met by the IHF/Memorial delegation stated the need to have special programs in the Uzbek language in nationwide television.

Russian-language media services in Kyrgyzstan were regarded as sufficient by interviewees.

In the Jalal-Abad region there are no Uzbek-language TV programs. A local TV station providing Uzbek-language programs was closed down after the “Tulip Revolution,” but the City Cultural Center plans to reopen it.

In Osh, a local TV station broadcasts in three languages: Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian. There are three local TV channels in the Uzbek language (the most popular are OshTV and MezonTV). In addition, the local Osh radio broadcasts Radio Liberty programs four hours a day in Uzbek and two hours in Kyrgyz, and the TV station Keremet a 30-minute program of the Voice of America.

There is no re-broadcasting transmitter in Osh and there are no Kyrgyz TV programs outside the city.

### Print Media

In Kyrgyzstan, most newspapers are published in Russian or Kyrgyz languages. The Uzbek-language

newspaper *Luch* (Ray) was closed in Jalal-Abad in 1997 but the Cultural Center plans to resume its publication soon in cooperation with the local university.

A state-owned provincial newspaper is published regularly in Osh (since 1932) in the Uzbek language. In addition, there are some independent Uzbek-language newspapers that come out only sporadically, usually due to financial problems.

In the Kara-Suu region, three local newspapers are published in the Uzbek language and a local TV station broadcasts in that language. There is plenty of literature available in the Uzbek language in this region. There are three Uzbek-language schools, one Kyrgyz-language school and one giving instruction in Russian (with 90% of its pupils Kyrgyz). Some local newspapers are published in the Uzbek language and four more are published privately but come out irregularly.

## **9. Cultural Activities and Civil Society**

In 2005, a youth political club “Sarbon” was set up in Osh, with 99% of its membership ethnic Uzbek. The head of the club, Davran Sabirov, would like to turn this movement into the political party.

There are several Uzbek national cultural centers in Osh and Jalal-Abad, working both at regional and city level. In Osh, they include the Osh Province Uzbek National Cultural Center (UNCC), whose president is Bakhtijar Toktomatov, and the Uzbek Society, under the leadership of Davran Sabirov. In May 2006, there were attempts by the general meeting of the leaders of the Uzbek diaspora to unite these two organizations and to re-elect the management of the Republican Uzbek National Cultural Center (whose president is M. Mamasaidov), but these efforts were in vain due to varying opinions between the different organizations.

In June 2005, Akhmajan Rakhimov (*Akhmad-pavlan*) was elected the head of the province UNCC (his deputy: Kobiljan Alimov). On 23 June, 35 supporters of Rakhimov’s competitor, Mr. Alimjanov, established the City of Osh UNCC, which shortly after was renamed into the Uzbek National Center of the Osh City. Aibek Alimjanov was killed on 15 October 2006 in his office.

Currently, there are four competing organizations in Osh: Province and City UNCCs, the Uzbek National Center and the Uzbek Society.

Some of these organizations conduct only cultural activities, including organizing concerts. Some of them previously also published schoolbooks (on history, Uzbek literature and geography) but had to give up this activity due to financial reasons. They support financially weddings and circumcision for children of poor families, organized a New Year’s party for 120 school children, and give support to the blind. For almost all of them, the preservation of national traditions and the language are central aims.

## **10. Effects of the Andijan Massacre and the Influx of Refugees**

The influence of the Uzbek television reporting on the May 2005 Andijan massacre had a great effect also on the other side of the border: people watching these programs in Kyrgyzstan were told that all the refugees from Andijan were terrorists. As a result, solidarity and support from the Kyrgyz population toward refugees from Andijan has been almost non-existent. Ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan do not usually state their support to Andijan refugees openly either although some wealthy local Uzbek businessmen have provided help to the refugees – in secrecy. About 50 Uzbeks soon left Kyrgyzstan for Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Many members of different political opposition parties (Birlik, Erk, etc.) also fled to Kyrgyzstan.

In May 2006, there were around 30-40 Andijan refugees in Osh, some of them remaining in detention.

## 11. Other Ethnic Minorities and Their Problems

### Russian Minority

While most ethnic Uzbeks live in the southern parts of the country, most Russian minority members live in the northern regions of Kyrgyzstan. Since Kyrgyzstan's independence, many Russians have left the country. However, there are still about 40,000 Russians in southern Kyrgyzstan, some 12,000 of them living in the Jalal-Abad region. Russians have been leaving mostly due to the dire economic situation.

The situation of the Russian-language schools is difficult. In the absence of qualified teachers, retired Russian-speakers and students are working as teachers without proper training. Teacher salaries are low – equivalent to the maximum of 25 dollars per month – which keeps qualified teachers away.

The organization called Slavic Diaspora was set up in 1992 during the wave of nationalistic pressure against ethnic Russians, which included large-scale layoffs of Russians from the manager level: 53 Russian directors of large enterprises were all replaced by ethnic Kyrgyz. The association is led by Valery S. Uleev and has, according to its own information, more than 12,000 members. It organizes some cultural activities, but its main task is to provide legal aid to ethnic Russians. Its cases concern, for example, financial support to veterans of war and labour, medical care, legal migration questions, and education in Russia. Since 2002, Slavic Diaspora has been a member of the International Council of the Russian Federation's Compatriots.

### Other Minorities

While Uzbeks is the main national minority in the south of Kyrgyzstan, regions east of Bishkek are inhabited by other minorities, especially Russians, Dungans (ca. 50,000), Meskhetian Turks, but also by Chechens, Germans, Azerbaijanis and other nationalities.

The state television broadcasts only once a month 30-minute programs for Uigurs, Dungans and Tatars in their own languages.

Minorities are especially concentrated in the city of Tokmok, west of Bishkek. The city has a House of Friendship, a provincial-level organization, where the IHF/Memorial delegation met heads of its Kazakh, Armenian, Uzbek, Kalmyk, and Chechen branches. The young staff of the house belongs to the youth organization of the Interethnic Center. In April 2006, the youth organization conducted a new project entitled "Youth Network for Conflict Solution" in cooperation with the Public Fund "Peremena" (Change). The program pays particular attention to the questions of inter-ethnic tolerance.<sup>3</sup>

There are around 120 families (about 1,500 individuals) from the North Caucasus in Tokmok (with total population of 56,000 people), including around ethnic Armenian and 12 Kalmyk families. In addition, there are about 5,000 Uzbeks in Tokmok, 9,000 Dungans – whose number is rapidly increasing – and about 2,500 Uighurs. In total, the city is inhabited by about 57 different nationalities.

Tokmok has only one Uzbek school, which faces serious problems due to a lack of textbooks and teachers. In the areas with many ethnic Dungans, the Dungal language is used as the language of instruction. This minority also has newspapers in their own language, which are printed in Bishkek while Uzbeks living in this region do not have newspapers in their own language.

The House of Friendship in Tokmok plans to organize language courses for minorities who do not

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.peremena.kg/index.php?pid=21>

have possibilities to study their own language at school, such as Armenians and Kalmyks.

## **12. Iskra Village Incident**

The most recent case of inter-ethnic conflict occurred in the village of Iskra, which has in total about 250 houses, 90 % of which are inhabited by ethnic Dungans. The incident resulted in 190 damaged houses and forced around 10 families to leave the country.

The incident started with a fight between boys representing ethnic Dungans and ethnic Kyrgyz on 31 January 2006. The police, however, arrested only the Dungans. The next day, Kyrgyz inhabitants of the village damaged more than 100 houses belonging to Dungans, the regional authorities publicly insulted the Dungans, and, later on, a crowd of around 200 Kyrgyz demanded that wealthy Dungan families be evicted from the region. Dungans organized groups of their own to patrol the village and protect themselves against attacks, while some families left the village and emigrated to Russia.

The city mayor provided glass to the villagers to repair broken windows. After the incident Dungans organized a local committee to deal with the issue. Unfortunately, no public authorities at state, provincial, regional or local level in charge of conflict prevention were involved in the solution of Iskra village conflict. The Dungan inhabitants collected 79 applications on the case and handed them over to the Chuj regional department of the Ministry of Interior, where they described the events. On 30 May 2006, the two Dungans involved in the January fight were acquitted, with legal assistance provided from the NGO Citizens Against Corruption.

## **13. Visit to the Issyk kul Region**

### Balykchi Village (formerly Rybachij)

Together with the representative of the NGO Citizens Against Corruption and journalist Azima Rasulova, the IHF/Memorial delegation visited the village of Balykchi some days after the murder of Ryspek Akmatbaev, a businessman and an alleged criminal leader, on 10 May 2006 near a mosque in the suburbs of Bishkek. On 9 April he had won 80% of the vote in a parliamentary by-election. He aspired the deputy post of his younger brother Tynychbek, who was killed together with other three parliamentarians in autumn 2005.

At the time of the IHF/Memorial visit, there were many people at the village square but it was generally peaceful. Akmatbaev's parents also visited the place. Some 3,000 people organized a sit-in at the square. Akmatbaev was popular particularly among the youth because he had opened many sport clubs for them in the region.

Residents of the Issyk Kul region stated that they were very unhappy with the political rotation in the local administration. The mayor, the heads of the local police and military department were all dismissed.

Eight to nine ethnic groups are represented in the region: Russians, Uighurs, Dungans, Koreans, Yakuts, Belarusians, and Germans.

Unlike elsewhere, many local NGOs in the Issyk Kul region are involved in providing social assistance to elderly Russian people living in the area. They organize meals and medical care and run self-help groups. The average pension is around 400 soms (approximately €7,70) and the average wage about 1,150 soms (€22).

There are ten schools in the region, including three Russian, each of which have about 45-48 pupils in

one class.

Around 1,800 young people are unemployed, most of them ethnic Kyrgyz.

The IHF/Memorial delegation met with the largest local human rights organization, which functions also as a job center and a psychological clinic mainly for young Kyrgyz people. After finishing obligatory education, Kyrgyz youth as a rule prefer to Bishkek instead of entering higher education.

Only one state TV channel can be seen in the Issyk Kul region, and the flow of information is generally slow. Information about developments in Issyk Kul is poorly presented at the state channel. There is a local radio station, Assatlyk, and some newspapers in different languages.

The situation in the field of education is difficult. There is one private educational institution, the Social-Economic Institute, which provides education in both Kyrgyz and Russian. Its tuitions, however, are very high by local standards: for example, the annual tuition of the law faculty is 5,500 soms (€106) while the minimum monthly wage is 400 soms.