



State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Kyrgyzstan

Publisher [Minority Rights Group International](#)

Publication Date 3 July 2014

Cite as Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Kyrgyzstan*, 3 July 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53ba8de5b.html> [accessed 13 August 2014]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Roughly a quarter of Kyrgyzstan's 5.6 million inhabitants are members of ethnic minorities. Ethnic Uzbeks make up the most sizable minority, at about 14 per cent of the population, with ethnic Russians making up another 8 per cent. Dungans, Uyghurs, Turks and ethnic Tajiks each make up around 1 per cent, with Ukrainians, Tatars and Kazakhs also making up a smaller proportion. All these groups remain politically marginalized. Although Kyrgyzstan's 2013 report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination claims strong minority representation in all branches of government, less than 13 per cent of parliamentary representatives and 9 per cent of all civil servants are members of ethnic minorities. While precise statistics on the ethnic breakdown of official bodies are difficult to obtain, ethnic Uzbeks, the largest minority group, are said to make up a negligible portion of employees of state organs and law enforcement.

The notion that the ethnic majority is dominated and threatened by members of ethnic minorities, even when numbers tell a different story, has had a lasting effect on the conditions of ethnic Uzbeks. This was evident during the outbreak of violent clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010. Over 70 per cent of the nearly 500 victims of the 2010 violence in southern Kyrgyzstan were ethnic Uzbeks. Uzbek-owned property also constituted the vast majority of the roughly 2,800 units of private property damaged. International observers and national human rights groups maintain that casualties inflicted on the Uzbek community were the result of targeted attacks which security organs either failed to prevent or actively facilitated. However, this was not reflected in the subsequent patterns of prosecution, with ethnic Uzbeks making up 80 per cent of those accused of crimes relating to the 2010 violence.

Numerous chronologies of the violence of 2010 have suggested that heated rhetoric in the months leading up to the conflict played a significant role in pitting Uzbeks and Kyrgyz against one another. Kyrgyz-language newspapers published several anti-Uzbek editorials, including one that famously recommended that Uzbeks be expelled from Kyrgyzstan to allow impoverished ethnic Kyrgyz to take over their land. At the other end of the spectrum, leaders of the country's Uzbek National Cultural Center were rumoured to have called for an autonomous Uzbek region within Kyrgyzstan, but it has been suggested that these remarks were purposefully distorted by certain leaders of the Kyrgyz community.

Kyrgyzstan's central government largely avoids overtly ethnic nationalist rhetoric itself, though with a recent loosening of press restrictions hate speech has become more common in the national media. While the regime may periodically attempt to silence extremist language when it sees it as a threat to its authority, it has demonstrated double standards in its prosecution of hate speech and incitement. A February 2013 report by a national human rights organization states that while 'ethnic stereotypes and hate speech' feature prominently in the rhetoric of ethnic Kyrgyz politicians and in Kyrgyz-language media, statutes prohibiting the incitement of inter-ethnic hatred are 'for the most part used against minorities themselves'. In early 2013, the parliament took what might appear to some to be a positive step in minority protections when it increased penalties for incitement of ethnic and religious hatred from the previous fine to prison terms of three to five years, rising to five to eight years for repeat offenders. Rights defenders, however, expressed fears that the measure could pose a threat to the falsely accused. In light of the country's inconsistent application of hate crime legislation, it could also result in more prosecution of members of minority groups and more self-censorship on their part.

Official inconsistency in enforcing laws against inciting hatred is reflected in one of the most prominent examples of hate speech since the June 2010 violence. In 2012, an Uzbek-language song containing anti-Kyrgyz lyrics attracted attention after being disseminated among young Osh-area residents through mobile phones. The song was promptly banned by the Osh district court, although it was unclear what charges would be sought against its author, an ethnic Uzbek native of Kyrgyzstan who now has Russian citizenship. While media observers acknowledged the song as hate speech, equally militant anti-Uzbek songs and poems that proliferated on the internet in the wake of the 2010 violence were not similarly banned.

The most vivid example of official double standards is the case of ethnic Uzbek activist Azimjan Askarov. Having gained a reputation for documenting abuses by law enforcement agencies, he was arrested amid the June 2010 violence and later convicted of murder, organizing mass disturbances and inciting inter-ethnic hatred. He is now serving a life sentence for these charges, which human rights groups have unanimously termed fabricated. Askarov's case continues to inspire controversy. In September a group of ethnic Kyrgyz women who may have belonged to a loose-knit movement of recruited demonstrators known colloquially as OBON ('Special-Assignment Female Units') broke into the venue of an international film festival that featured a documentary about Askarov, shouting threats against the festival organizers, as well as nationalist slogans. The festival organizers claim police actively cooperated with the women, who allegedly had links with powerful politicians.

In April 2013, Ulugbek Azimov, another prominent ethnic Uzbek human rights activist, was appointed head of the coordinating council of the National Committee against Torture, provoking criticism from nationalist politicians. In May, he and two family members were severely beaten by several ethnic Kyrgyz, one of whom reportedly made reference to Uzbeks 'beating Kyrgyz'. The Municipal Department of Internal Affairs denied the attack was linked to Azimov's ethnicity, and opened a case against one of his attackers on the charge of 'hooliganism'.

Authorities do accuse members of the ethnic majority of inciting inter-ethnic hatred in some instances. In September 2013, authorities issued a warning to the country's most popular tabloid *Super Info*, after it published a video taken during the June 2010 violence that showed a group of ethnic Uzbek men harassing their ethnic Kyrgyz peers. In its statement, the Ministry claimed the video 'provoked vengeful feelings', suggesting that the censorship of the video was necessitated at least in part by fears of reprisals against members of ethnic minorities.

Websites in Kyrgyzstan are known to strictly monitor hate speech in their comment sections. However, the little research available on hate speech in online media articles suggests it remains frequent, although direct incitements to violence are rare. For example, the School of Peacemaking Journalism and Media Technology, a locally run outfit, analysed 141 internet and print articles in 2013 that made mention of ethnicity or citizenship. It found that over half

contained some degree of hate speech, the majority of which consisted of irrelevant references to the minority status of accused criminals, and quotations of negative statements about minority groups that were cited without commentary.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country

All countries



Clear

Search

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Kyrgyzstan](#)

Topics

- [Minorities](#)
- [Uzbek](#)