Beat: News

Raids in Moscow - Chicanery against indigenous human rights activists

Raids in Moscow

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USPA NEWS - Growing concerns about safety of indigenous campaigners.
The Society for Threatened Peoples (STP is concerned about the safety of Russian indigenous human rights activists and environmentalists and their families.

“The indigenous activists are increasingly harassed by the security forces ““ apparently as an attempt to stop them from campaigning for the rights of minority groups, as they did last weekend,“ criticized Sarah Reinke, the STP´s expert on questions regarding Eastern Europe, in Berlin on Monday. Early in the morning, policemen had searched the apartment of Rodion Suljandziga, who is Head of the Center for Support of the Indigenous Peoples of the North. Suljandziga ““ who was supposed to open a conference of the 143 small peoples of the northern territories, Siberia, and the Far East on that day ““ was taken to the police station of Konkovo District in the Russian capital.

The police confiscated his computer. Suljandziga is one of only a few activists in the Russian Federation who advocate for the rights of indigenous communities on an international level.

“Many conference participants are now very afraid of being harassed as soon as they return to their home regions,“ Reinke describes how the arbitrariness leads to insecurity among all the indigenous human rights activists. “Before their visit to Moscow, several delegates were asked to invite “˜observers´ of the organization “˜Raipon´ ““ which is loyal to the government ““ and had declined. Now, they fear they might be punished.“

Suljandziga´s “Center for Support of the Indigenous Peoples of the North“ provides young indigenous activists with training on how to build up an organization and on education. According to the STP, he has been under surveillance for years. In 2014, the Russian secret service FSB confiscated his passport when he tried to travel to New York to take part in the UN Conference on Indigenous Peoples, which he had helped to organize.

In Russia, the rights of indigenous peoples are being trampled underfoot, especially in regions that are rich in important raw materials such as oil.

The people there are suffering from diseases, unemployment, and the ongoing destruction of their natural surroundings. Their life expectancy is ten years lower than the Russian average. “If the few remaining leading representatives of the indigenous communities are persecuted and practically forced to leave the country, they will no longer be heard ““ quietly exposing them to arbitrariness of the government and the economy,“ warns Reinke.

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