

INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN KAZAKHSTAN BETWEEN 2006 AND 2007**Events in Aktau**

On August 20, 2006 Aktau City witnessed riots. Printed mass media reported that originally an unauthorized but peaceful rally of workers was taking place at the central square of the city Yntymak. The workers of Mangistau MunayGas OJSC were demanding salary increase. According to City Akimat (local authority), around 10 or 15 people were participating in the rally. Next day information leaked to the press that there were more than 200 people gathered at the square by night. According to city authorities small groups from the rally moved to courtyards of resident buildings and tried to organize pogroms. Other sources speak about clashes with police and number of arrested vary between 17 and 25 persons. Participants of the rally were joined by the youth who started violent clashes with the police. Opposition mass media reported that at that moment some people in crowd began screaming racial offenses against the Caucasians who live in the area and then began to smash cafeterias and shops owned by Lezgins, Chechens and Azerbaijanis.

Mangyshlak peninsula which hosts port city of Aktau has already several times been a field of interethnic conflicts. The most notorious one is a massacre in New Ozen (currently Zhanaozen) of summer 1989 when indigenous people had bloody fights with Lezgins and Chechens. From time to time local conflicts between indigenous people, i.e. Kazakhs, and representatives of the Caucasian diasporas take place in villages of Mangyshlak peninsula. As a rule conflicts arise out of incidents of a criminal nature.

Events in Shelek and Malybai

A racial conflict exploded in November 18, 2006 in Shelek village, Almaty Oblast. A quarrel between young men of Uighur and Kazakh ethnic origins in the Old Castle café turned into an ethnic conflict. The young people began to form groups by an ethnic origin and arrange large-scale fights. Next day, November 19, a group of Kazakh youth smashed three cafés where the Uighur youth frequently meet. Some young Kazakh men raided October Street, beating everyone they met on their way. It is fair to say that they did not injure women, old people or children and did not break into houses. The largest clash took place at the crossing of Zhibek Zholy and Ismail Tairov Streets where more than 300 people represented each side according to reports of mass media. Police was not able to calm down the furious crowd. It was possible to avoid bloodshed only thanks to interference of the elder men of both nationalities. There were injured people who were taken home. Deputy Head of the Department of Internal Affairs of Almaty Oblast Colonel M. Ayubayev arrived on November 19 in

Shelek. A meeting was gathered in Akimat of Shelek rural district in connection with the emergency situation.

Shelek authorities introduced curfew like regime, whereby police posts were on duty throughout the village. The community headquarters composed of school principals, representatives of public associations, administration of the District Office of Internal Affairs were sitting in the Akimat for almost one week. Schools held emergency meetings with parents of pupils. However, efficiency of these arrangements was brought to nothing by numerous anti-Uighur articles in mass media (overall more than 100 articles), especially in the Kazakh-language press. The articles were published with provocative headings, for instance ‘Your state but our land’ (article by Ye.Uralbayev in the Svoboda Slova newspaper). These moods were supported by several radical national-patriotic organizations. They held various campaigns on site which heated up the ethnic tension. Public speeches of some Parliament members, political scientists and public figures also intensified ethnic issues of the conflict. Influential weekly newspaper Zhas Qazaq labeled the conflict as “fascism” on the part of the Uighur youth. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan-Zaman newspaper urged “the Uighurs to apologize to the Kazakh people.” Schools where teaching was held in the Uighur were treated as a source of separatism.

After all these events the authorities began to remove nameplates written in the Uighur language in Uighur schools in Almaty Oblast. These educational establishments themselves also gradually remove materials about the history of Uighur people and their public figures. Articles about Uighurs of Kazakhstan regularly appear in the Kazakh-language press after events in Shelek and Malybai. In particular, articles in Ana Tili and Kazakhstan-Zaman regularly raise a question of changing a name of Uighur District in Almaty Oblast.

Events in Malovodnoye village

A large-scale fight took place in Kazatkom village, Almaty Oblast, on March 18, 2007. A day before two young men of Kazakh and Chechen origins had a conflict in neighboring village Malovodnoye, when one of sides used the gun “OSA”, which shoots plastic bullets. Next day at noon a crowd began to gather in a wasteland in Malovodnoye near an office building of a former winery. Most people in the crowd were young Kazakhs from villages. At one point the crowd got into the standing by cars. About 50 cars moved into the direction of the village.

The first point of attack was the house of the Makhmakhanov family. Head of the family a 75-year old E.Makhmakhanov, a famous sheep breeder, had lived in Kazakhstan for 45 years. He raised 15 children all of whom were born and grew up in Kazakhstan. The crowd approached the house shouting violent words. Three Makhmakhanov brothers went outside and tried to prevent the attack. During the conflict they opened fire using guns and as a result of which two attackers were killed. One of them, Sadykov, died on the scene of the event and another, Bugutov, died in a hospital. Three

Makhmakhanov brothers Khadjimurat, Nazhmutdin and Amir started to run away from the house carrying away a bulk of the crowd. All three brothers died from severe beating. Meanwhile, a part of the mob was smashing outlets and houses of Chechens in Malovodnoye. It should be noted that the local police did almost nothing to cease the pogrom. They had neither technical nor human resources.

According to Kazakhstan today News Agency, a representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated at the press conference in Astana held the next day that ‘this conflict cannot be treated as an ethnic conflict.’ Around the same time there was a spontaneous rally of local residents in Malovodnoye. The rally headed to the main street of the village. They were planning to go to the neighboring village to “deal” with Chechens, but they were stopped by police. At the same time, Malovodnoye conflict reached the Majilis, where its members were divided into two camps. One of them argued that the conflict was rooted in inter-ethnic disagreements, while another blamed social problems.

Almost 30,000 Chechens live in Kazakhstan, including 1,500 in Yenbekshikazakh District where the conflict took place.

Events in Mayatas village

Kurds and Kazakhs had a clash in October 2007 in Mayatas village of Tolebi district, South Kazakhstan Oblast. After rape of a 4-year old Kazakh boy local residents of Kazakh origin began to smash and set on fire houses of local Kurds. Mass media reported that a complaint about rape of an underage was filed with the Tolebi District Office of Internal Affairs only one week later. The suspect was immediately placed in a pretrial detention facility and twenty police officers were assigned to guard the family of the suspected rapist from October 28 to prevent any illegal actions against it. However, these efforts could not prevent further turmoil in the village. At night a motorcade of 15 vehicles approached the house of the suspect. The hooligans threw bottles with flammable mixture at the house and neighboring houses of Kurds. Three police officers were injured in clashes. “Arson of Kurd residences took massive scale, especially in Tolebi District, where Kurd population is the largest. Organizers of the incident had precise information about location of houses of Kurds throughout the region,” said Mr. Nadirov, the President of the Association of Kurds of Kazakhstan. Kurds were taken under protection of local police. Police arranged round-the-clock inspection of vehicles and IDs in Mayatas. However, as mass media reported, there were almost no Kurds left to be protected. After three days of arson and violence 90% of Kurds had to leave Mayatas. The majority of them moved to Chimkent and were afraid to return back to the village.

Even though the conflict was contained to one region, anti-Kurd moods still exist. Kazakh-language press has published statements that Kurds were extremely brazen in rural areas. Moreover, representative of the Committee of Administrative Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of

Kazakhstan Moldiyar Orazaliyev hinted that another reason behind violence against Kurds was that “some local residents were engaged in petty thefts and drug dealing,” and adding that “there is no interethnic hatred”.

Although after the events head of Tolebi District Office of Internal Affairs Colonel Zh.Namazbayev and his deputy Zh. Yerzhanov were dismissed, Kurds demanded punishment of all guilty persons. Later, Zh. Yerzhanov was sentenced to four years of imprisonment for failure to take proper measures, for concealment of crime, for late initiation of a criminal case in rape and abetting the breakout of the conflict. Another police officer S.Rustamov is on the wanted list.

More than one year after pogroms Kurd families who lost their houses and property cannot obtain compensation from the state.

Central Asia has been a home to Kurds since 1937 when they were deported by Stalin from Soviet republics neighboring Turkey. Later on, a bulk of Central Asian Kurds clustered in Kazakhstan after nationality clashes in late 1980s in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. More than 7,000 Kurds reside in South Kazakhstan Oblast, including 3,500 in Tolebi District alone.