

RAVIL MINGAZOV*
RUSSIAN GUANTÁNAMO DETAINEE IN NEED OF PROTECTION



Ravil left Russia because of religious intolerance and persecution by the Russian intelligence and military services. He fled in search of a new home that would be tolerant of his faith and hospitable to his family. Instead, he found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time and has since endured years of abuse at the hands of the U.S. government. After more than seven years of unjust imprisonment, Ravil still desires the one thing that led him to leave Russia in the first place: a new home state that will be tolerant of his religion and where he can safely live with his family.

Summary: Ravil Mingazov is a former ballet dancer who fled religious discrimination and mistreatment in Russia. He was rounded up in a Pakistani house raid far from any conflict and turned over to U.S. authorities, who ultimately transferred him to Guantánamo. Ravil has been in Guantánamo for more than seven years but cannot go back to Russia, where seven former Guantánamo prisoners returned to face imprisonment, abuse, torture and even death. Ravil fears that he would likely suffer a similar mistreatment if he does not receive humanitarian protection outside of Russia.

Personal History: Ravil was born in Kamchatskaya, Russia, in December 1967. His family later moved to Naberezhnye Chelny, Tatarstan, Russia, where his mother still resides. He studied ballet at the Naberezhnye Chelny Art School. Ravil was subsequently a ballet dancer with various troupes and even performed on national television. In 1987, he joined the army as a ballet dancer in the famed Russian army ballet troupe. Later, he was assigned passport control duties on the Mongolian border.

After the Soviet Union dissolved, Ravil left the army and returned to Naberezhnye Chelny, eventually finding a job in the food supply department at a nearby military installation. During this time, Ravil became a practicing Muslim. He married a Muslim woman and they had a son. Due to his religion, he experienced significant hostility and prejudice. The army unit refused to serve *halal* meat. Abusive incidents against Muslim soldiers went without investigation or redress, and there was general intolerance towards Muslim soldiers. Ravil provided support for the Muslim soldiers, finding appropriate food and seeking aid for victims of prejudice. This, in turn, led to conflicts with his commanders: his requests for religious accommodations were denied, he was denied permission to travel, and he was interrogated. His house was ransacked and searched, his wife was denied a passport, and the family was refused permission to give their son a Muslim name.

Ravil was reluctant to leave his home country, but fearful for himself and his family, he eventually left to find a place to live that would accommodate and tolerate his family's faith and ensure them

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safety. He planned to find such a place and then bring his wife and son there to join him. He traveled to Tajikistan and, from there to an Uzbek refugee camp in Afghanistan. Ravil had been living in the camp for only a short period when the Americans invaded Afghanistan. In the chaos of war, he found himself as a refugee twice over, evacuating Afghanistan with other refugees fleeing the fighting. Ultimately, Ravil reached an Islamic center in Pakistan sympathetic to Muslim refugees. He had only been staying there briefly when, one night, Pakistani police burst into the house and arrested all of the refugees. After his arrest, Ravil was taken to a prison in Islamabad and then transferred to U.S. custody. U.S. forces brought him to Bagram, Afghanistan, where he was subjected to severe abuse. At Bagram, he was beaten, slammed into the ground, hung by his arms, deprived of food and sleep, and eventually transferred to Guantánamo. He has been in Guantánamo ever since – without charge or trial.

Allegations: The government has not provided any evidence about the reasons for Ravil’s arrest and continuing imprisonment. Ravil was a refugee who was arrested at a house in Pakistan, far from any armed conflict. He has never agreed with the way Al Qaeda or the Taliban interpret the Muslim religion – a religion he knows to be based only on peace and forgiveness.

Fear of Torture or Persecution: Muslims often face persecution in Russia on account of their faith. The U.S. State Department has repeatedly documented the harassment and persecution of Muslims in Russia. Likewise the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has observed that religious persecution in Russia has generated significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

Moreover, Russia has a criminal justice system notorious for lacking due process and fairness. Security forces in Russia have been involved in extrajudicial killings; torture, violence and other brutal treatment; and arbitrary arrest and detention. The United Nations body responsible for monitoring state compliance with the Convention Against Torture has acknowledged “numerous and consistent allegations of widespread torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of detainees . . . commonly with a view to obtaining confessions.”

While in Guantánamo, Russian detainees were threatened with coercive interrogations in Russian prisons. Muslim “security” detainees are particularly at-risk of abusive treatment in Russian detention facilities. Indeed, seven former Guantánamo prisoners released to Russia in 2004 were kept in detention and suffered torture and abuse at the hands of Russian authorities despite the country’s assurances of humane treatment. After serving prison terms in Russia, they were released only to be further harassed, abused and persecuted by Russian authorities.¹ In June 2007, one of the former detainees who was returned to Russia was killed in a police raid on an apartment building in Nalchik, the capital of the internal republic Kabardino-Balkariya.

Urgent Protection Needs: Ravil has been imprisoned without charge or trial in Guantánamo for more than six years. He cannot safely return to his home country because of the risk of torture or persecution. Russia is notorious for its persecution of Muslims and for torture and abuse in its prisons. Ravil seeks only a place to live safely with his family. Without the offer of humanitarian protection from the U.S. or another country, Ravil will continue to be imprisoned indefinitely without charge.

¹ Human Rights Watch, *The “Stamp of Guantánamo” The Story of Seven Men Betrayed by Russia’s Diplomatic Assurances to the United States*, March 2007, Vol. 19, No.2(D).