

Ex-Satanic Russian Hit Man Fights for Peace

Gennady Terkun, a former Satanist and Russian hit man, has been on a mission to bring peace to the southwest corner of Russia.

For more than 10 years, Terkun has been leading a church in the predominantly Muslim Northern Caucasus region.

Since the late 1990s **Islamic radicals** have waged a bloody insurgency in this region. Two wars and scores of terrorist attacks have killed thousands and displaced many more.

"I am convinced that it is the love of Christ that can turn this region around," Terkun said.

Terkun's goal: reach this war-torn region with messages of reconciliation and forgiveness; bold words for a man who admits a bloody past that he is uncomfortable talking about it.

A Bloody Past

"I left home when I was 13 years old and got entangled with the wrong crowd. I did a lot of things that I am ashamed of," said Terkun.

He's from the small Russian city of Krasnodar. His life reads like a Hollywood mafia thriller. Drugs. Armed robbery. Prostitution. Hired assassin. Money laundering. Gun smuggling. You name it Terkun did it all—and then some.

"It's as if I became the devil's slave. I even remember making a pact with Satan to serve him," he said.

His deeds eventually caught up with him.

"I was arrested and sentenced to 20 years in prison," he said.

A Transformation

His life is now an example of God's transforming power. In 1987 the former Soviet Union faced huge political changes and a young Terkun sat in prison.

"I had a bad reputation in prison as someone who had special cult-like powers. Prisoners were even afraid of me," he said.

One day some Christians came to share the love of Jesus. Terkun said it was the first time he'd ever heard the **gospel message**.

But it took four years for it to sink in.

"In 1991, I realized its true meaning. I dropped to my knees in the prison cell and told God I was a sinner," he recalled. "I didn't want to live one single day without Him in my life."

"From that moment I went from serving Satan to a servant of Jesus," Terkun said.

The prison miraculously shortened his sentence by five years, and he was released in 1996. The day after he walked out of prison he walked into a Bible training seminar organized by Russian Ministries, which focuses on bringing the gospel to the former Soviet Union.

"Russian Ministries was very instrumental in my life. Their classes taught me how to share my new faith with others," he said. "They also put in me a missionary heart to plant churches and help train the next generation of leaders in my country."

He was baptized shortly thereafter.

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A New Mission

Terkun coordinates dozens of youth camps each year in

partnership with Russian Ministries and local congregations. Di Gusalova is a member of Terkun's church and helps with the camps.

"This is our next generation. These kids have to know there's an alternative lifestyle to violence," Gusalova said. "We spend time playing games with them, handing out gifts and building relationships. It then gives us an opportunity to share the gospel."

Many parents say the camps are God-sent.

"I love it when they talk about peace and getting along with other ethnic and religious groups. They are helping to build bridges and this is important," Svetlana Agyzariva, a camp parent, said.

In one city, the local Communist party even took out full page newspaper ads promoting the youth camps.

"You may be surprised but there are many Christians in the Communist party. We believe that the messages of Christ can give these kids a brighter future," Communist leader Zoya Mozlveva said.

When he's not coordinating camps or preaching, Terkun trains local believers to become the future leaders here.

"It's all about missions and church planting," Terkun said.

Leaders in the Crosshairs

Working in the Northern Caucasus is not without its hardships. It includes the volatile region of Chechnya where Muslim militants and Russian forces have battled back and forth to control the province. There is relative peace now but Islam's influence is growing.

With the help of the Russian government and several Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, Chechnya has today erected what could be the largest mosque in Europe.

For evangelical Christians living in this province, life for them can not only be challenging, but potentially dangerous.

Local Christian leader, Ramza, has first-hand experience.

“I’ve been repeatedly warned by Muslim radicals and local authorities to stop preaching but I will not,” he said. “I’m a simple man whose life was one day touched by Christ. I have a responsibility to tell others about Him no matter the cost.”

It’s the price that Ramza, Gennady, and the other believers are willing to pay to bring lasting peace.

“God changed my life in prison that day for a reason and this is it: to bring love and hope to these regions,” Terkun said.