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## News



## US Offers Citizenship To 7000 Ahiska Muslims

By Damir Ahmed, IOL correspondent

KRASNODAR, Russia, July 24, (IslamOnline.net) - The United States has agreed to grant citizenship to 7,000 Ahiska Muslims who will be settled in Pennsylvania, reported a Russian newspaper on Friday, July 23.

The first 11-strong batch of the Ahiska Muslims, living in the Russian province of Krasnodar, left for Geneva on Thursday, July 22, before flying to Philadelphia, reported *Novie Izvestia*.

It added that the Muslims would be housed near the grand mosque in Philadelphia.

The paper recalled that Krasnodar governor Alexander Tkachev was notified of the American decision on February 15.

*Izvestia* said the Russian government does not treat Ahiska Muslims as citizens and has not therefore given them passports or IDs.

An official in Krasnodar administration had told Interfax on Tuesday, July 20, that of the 11,999 Ahiska Muslims living in the region, 4,943 have received Russian citizenship and 744 have embarked on Russian naturalization procedures.

He added that more than 5,000 others have expressed a desire to emigrate to the United States.

Earlier, Chingiz Neiman-zade, chairman of Vatan, a [Meskheta Turks](#) association based in Georgia, said the United States had offered to accept the Ahiska Muslims living in Krasnodar as immigrants.

"On February 16, the International Migration Organization began an information program in Krasnodar to explain the terms for the resettlement of the Ahiska Muslims in the U.S.," he told *Chicago Tribune* on Thursday, July 22.

"The immigrants will be provided with housing and furniture, they will be helped to learn the English language and to complete formalities needed for residence in the US, which is especially important, and have been promised life-long welfare allowances for pensioners and the disabled."



Several Ahiska Muslims packing to leave for the US

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## Happiness

Ahiska Muslims were happy with the American offer.

"This decision marks a great change in our life", said Tepeshon Swanidze, leader of the Ahiska Muslim community in Russia.

"We thank the US administration for its humanitarian decision", he added.

[Ahiska Muslims](#), originally hailing from Anatolia, were exiled from their homeland after Russia seized the region of Ahiska following its 1828-1829 war with the Ottoman Empire.

Many Ahiska Muslims were forced to seek refuge in Erzurum in eastern Turkey after being persecuted by the Russian Cesar for supporting the Ottoman Empire.

Facing a similar fate under the notorious Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, Ahiska Muslims fled to Uzbekistan in 1944.

One year later, they went to Azerbaijan where they currently reside.

Turkish and Azeri parliamentarians had recently appealed for an [international intervention](#) to pressure the Georgian government into allowing the return of Ahiska Muslims.

Ahiska became part of Georgia in 1918.

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