

Trinidad Jiménez

Minister for Health and Social Policy
Spanish Presidency of the EU

Vladimír Spidla

Commissioner for Employment,
Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
European Commission

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Dear Ms. Jiménez and Mr. Spidla,

Roma discrimination and exclusion in Europe

On the eve of the opening conference of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion that will take place in Madrid, Amnesty International is concerned about the situation of discrimination and social exclusion that leads Romani communities into poverty in Europe.

The Roma are a clear example of a community that suffers from both poverty and discrimination, and encompasses the link between these two human rights issues. Roma face exclusion from public life and are unable to enjoy full access to their rights in relation to housing, education, employment and health services. In some countries they are prevented from obtaining citizenship and personal documents required for social insurance, health care and other benefits. Roma are often victims of police ill-treatment and their complaints are often not thoroughly and impartially investigated. Frequently Romani children are unjustifiably placed in "special" schools where curtailed curricula limit their possibilities for fulfilling their potential. Romani children and women are among the communities most vulnerable to traffickers.

Evidence of continued segregation at schools is confirmed by a recent Amnesty International report *Injustice renamed Discrimination in education of Roma persists in the Czech Republic*. Romani children in the Czech Republic are denied the right to an education free from discrimination which has serious negative impacts on the quality of education they receive. Many Romani children are sent to schools and classes designed for pupils with "mild mental disabilities". Others are effectively segregated in Roma-only mainstream schools and classes, where they receive a lower quality of education. The situation persists two years after the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Czech Republic discriminated against Romani children through their placement them in special schools. This discrimination limits their future education and employment opportunities, and their opportunity to escape the vicious cycle of poverty and marginalization that Roma face. This pattern of segregation in education is not restricted to one EU member state. Research shows that with different forms, discrimination against Roma communities is entrenched into many European societies.

The lack of adequate action from governments worsens the historical marginalisation of Roma. In this regard, a trend of forced evictions of Roma communities has been increasing in the last years in several EU countries. In Italy last March, Milan authorities forcibly evicted the Bacula community of about 150 Roma people living under an overpass in the north of the city. According to local information, 70 of them were dispersed without being given alternative accommodation. Some families had been already re-housed in temporary shelters provided by NGOs. The authorities neither had plans for adequate alternative housing nor held discussions with all individuals likely to be affected.

This is a case where the systematic disregard of the rights of the Roma community is brought to light. Most of the Roma people living in this Bacula camp have previously experienced at least one forced eviction. Approximately 110 of them are believed to have been forcibly evicted, in April 2008, from another unauthorized camp in the city, in via Bovisasca. Of these 110, at least 100 had apparently

also been forcibly evicted, in October 2007, from the same Bacula camp where they are living now. Several of the previous forced evictions involved the destruction of property, including shelters, clothes, mattresses, and, in some instances, medicines and documents.

Obligations by the governments to provide adequate housing are breached repeatedly. In Romania about 75 Roma people – including families with young children – have been living in metal cabins and shacks next to a sewage treatment plant since 2004. They were moved to the area, deemed unfit for human habitation, from a crumbling building in the centre of the town of Miercurea Ciuc. They were told the move was temporary, and for their own safety. After more than five years, and various court cases, the continued violation of their right to adequate housing – among a host of other rights – is beginning to feel very permanent. Erzsébet Fodor and her family are one of these cases of people in need of urgent action by the authorities.

Amnesty International has learnt of other forced evictions of Roma taking place in Slovakia and Greece. All these evictions are believed to have been carried out without the procedural safeguards required under regional and international human rights standards, including adequate and reasonable prior notice, an opportunity for genuine consultation, provision of legal remedies including legal aid if needed, adequate alternative housing and compensation for all losses.

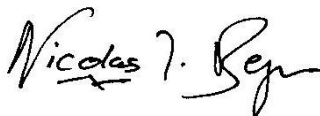
The EU needs to take concrete action to combat discrimination, social exclusion and poverty of Roma communities within Europe. The launch of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion provides a key opportunity to do so as the objectives of the European Year include the recognition of the fundamental right to live in dignity for those living in poverty and suffering social exclusion. It states that the fight against poverty and exclusion is the shared responsibility of both the collective and the individual, and recalls the strong political commitment of the EU and its member states to make a decisive impact.

Amnesty International calls on the EU to build on its political commitment and take action to halt forced evictions as well as on other forms of discrimination towards the Roma community. The Spanish Presidency, hosting the Second EU Roma Summit, should use these occasions to reaffirm that the EU, as a union of values, does its utmost to protect minorities and to fight against discrimination.

Amnesty International calls on the Spanish Presidency to:

- Call for an end to forced evictions in the EU and that due process takes place in member states in relation to evictions, starting with the case of Erzsébet Fodor and her family.
- The EU and its member states should adopt and implement policies that stop segregation and encourage the integration of Romani children in mainstream education

Yours sincerely,



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