



Viviane Reding

Vice-President, Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights
and Citizenship
European Commission

Brussels, 15 March 2011
Our Ref: B1048

Dear Commissioner Reding,

The right to housing, water and sanitation in Slovenia: discrimination against Roma people

Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to the widespread discrimination faced by Romani communities in Slovenia. As a result, most of them are living in poverty and are marginalised in education, employment and housing.

You can see evidence of this situation in our publication which will be released on 16 March: *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*. The report reveals that many Romani families in that country are living in poorly built, overcrowded shacks in isolated and segregated rural settlements, far from health-care services, schools, employment and shops. They also live in fear of forced evictions and are rarely consulted or told about the choices available to them.

Chiefly because of the lack of security of tenure and segregation, some thirty percent of Roma settlements in Slovenia's south-eastern region lacked access to water in 2010. In a country where almost all the population has access to safe drinking water, many Romani communities struggle to collect even small quantities of water for drinking, cooking, and bathing. Some Romani families have less water than the daily minimum deemed necessary for victims of a humanitarian emergency, i.e. less than 15 litres of water a day per person.

Such discrimination and the marginalisation of Roma communities amount to a blatant violation of EU standards and principles. The right to education, non-discrimination, and the rights of the child, as set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, are a cornerstone of EU policy. The Race Equality Directive sets procedural and substantive standards – which Member States are bound to respect – to ensure that Europeans have access to goods and services, including housing without discrimination.

Slovenia's failure to ensure the necessary conditions for Roma people to live in adequate housing with security of tenure, freedom from discrimination, and with access to minimum essential levels of safe water, **should be considered a matter of serious concern by the European Commission**. The Commission should take the necessary steps to ensure Slovenia complies with its obligations under EU law.

While the Roma community are not the only people who face poor living conditions in Slovenia, the living standard of the majority of Romani communities falls well below that of the general population. Romani people often find living in settlements is their only option owing to discrimination when they try to buy or rent a home. Amnesty International has for instance documented cases in which non-Roma communities have blocked attempts to locate Romani families in their neighbourhoods or prevented private properties sales to Roma. In many towns, Romani families face specific barriers in accessing social housing, including lack of information, biased attitudes and discriminatory criteria for allocation.

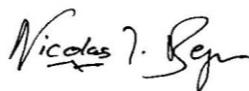
The situation of Roma people in Slovenia is only the latest example of the prevalent Europe-wide discrimination and human rights violations against Roma. It again highlights the **pressing need for vigorous and determined action by the European Union** to tackle the discrimination and exclusion faced by its Roma communities. On the eve of the public discussion of an EU Framework for National Roma Strategies, Amnesty International wishes to stress the importance of the role the Commission can play.

Consequently, **Amnesty International calls on the Commission to:**

- Issue a public statement to express its concern at the situation of Roma people in Slovenia
- Monitor the situation in Slovenia regarding discrimination against Romani communities and their access to essential services
- Ensure the Slovenian Government complies with its EU obligations and take any necessary steps to guarantee respect for the rights of Roma people in Slovenia
- Ensure that its proposal for the EU Framework for National Roma Strategies and related policies include a strong fundamental rights dimension and the fight against discrimination at its core
- In developing future policy, focus on the economic and social consequences of discrimination against Roma people

We look forward to hearing what actions you propose taking on this issue, and are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Nicolas J. Beger
Director

CC: László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion