



Zoltán Balog

Minister of State for Social Inclusion
Ministry of Public Administration and Justice
Hungarian EU Presidency

Brussels, 15 March 2011
Our Ref: B1049

Dear Mr Balog,

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.

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.

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.

At the beginning of its EU presidency Hungary made a clear commitment to support Roma inclusion, which Amnesty International has welcomed. We further detailed our expectations and set benchmarks in our *Recommendations to the European Union during the Hungarian Presidency*. Yet, while EU action is required, there is a disappointing record of failure by EU member states in fulfilling their human rights obligations to Roma people. The situation of Roma people in Slovenia, which is only the latest example of the discrimination and human rights violations against Roma throughout Europe, **shows the importance and the urgent need to act**. It is time to translate the political undertakings made during the Spanish and Belgian presidencies into effective action against anti-Gypsyism and to fulfil the rights of Roma people in Europe.

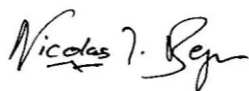
During its EU presidency, **Hungary has the possibility of making its promises a reality, by proposing tangible measures to fight discrimination and the marginalisation of Roma people**. On the eve of crucial discussions on EU policy on Roma, the Hungarian presidency must clearly oppose discrimination and lead the EU in defining a robust policy based on fundamental rights.

In line with the commitment made by the Hungarian presidency to support Roma inclusion, and following the recommendations we made, **Amnesty International calls on the Hungarian presidency to:**

- Condemn the discrimination and marginalisation of Roma people in Slovenia and other EU member states
- Take the lead in ensuring that the proposal for the EU Framework for National Roma Strategies and related policies: 1) Assigns clear targets for member states' action to promote social inclusion and fight discrimination; 2) Establishes systems for monitoring and evaluation of progress at national and EU level, as well as clear allocation of responsibilities
- Promote the adoption of such EU Framework in the Council of the EU, and commit to following-up its implementation

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

Yours sincerely,



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