

Amnesty International

Statement to Working Session 14: Roma/Sinti and, in particular, early education for Roma and Sinti children

Amnesty International is concerned about the Roma community which continues to suffer massive discrimination throughout Europe. Roma people continue to be denied their rights to housing, employment, healthcare and education. Roma are often victims of forced evictions, racist attacks and police-ill-treatment. The rise in anti-Roma sentiment and number of violent incidents in several OSCE participating states shows the importance of recognizing the gravity of racially motivated crimes and of exercising the clear political will needed to ensure there is no impunity for those responsible.

In recent attacks in June 2009, on Roma people in the **Northern Ireland**, over 100 Roma people from Romania were forced to flee their homes in Belfast.

In the **Czech Republic** violent attacks by far-right groups against the Romani community have intensified. Many Roma in the country say they fear for their lives.

Molotov cocktails were thrown into Robert Kudrik's home in the village of Vítkov in April 2009, where he lived with his partner, four children and three more family members.

The fire destroyed their home and seriously injured the parents. Their two-year-old daughter fell in a coma with burns covering 80 per cent of her body. According to the police, the motive of the attack remains unclear, but racially motivated crime cannot be ruled out.

**Hungary** has recently witnessed a series of violent attacks against Roma.

On 3 August, a 45-year-old woman was shot dead in the eastern Hungarian village of Kisléta and her 13-year-old daughter was seriously injured in the attack. According to the police and the media this is the sixth Roma person killed in the last year. One of the most shocking attacks was reported in February. Robert Csorba, a 27-year-old Romani man and his five-year-old son, Robika, were shot dead while fleeing their house in Tatarszentgyörgy (a village about 40km south east of Budapest) which was set on fire as a result of a suspected arson attack.

According to the Hungarian National Police, in 2008, there were 16 incidents involving the use of weapons against Romani homes that led to at least four Romani people being killed. However, the figures reported by NGOs are higher, with the European Roma Rights Centre documenting 39 attacks against Roma and their property between January 2008 and June 2009.

In **Italy**, for the past 10 years, forced evictions of Roma and Sinti communities have been routinely carried out by the authorities; however, their frequency and impact seem to have increased since 2007. Communities affected include both those who live in unauthorized settlements and those who have a legal title to live in authorized settlements. Both Roma and Sinti with Italian citizenship and those with EU or another nationality have been adversely affected.

Many of them, forced to find alternative shelter at very short notice, often in unauthorized areas, have been subjected to repeated forced evictions. Very often forced evictions are carried out at short notice, without any prior consultation with communities in alternatives to eviction or provisions for alternative

accommodation. Many evictions are carried out even without a formal notice or order. Those that are carried out with formal procedures often fail to be appropriately justified in domestic law. Lack of a formal order and the short advance notice also impede opportunities to try and stop the eviction via the courts.

Members of evicted families often lose their jobs and livelihoods. Children may be forced to move away from school in the middle of the school year and their education may be severely affected as a result.

Forced evictions, thus, entail gross violations of a range of internationally recognized human rights, including the rights to adequate housing, food, water, health, education, work, security of the person, security of the home, and freedom of movement.

**In Romania.** In June 2004, over 100 Roma were evicted from a building in Miercurea Ciuc/Csikszereda, in the mainly Hungarian county of Harghita. About 70 Roma now live in an 800m field at the outskirts of the town, hidden behind a sewage filtering station. Signs on the fences around the station warn of toxic danger. The authorities provided eight metal containers for the Roma to live in. They were not enough, so the Roma built another 14 shacks from wood and other materials. The dwellings are connected to the filtering station's electricity and water supply. When they run out of wood – a certain amount of which is provided by the municipality – the people heat the containers using solid fuel. The containers do not offer sufficient protection from cold or rain. Weather conditions during the winter are very harsh and temperatures can reach -26°C. According to the testimony of local Roma, living conditions are an extreme danger to health, due to the proximity to the sewage filtering station and the adverse weather conditions. During the summer months the smell coming from the station is unbearable. The placement of the Roma on the site was supposed to be a temporary solution. The local authorities have so far failed to provide adequate housing to those Roma, who were forcibly evicted in 2004.

**In Serbia** Roma communities continue to be vulnerable to attacks by non-state actors, (often members of ring-wing groups) who enjoy widespread impunity. Roma are also denied the right to adequate housing, and are vulnerable to evictions. On 9 April - International Roma Day - 250 Romani people (many displaced from Kosovo) who had been evicted from a temporary settlement at Blok 67 in New Belgrade on 3 April, remained without shelter. Blok 67 was cleared to make way for the 2009 Student Games; those who remained on the site in June were fenced in by the authorities for the duration of the games.

**In Kosovo,** Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented a recent spate of physical attacks on, and the harassment of, Roma communities during July and August, suggesting an increase in inter-ethnic tensions. The organizations have called on the Kosovo and international authorities to act in concert to halt this recent wave of attacks.

**In Montenegro,** more than 4,400 Roma and Ashkalia from Kosovo are denied access to the rights of refugees, but defined as internally displaced persons under the 1992 Government Decree on the Care of Displaced Persons. Many of those who arrived in Montenegro after 2003 are not even able to registered as internally displaced persons, and remain in danger of statelessness.

**Macedonia** has made little progress in implementing the National Action Plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, (in revision since September 2008, and finally adopted in May). The revised NAPs fail to include any significant measures to address the double-discrimination experienced by Romani women and girls, including in access to education, health-care and employment.

**In Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia, Czech Republic and Slovakia** the authorities continue to fail to integrate Roma children fully into the education system by placing them in special schools or classes for pupils with mental disabilities, where a reduced curriculum is taught.

The Constitution of the **Czech Republic** guarantees that all children have the right to an education. Yet, despite positive measures taken in 2005 – with the New School Act – there is still discrimination and intentional exclusion of Romani children from mainstream education. The former special schools, whose name was abolished in 2005, now called mainstream schools continue to teach Roma children a sub-standard education.

The practice of segregating Romani children in schools for children with mental disabilities continues, despite a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in November 2007 that it amounted to unlawful discrimination.

In **Slovakia**, Roma children continue to be inappropriately placed in "special schools" or classes for children with mental disabilities, or segregated in Roma-only mainstream schools or classes where they study a lower curriculum in virtual isolation from other pupils.

Amnesty International believes that thousands of Romani children are erroneously placed in special schools or segregated in Roma-only schools across Slovakia.

New education legislation in Slovakia prohibits discrimination, especially in the form of segregation; however no measures exist to ensure this prohibition is implemented in practice.

#### **Recommendations:**

**Amnesty International calls upon the participating states to:**

- to acknowledge the gravity of racially motivated crimes and to investigate urgently the series of racist attacks and to protect Roma from future attacks.
- to reverse racial discrimination in education and address the grave violations of the right to education for Roma children.