

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

12 September 2012  
AI Index: EUR 01/023/2012

### **France/Romania: High level intergovernmental meeting must commit to ending forced evictions of Roma**

On 11 September Amnesty International received reports of forced evictions of the Pirita settlement in Baia Mare, Romania and a camp in Villeneuve-le-Roi in the southeastern suburbs of Paris, France. These two forced evictions are the latest in regular and worrying pattern of such human rights violations against Roma communities monitored by Amnesty International across Europe. Eyewitness reports confirm that 26 families were forcibly evicted and left homeless in Pirita Tuesday morning, as were another 200 people in Villeneuve-le-Roi of whom only a limited number were offered alternative housing.

Today, the French Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls and the Minister for European Affairs, Bernard Cazeneuve, are travelling to Romania to meet the Romanian President Traian Basescu, Prime Minister Victor Ponta, Minister of the Interior Mircea Dusa and Minister of Work, Family Affairs and Social Security, Mariana Campeanu.

Amnesty International calls on French and Romanian authorities to use the opportunity presented by the high level intergovernmental meeting to place human rights at the core of any discussion on the situation of Roma, and to commit to ending forced evictions of Roma in both countries.

On 31 August local officials in the northern town of Baia Mare, Romania, gave 26 Romani families (116 people, some of whom have been living there for years) living in Pirita settlement until 7 September to dismantle their homes. The authorities said that if the residents failed to comply, they would move in and demolish the housing, leaving the community with nowhere to go. The local authorities also stated that the families would have to cover the costs of the demolition. Tuesday morning at 6.00 am the police, gendarmes, ambulances and firemen entered the Pirita settlement and started to demolish the housing of the Romani families. The eviction was not preceded by a genuine consultation.

One Romani man told Amnesty International after the eviction yesterday morning: "They came and demolished our homes. There are still a few houses standing but they (the authorities) will come back in the afternoon. The authorities told those who are from Baia Mare that they could go and stay in the night shelter, while those who are not originally from Baia Mare were told to go back to where they came from. Now we stay outside, we have no place to go. The adults and children whose houses have been demolished now stay by the ruins of their homes and cry. This is everything that is left for them to do [...] This is how human rights work in Romania. It would be better if they would just come and shoot us, rather than treat us like they did, it would be better. My children, I have four, have to start school soon. What will we do? What can we do? There is really nobody who can do anything about this situation? We are desperate."

According to news reports, about 200 Roma were forcibly evicted yesterday morning from a camp in Villeneuve-le-Roi in the Val-de-Marne Department (94), south east of Paris. The police arrived at 8.15am in order to dismantle this camp in an industrial zone on the banks of the Seine. According to a group of concerned local residents, the local authorities (préfecture) have only offered unlimited emergency accommodation to certain families deemed the "neediest", and negotiations regarding alternative housing are currently being carried out. A French journalist who witnessed the eviction reported that there were about 100 children and

several pregnant women among those evicted. As in previous years, the number of evictions of Roma camps has risen during the summer.

Amnesty International met with France's Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls on 31 August, following an inter-ministerial meeting earlier that month, called by the French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, which resulted in the publication of a new circular on the eviction of camps. Minister Valls said during the meeting that evictions will continue, and that these would not be conditional on the availability of alternative housing. This statement by the Minister, repeated again in press statements on 11 September, confirms that the current policy is not in compliance with France's international law obligation not to leave anyone homeless as the result of a forced eviction.

### **Background:**

Forced evictions are violations of international human rights law. Across Europe, governments forcibly evict thousands of people from their homes, ignoring their obligations under international human rights law, all too often picking easy targets like the Roma who are poor, socially excluded, and discriminated by the societies in which they live. Roma are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Europe. Nearly 80 per cent of the European Roma population, around 10 million people, live in European Union (EU) member and candidate-member states. Across the region, Romani communities are often denied equal access to adequate housing, education, health, water and sanitation.

### **Romania:**

Pirita is one of the six informal settlements inhabited by Roma in Baia Mare - the others are Craica, Ferneziu, Valea Borcutului, Garii and Horea. During several visits by Amnesty International delegates, residents expressed fears about the insecurity they face as a result of the constant threat of forced eviction, the lack of formal tenancy for their property, and the absence of adequate information about decisions taken by the local authorities that impact on their lives.

The latest forced eviction of Pirita settlement is part of the political platform of Baia Mare's new mayor, Catalin Chereches, elected in June this year. Among the main priorities after taking office was the elimination of the "pockets of poverty" in the town. These plans included the demolition of Pirita and Craica. Recently the mayor stated that "the communities of Craica and Pirita could be razed in less than an hour".

Baia Mare authorities have twice in the past announced plans to evict Roma and others from the informal settlements, in July 2010 and August 2011. but widespread criticism lead to these plans being halted. In April 2012, municipal authorities served demolition orders to some 300 Romani families living in three informal settlements, including Pirita. In the following months, dozens of families from Craica settlement were relocated to an abandoned factory on the town's outskirts - an arrangement which falls far short of the criteria for adequate alternative housing.

### **France:**

In February and June 2012, representatives of Amnesty International conducted in-depth research on the housing situation of Roma in France, concentrating in particular on the Ile-de-France region. Amnesty International representatives visited several unauthorised camps and squats, as well as some "integration villages" (villages d'insertion) and ad hoc solutions proposed by local authorities, and spoke with several inhabitants of these camps. The vast majority of those interviewed by Amnesty International reported having been forcibly evicted several times over recent years, and said that with each eviction they found themselves living in more precarious conditions than before.

One of the main concerns identified by Amnesty International is the inadequacy of the domestic legal frameworks in both France and Romania. The law as it stands, in both countries, can leave number of people, particularly from marginalized communities, without

protection of their right to housing, in particular protection against forced evictions. For example neither the French nor the Romanian law contain an obligation to consult the inhabitants before a planned eviction. Neither of the legal systems prohibit evictions that would render inhabitants homeless or vulnerable to other human rights violations.

However, under international law, governments are required to ensure that no matter what people's tenure status is – whether they rent, own or irregularly occupy their home or the land they are living on – they must be provided with a minimum degree of security of tenure. They should have legal protection against forced evictions, harassment or other threats.

The Romanian and the French governments must prioritize the reform of their housing legislations to bring them in line with the international standards on evictions, and make this task central to any discussion on intergovernmental cooperation on the situation of Roma.

**See also:**

**Links**

France: Still waiting for commitment to end forced evictions, EUR 21/011/2012, 23 August 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR21/011/2012/en>

France: Inter-ministerial meeting must make a firm commitment to end forced evictions of Roma, EUR 21/010/2012, 21 August 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR21/010/2012/en>

France: Authorities must stop forcibly evicting Roma, EUR 21/001/2011, 5 September 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR21/001/2011/en>

France must withdraw order targeting Roma for eviction, News Story, 13 September 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/france-must-withdraw-order-targeting-roma-eviction-2010-09-13>

France urged to end stigmatization of Roma and Travellers, EUR 21/005/2010, 26 August 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR21/005/2010/en>

Romania: Scores of Roma face imminent forced eviction, 6 September 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/romania-scores-roma-face-imminent-forced-eviction-2012-09-06>

Romania: Authorities of Baia Mare should not relocate Roma in inadequate housing, EUR 39/009/2012, 7 June 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/009/2012/en>

Romania: Roma relocated to live in unsafe old office, 39/008/2012, 22 May 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/008/2012/en>

Romania: Roma in Baia Mare face threats of forced evictions and harassment, 10 May 2012, 39/007/2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/007/2012/en>

Romania: Unsafe foundations. Secure the right to housing in Romania, 39/002/2012, 8 May 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/002/2012/en>

Romania: Stop forced evictions of Roma in Baia Mare, EUR 39/005/2012, EUR 39/005/2012, 25 April 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/005/2012/en>

Romania: Hundreds of Roma in Baia Mare, Romania are at imminent risk of forced eviction by local authorities, EUR 39/004/2012, 19 April, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/004/2012/en>

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