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Albania: Authorities have an obligation to assist forcibly evicted Roma

Amnesty International is urgently calling on the Albanian authorities to provide alternative housing for 37 Roma families who were forcibly evicted this morning from their homes in Rruga e Kavajes, in the capital Tirana.

The forced eviction was carried out by the employees of a construction company who plan to develop the site, with complete disregard for procedures in Albanian law and international standards on forced evictions.

Zemrie, a mother of five and grand mother of four, who had lived in the area for the last 30 years, told Amnesty International:

"They came this morning unannounced and I don't really know what happened. It just happened all very quickly and I am still in shock... my home was demolished and I managed to gather some of my belongings ...We will stay here on the street for tonight, as we don't have anywhere to go' 'My daughter in law has a two weeks old baby and we have three more small children in the family".

Amnesty International had previously called on the Tirana authorities to stop the eviction, and urged the Ministry of Social Affairs to provide assistance, including adequate alternative housing, as required under international standards on development-based evictions. Another eyewitness told Amnesty International that the community plan to protest in front of the municipality to ask for housing, adding "They will sleep in front of the municipality until they find a solution. They will take all their stuff and stay there".

The local police only arrived after calls from commissioners from the Office of the People's Advocate (Ombudsperson) and the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in Tirana. The police stopped all further demolition and suspended any further work on the site until their investigation is complete.

A commissioner from Ombudsperson's office told Amnesty International: "Seven or eight barracks were demolished this morning before the police arrived and stopped it. It was all very chaotic, people were screaming and crying and trying to hang on to their belongings. Some of them managed to pack some of their belongings, but one barrack was demolished with everything inside, another one even caught fire. It was very shocking and frightening for all. People are now left homeless and don't know what to do. The police have now left and people are left without hope, except for some help from local NGOs".

Around 30 families left the area last week when they were threatened by company workers and told that their homes would be demolished. The authorities must also find the whereabouts of these families and make sure they are not left homeless.

Although Albania does not have a law preventing forced evictions, under Albanian law, the owner of the land is obliged to provide the Roma living there with 10 days notice. Under international standards, the Roma should have been provided with a formal notice of eviction, apply irrespective of whether they were occupying the land lawfully or unlawfully.

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