

URGENT ACTION

FAMILIES AT RENEWED RISK OF EVICTION

Thirty-three families, including Roma displaced from Kosovo, could be forcibly evicted from their homes in Belgrade, Serbia's capital, at any time from 1 March. Some of the families have been offered accommodation that does not meet international standards on adequate housing, while others will be left homeless.

The Belgrade city authorities, on behalf of the government of Serbia, are planning to forcibly evict **33 Roma families** living in Block 72, to make way for commercial housing. Block 72 is an informal settlement on government-owned land in the city. The eviction was due to take place in November 2011, but it was delayed following protests by human rights groups, including Amnesty International. The city authorities have announced that they will carry out the eviction on 1 March, or as soon after that as the heavy snows in Belgrade clear.

Twenty of the families are internally displaced, having fled Kosovo after the war there in 1999. Twelve other families are residents of Belgrade, and one originates from southern Serbia. If the eviction goes ahead, the families registered as resident in Belgrade are likely to be offered accommodation in "container settlements", inhabited by other Roma families who have been forcibly evicted from other settlements. The metal containers are poorly ventilated, damp and overcrowded, and are usually on the outskirts of the city, far from public services and employment opportunities. Some of the families from Kosovo have been offered a place in collective centres for refugees, which are large buildings housing several families. However, these are inadequate due to poor infrastructure and lack of basic facilities, and the Serbian government is planning to close down all collective centres. Only one family has accepted this offer so far. Those that do not accept may be left homeless. The remaining ten families of the internally displaced were told by the authorities that they must return to Kosovo.

We previously stated that 27 families living in Block 61 in Belgrade were under threat of forced eviction. This information has now been corrected. The group under threat comprises 33 families, who live in Block 72.

Please write immediately in English or your own language to the authorities in Serbia, urging them to:

- Stop the forced eviction of Roma families living in Block 72 in Belgrade.
- Provide adequate alternative housing for all the affected families, as required by UN Guidelines and Principles on Development Based Evictions and Resettlement and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Serbia is a party.
- Ensure that the internally displaced families receive further assistance and protection, as required by the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 APRIL 2012 TO:

Minister for Environment, Mining and Spatial Planning

Oliver Dulić

Nemanjina 11

11000 Belgrade, Serbia

Email: kabinet@ekoplan.gov.rs

Fax: +381 11 361 77 22

Salutation: **Dear Minister**

Commissioner for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia

Vladimir Cucić

Narodnih heroja 4

11070 Belgrade, Serbia

Email: kirs@kirs.gov.rs

Salutation: **Dear Commissioner**

And copies to:

Minister for Human and Minority Rights,

Public Administration and Local Self-

Government

Milan Markovic

Bircaninova 6

11 000 Belgrade, Serbia

Email: kabinet@mduls.gov.rs

Fax: +381 11 268 53 96

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 323/11. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR70/028/2011/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Following pressure by human rights groups, a working group consisting of government and city authorities and human rights groups was created in November last year, in order to develop a resettlement action plan for the residents of Block 72. At a meeting of the working group in February 2012, the Ministry for Spatial Planning and Development announced that the eviction will be carried out as soon as weather conditions allow, most probably the week of 1 March.

This will be sixteenth forced eviction to take place in Belgrade that Amnesty International has documented since April 2009. Each resulted in people being rendered homeless. Some activists who tried to prevent evictions from happening were arrested. This is the first eviction to be carried out by the state authorities.

The situation of internally displaced families from Kosovo is of particular concern. According to the government, 20 of the 20 families originating from Kosovo had received assistance for returning to Kosovo in the past. However, as emphasized by local human rights groups, these families came back to Belgrade, because the authorities have failed to guarantee their sustainable return and reintegration in Kosovo in safety, dignity and freedom from discrimination.

The vulnerability of internally displaced people to forced evictions has been raised by the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Walter Kälin. In 2009, he reported that “almost a third of all Roma IDPs (32%, compared to 6.9% for non-Roma IDPs) surveyed reported to live in an object not intended for housing”. The Representative also expressed concern about the increasing number of forced evictions of Roma in Belgrade, including the eviction of IDPs from Kosovo, from informal settlements to clear space for public infrastructure projects. The Representative recommended that “the Government, [to] develop, in close consultation with civil society, international organizations and the Serbian Ombudsman, clear and uniform guidelines that direct municipal and other concerned authorities on how to handle such cases in line with international standards.”

While the government has recognized Roma from Kosovo as IDPs, the government has failed to provide them with basic rights or other forms of protection set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, including an adequate standard of living, which includes: essential food and potable water; basic shelter and housing; Essential medical services and sanitation. Roma IDPs living in informal settlements have not been granted these rights.

Serbia is a state party to international and regional human rights treaties which prohibit forced evictions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In particular the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in their General Comment 7 have stated that “evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights”. The Serbian government has failed to prevent forced evictions of Roma by the City of Belgrade, who not only lose their homes, but often their livelihoods and their only possessions.

The Serbian government has failed to comply with its obligations under these treaties including by adopting a law prohibiting forced evictions, which would ensure that the processes and safeguards, set out in the UN Guidelines and Principles on Development Based Evictions and Resettlement, are in place before any evictions are carried out.

Name: 33 families in Block 72 (previously given as 27 families in Block 61)

Gender m/f: Both

Further information on UA: 323/11 Index: EUR 70/006/2012 Issue Date: 24 February 2012