

URGENT ACTION

ROMA FAMILIES AT IMMEDIATE RISK OF EVICTION

Around 1500 Roma people are at risk of being forcibly evicted from their homes in Belvil, an informal settlement in Belgrade, Serbia's capital, at any time from 19 March. They have not been given information about resettlement and may be resettled in inadequate conditions or left homeless.

The planned eviction of the informal settlement was first announced by the Belgrade city authorities in March 2010. They stated that most of the residents of Belvil settlement would be evicted to make way for access roads for a new bridge over the River Sava. The authorities did not carry out any meaningful and genuine consultations with residents nor did they have a resettlement plan. However, following massive campaigning by Amnesty International and local human rights organizations, the eviction was put on hold. As a result of continued lobbying, the European Investment Bank (EIB), which is co-financing the Sava bridge project, was persuaded that the eviction should be carried out in accordance with international standards.

In April 2011, the city authorities, assisted by the EIB, called a meeting with those residents of Belvil who live on the route of the access road (around 100 families) and promised the eviction would be carried out according to international human rights standards. The authorities said that they would develop a detailed Resettlement Action Plan, which would be consulted with each affected individual. They also said that residents would be accommodated in pre-fabricated houses, which Amnesty International considered to be adequate housing.

However, the affected residents were not informed of any further developments until 15 March 2012, when the city authorities told all residents of Belvil that they would be soon evicted. On 16 March, the Belgrade city authorities distributed eviction notices to residents in the settlement who are not living on the route of the access road. They were told that they have three days to destroy and leave their homes. They were not consulted on any alternative housing options or on plans for resettlement, and the authorities have failed to respond to repeated requests for information. Those living on the route of the access roads were told they will also soon be evicted, but were not told when this would happen. Despite assurances from EIB and the city authorities, they were not given any information about their resettlement, including where they would be resettled and what kind of housing would be provided.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Urging the city authorities not to forcibly evict the Roma families living in Belvil or elsewhere in Belgrade;
- Urging them to undertake a genuine consultation with all affected people on all feasible alternatives to evictions and on options for resettlement, including the provision of adequate housing;
- Urging them to ensure that evictions are undertaken only as last resort, and after all legal protections and safeguards are in place including a comprehensive resettlement and compensation plan for all those affected.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND BEFORE 30 APRIL 2012 TO:

Mayor of Belgrade

Dragan Djilas
 Dragoslava Jovanovica 2,
 Belgrade 11000,
 Serbia
 Email: gradonacelnik@beogradsg.org.rs
 or natasa.golubovic@beogradsg.org.rs

Salutation: Dear Mr Djilas

Copies to:

Minister for Labour and Social Affairs
 Rasim Ljajić
 Ministarstvo rada i socijalne politike
 Nemanjina 22-24, 11000 Beograd
 Serbia
 Email: ministar@minrz.gov.rs

Salutation: Dear Minister

President of the Republic of Serbia

Boris Tadic
 Predsednik Republike Srbije
 Andricev Venac 1
 11000 Beograd, Serbia
 Email:
 kontakt.predsednik@predsednik.rs

Salutation: Dear President

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 8 April 2011, following huge international pressure, including by the European Investment Bank, the Belgrade City authorities held a meeting with Belvil residents. At the meeting, the affected families present (or their representatives) were informed that they would be resettled to several sites in and around Belgrade, and would be rehoused in prefabricated houses. Plans of the sites and drawings of the prefabricated houses were shown to the families. Amnesty International welcomed the commitment of the city to provide such housing, which the organization considered to be a far more adequate form of housing than the containers offered to those evicted from other settlement in Belgrade.

In January 2012, Amnesty International received reports from numerous sources, that the planned resettlement process was being subverted by a process through which the Roma families living on the route of the access roads were offered sums of money to leave the site. In the context of the lack of information from the city authorities on resettlement plans and the prolonged anxiety and insecurity that these vulnerable communities have been forced to live with, it is not surprising that many families – fearing that they will not be provided with any alternative accommodation – have accepted these sums of money and moved off the site. As a result, out of 100 families living on the route, there are only around 30 left.

Amnesty International is concerned that Belgrade city authorities will evict residents of Belvil in a similar way to that used in the other 16 forced evictions so far since 2009. In most cases, people are offered alternative accommodation in metal containers in segregated Roma settlements in the outskirts of the city, far from local public services. Amnesty International does not consider that these metal containers satisfy human rights criteria for adequate housing.

Houses in Belvil are built from recycled materials, including wood and cardboard, bricks and other salvaged building materials. Most families build their own houses. The most common occupation of the Belvil inhabitants is collecting and reselling scrap or recyclable materials, readily available in the centre of the city. They store the waste material in the settlement. If evicted, they will lose their only access to income.

Under international law, forced evictions are a gross violation of a range of human rights, including the rights to adequate housing guaranteed under Article 11.1 of the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights and the right to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interference with one's home under Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Serbia is a state party to both of these treaties. The right to adequate housing includes the right not to be forcibly evicted. A forced eviction is the removal of people against their will from the homes or land they occupy, without legal protections and other safeguards that include genuine consultation with those affected, prior and adequate notice, provision of adequate alternative housing and legal remedies for those affected. People are entitled to these safeguards regardless of whether they rent, own or lease the land or housing in question.

Name: 1500 Roma people

Gender m/f: Both

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