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Serbia: “Cleaning” of Roma settlement violates international law

Amnesty International condemns the forced eviction of Roma families from an informal settlement at Vidikovac in Čukarica municipality in Belgrade.

The forced eviction, which began on 22 April and continued the following day, was carried out by the Belgrade city authorities and Čukarica municipal authorities, with complete disregard for Serbia’s international and regional human rights obligations.

The organisation is also deeply worried that the authorities have described the forced eviction as a “cleaning operation”, showing a callous lack of respect for the human rights of the affected Roma.

Municipal and city officials told the affected Roma that they were carrying out a “cleaning operation”, based on a decision by the Communal Inspectorate. The city of Belgrade’s website featured a report on the forced eviction of the Roma families with the headline, “Cleaning the communal mess in Čukarica”, (Uklanjanje komunalnog nereda na Čukarici).

Amnesty International considers the way in which this eviction was conducted, under cover of a “cleaning operation”, underscores the absolute necessity for a law prohibiting forced evictions.

According to a TV interview with Alexandra Krstić Deputy Director of the City Social Welfare Department the “cleaning operation” will last for about seven days and will include other “unhygienic sites”. Amnesty International reminds the city authorities that if an informal settlement lacks water or sanitation, then they have a duty to introduce measures to help improve living conditions at the settlement, rather than forcibly evict people from their homes.

Amnesty International is concerned that other Roma families remain at risk of forced eviction and strongly urges the authorities to halt their plans immediately and to refrain from any further unlawful evictions, until adequate plans for resettlement and alternative accommodation can be identified.

The residents of the affected informal settlement in Čukarica did not receive any warning of the eviction: they were not consulted in advance nor were they provided with eviction notices, as required by law. When one man asked for the eviction notice, he was reportedly slapped and racially abused by a police officer; another man was reportedly arrested. More than 30 homes were demolished, and many people were unable to rescue their possessions before the bulldozers moved in. The affected families were not offered compensation for their damaged possessions and no adequate alternative housing was provided. An offer by the City Centre for Social Welfare to provide emergency accommodation for women and children only, in social welfare centres was only accepted by one woman. Families spent the night under plastic sheets and other materials they could recover from their homes.

Many of the affected Roma had been forcibly evicted from the Belvil settlement a year ago, and sent to inadequate or non-existent housing in southern Serbia. With no possibility of employment,

they had returned to Belgrade in search of work. Others, from the village of Tibuzde, near Vranje, have been living at the settlement in Vidikovac for years, after their entire village in southern Serbia was destroyed.

Amnesty International continues to campaign against forced evictions, and for the introduction of a legislative frame work which prohibits such evictions and provides guidelines to ensure that any further evictions are carried out according to international standards.

Public Document

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