

## JOINT STATEMENT: Committee of Ministers Fails Romani Children in Czech Republic

---

**DECEMBER 8, 2011** -- Romani children continue to languish in sub-standard schools as the Czech Republic flouts its legal obligations to make inclusive education a reality for all children in the country. Regrettably, the Council of Europe is doing far too little to pull the Czech authorities into line, three major international human rights groups said today.

The Open Society Justice Initiative, Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre are increasingly concerned that the Czech government continues to drag its feet on stopping the practice of disproportionately placing Romani children into schools segregated from their mainstream peers and taught a limited curriculum. This practice was condemned by Europe's top human rights court in 2007 as unlawful, amounting to a violation of Romani children's rights to an education and to be free from discrimination.

"In defying the clear mandate of the European Court of Human Rights, the Czech government is failing to give Romani children an equal chance at better opportunities in life," said James Goldston, Executive Director of the Open Society Justice Initiative. "Every year that goes by without change means more Romani children facing dead-end futures."

Yet the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers – the inter-governmental body charged with overseeing how states put decisions from the European Court into practice – appears to have chosen to adopt a deferential approach to the Czech government. Instead of focusing on the lack of change on the ground that is affecting thousands of Romani children, it welcomed minor steps taken by the government which are manifestly insufficient to solve the problem – the adoption of two administrative decrees.

"The Committee of Ministers has missed the point," said Dezideriu Gergely, Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Centre. "The Czech government must transform the way it effectively ensures inclusive education -- and this is not going to happen by simply tinkering around the edges of a few laws."

The changes required by the *DH and others v Czech Republic* judgment are far more extensive than anything the Czech government has put into place. Apart from compensating the 18 Romani children who brought the case, the European Court ordered the Czech government to institute measures that would put an end to the discrimination and that would redress its effects. But rights groups say that the Czech government has done little to meet its obligations.

“There have been significant set backs in the implementation of the necessary reforms. The national action plan for inclusive education has stalled, education experts have quit in protest at the government’s lack of political will to pursue an inclusive agenda. As a result, the Ministry of Education’s capacities to implement the European Court’s judgment are extremely limited,” said Nicola Duckworth, Amnesty International’s Director for Europe and Central Asia.

The three groups are calling on the Committee of Ministers to fulfill its mandate by rigorously monitoring the Czech Republic’s compliance with its legal obligations to implement the D.H. judgment, and properly debate the case at its June 2012 meeting. In so doing the Committee should require the Czech government to take demonstrated practical steps to educate Romani children together with non-Roma classmates. As a first step, the Czech government needs to collect and analyze data of both practical and mainstream schools, disaggregated by ethnicity and disability, in order to be able to make informed decisions on what needs to be done to cement real change on the ground.

**For more information or media enquiries, please contact:**

**Jonathan Birchall (English, French)**  
**Open Society Justice Initiative, New York**  
**Phone: +1-212-547-6958**  
**Email: [JBirchall@justiceinitiative.org](mailto:JBirchall@justiceinitiative.org)**

**Kateřina Šaldová (English, Czech)**  
**Amnesty International**  
**Phone: +420 224 243 600, Mobile: +420 724 133 134**  
**Email: [press@amnesty.cz](mailto:press@amnesty.cz)**