

AI Index: PRE 01/423/2012
06 September 2012

Romania: Scores of Roma face imminent forced eviction

More than 100 Romani adults and children will be forcibly evicted from an informal settlement in northern Romania unless local authorities back down on a pledge to demolish their homes, Amnesty International said today.

Local officials in the northern town of Baia Mare have given 26 Romani families living in the Pirita settlement until the morning of Friday, 7 September to dismantle their homes. If they fail to comply, the authorities have said they will move in and demolish the housing, leaving the community with nowhere to go.

In a particularly cruel twist, the local authorities have said they expect the evicted Romani families to reimburse the demolition costs.

“This is an unconscionable move to purge Romani families – some of whom have lived in Pirita for years – from their homes, without prior consultation and without providing adequate alternative housing in line with international standards,” said David Diaz-Jogeix, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Europe and Central Asia Programme.

“Evictions at Pirita or other settlements must only be carried out as a last resort, after all other feasible alternatives have been explored – forced evictions must be avoided at all costs and any resettlement must be carried out in compliance with international human rights standards.

“It seems to be part of a concerted plan to forcibly evict Romani communities around Baia Mare, which would leave hundreds of children, women and men in the streets with nowhere to go.”

A wider plan

Pirita is one of five informal settlements inhabited by Roma in Baia Mare – the others are Craica, Ferneziu, Valea Borcutului and Horea.

During several visits by Amnesty International delegates, residents expressed fears about the insecurity they face as a result of the constant threat of forced eviction, the lack of formal tenancy for their property, and the absence of adequate information about decisions taken by local authorities that impact on their lives.

Baia Mare authorities have twice in the past announced plans to evict Roma and others from the five informal settlements, in July 2010 and August 2011. But widespread domestic and international criticism led to these plans being halted.

In April 2012, municipal authorities served demolition orders to some 300 Romani families living in three informal settlements, including Pirita.

In the following months, dozens of families were relocated to three former office buildings in the

chemical factory CUPROM on the town's outskirts – an arrangement which falls far short of the criteria for adequate alternative housing.

On 7 June, Amnesty International supported the calls of over 30 Romanian NGOs protesting in the capital Bucharest over the relocation of Baia Mare's Romani families without adequate prior consultation.

'Pockets of poverty'

The latest threat to demolish Pirita and evict its residents was the key priority of the political platform of Baia Mare's new mayor, Catalin Chereches, elected in June this year.

After taking office, the mayor reiterated the commitment to eliminate the "pockets of poverty" in the town. These plans include the demolition of Pirita and Craica – after viewing the Roma settlements from the air while promoting a sky-diving event, Chereches proclaimed that the communities could be razed in less than an hour.

Local authorities have justified the planned demolitions on the grounds that no formal authorization had been given for the construction of housing there. But many of the Romani families in Pirita have been living there for years, while the authorities have tolerated the settlement.

Amnesty International warned the Baia Mare municipal authorities that their plans to evict the Romani families from settlements seem to completely lack human rights safeguards.

"Baia Mare's authorities must urgently engage in genuine consultation with Roma people across the town to develop long-term housing alternatives in line with established criteria for adequate housing," said Diaz-Jogeix.