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## **Slovak authorities in breach of obligations to Romani school children**

The Slovakian government's continuing inaction over the segregation of thousands of Roma children is a shameful and unlawful affront to society, said Amnesty International in a report published today. Thousands of Romani children in Slovakia are starting the new school year again in separate schools and classes.

"It is high time the Slovak authorities end the discriminatory practice of segregation in education and recognize their responsibility to ensure that all children in the country have equal access to quality education. Otherwise, the lives of these children will be blighted for ever by inferior education, humiliation and separation," said Jezerca Tigani, Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia Programme.

Amnesty International's report, *Unfulfilled promises: Failing to end segregation of Roma pupils in Slovakia*, exposes the continuous and unacknowledged failure of the Slovak authorities to eliminate the longstanding discrimination of Roma in the education system.

According to a 2012 United Nations Development Programme survey, around 43 per cent of Roma in mainstream schools were enrolled in ethnically segregated classes. By failing to introduce a comprehensive national reform the Slovak government is tolerating unlawful discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity in education.

A Romani mother from the town of Levoča, whose children were placed in Roma-only classes told Amnesty International: "I don't accept segregation. My child should receive the same level of education as non-Roma children."

On 30 October 2012, the Regional Court in Prešov, eastern Slovakia, provided the Roma community with a glimmer of hope. It ruled that the placement of Romani pupils in separate classes at an elementary school in the village of Šarišské Michaľany was a violation of the Anti-Discrimination Act and an infringement of human dignity. The school was ordered to change the arrangements for Romani pupils by the beginning of school year 2013/2014.

The case highlighted how individual schools and local authorities lack the understanding of what constitutes discrimination and segregation. They also lack additional funding to provide for ethnically and socially diverse pupil population and to ensure equal and inclusive education.

"The authorities must assist the school in Šarišské Michaľany with clear guidelines and additional resources to comply with the court ruling. This will encourage other schools to break the pattern of segregation on ethnic grounds. It will also send a signal to the rest of the society that ethnic segregation will not be tolerated," said Jezerca Tigani.

“The onus is on the Slovak government to enforce the right to access to education without discrimination through comprehensive reform and targeted assistance to the relevant bodies within the educational system.”

The widespread and continued segregation of Roma school children in Slovakia has wider implications as the authorities of the country are also breaching international human rights law, and European Union (EU ) anti-discrimination legislation. The European Commission has the responsibility, the obligation and the tools to ensure member states comply with EU law including through infringement proceedings.

"It is time the Commission started taking stronger stance and action vis-a-vis countries, such as Slovakia, where the government is failing to end widespread and systemic segregation that has no place in 21st century Europe and is in complete contradiction with EU law and the principles of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms that the EU prides to be founded on," said Jezerca Tigani.