

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Romani woman shot dead in Hungary

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the killing of a Romani woman in eastern Hungary in the early hours of 3 August. The 45-year-old woman, Maria Balogh, was shot dead in the village of Kisléta and her 13-year-old daughter was seriously injured in the attack, which happened just one day after Hungary marked International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.

Initial police reports suggest that the attack conforms to a recent pattern of racist attacks targeting Romani communities in Hungary. According to media reports, the house, which was located on the outskirts of the town, was attacked in the middle of the night.

Amnesty International has voiced concern about the growing number of attacks against the Romani community in Hungary over the last year and the failure of the police to investigate such incidents effectively. Between January 2008 and June 2009, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) documented 39 attacks against Roma and their property. Eight people have died in these attacks. The increasing number of attacks against Roma individuals and their homes has created a climate of fear and intimidation in that community.

Róbert Csorba, 27, and his five-year-old son were killed while fleeing their house which was set on fire as a result of a suspected arson attack in Tatárszentgyörgy on 23 February 2009. Jenő Kóka, a 54-year-old Romani man, was shot dead as he left his home to make his way to the nightshift in the local chemical factory where he worked at Tiszalök on 22 April.

Last November, a man and woman were shot through the window after their house was petrol bombed in Nagycsécs, a village in north eastern Hungary.

Amnesty International has welcomed the Hungarian government's firmly condemnation of the attacks against members of the Romani community. However an effective police investigation is urgently required.

Investigations into a number of recent cases of racist attacks have been reported to be inadequate. In the Tatárszentgyörgy case, for example, the head of the local criminal investigation department violated the rules of on-sight investigation, according to a report issued by the ERRC, the Legal Defence Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities (NEKI) and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ).

Amnesty International welcomes the decision that this most recent killing, in Kisléta, and its apparent racial motive will be investigated by the Hungarian National Bureau of Investigation. The agency was established specifically to investigate serious crimes.

Many Roma in Hungary live in fear. Nobody knows where and against whom the next attack is going to take place. The Hungarian authorities must take positive action to address underlying prejudices against the Roma community. They must also put policies in place to prevent such attacks and prosecute those breaching the law.

Amnesty International is also concerned that there might be more cases of attacks that remain unreported. In its 2009 Report on Hungary, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance noted that the "victims of such acts may often be reluctant to report the racist

elements of violent offences against the person, whether owing to a sense of shame, due to fear of retribution, or because they feel it is unlikely that serious follow-up will be given to this aspect of a crime."

Background

Roma face systematic discrimination across Europe, remaining largely excluded from public life and unable to enjoy full access to housing, education, employment and health services. Many live in what amount to segregated ghettos, physically isolated from other parts of the community, and often with limited or no water or electrical supplies, sanitation systems, paved roads or other basic infrastructure. Unlawful forced evictions of Roma in some countries drive them deeper into poverty.

Amnesty International has worked alongside others for a number of years to combat such anti-Roma discrimination, documenting cases of violent attacks against Roma individuals and whole communities, as well as cases of ill-treatment by the police, and campaigning particularly for access to housing and education rights.

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