

# URGENT ACTION

## FORCED EVICTION OF IRISH TRAVELLERS IMMINENT

**Up to 86 Irish Traveller families living at Dale Farm in Cray's Hill, Essex face imminent forced eviction from their homes, possibly as soon as 19 September. A forced eviction would leave many residents homeless or without adequate alternative housing.**

The written notice from Basildon Council to 86 families living at Dale Farm requiring them to vacate their homes, expired on 31 August. The notice applied to between 300 and 400 residents occupying sites which the Council regards as 'unauthorized developments'. On 31 August, the High Court of England and Wales refused an emergency application for judicial review by some of the residents seeking an injunction against the eviction.

On 5 September Basildon Council confirmed that electricity supplies would be cut off on 19 September and that its contractors would then "take direct action to clear the site". This was despite the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 2 September calling on UK authorities to halt the eviction, "provide alternative culturally appropriate accommodation" prior to any eviction, and comply with international and regional human rights norms.

The proposed eviction would leave residents of Dale Farm without adequate alternative accommodation, and without access to essential services such as schooling for children and continuous medical treatment for residents with serious illnesses. In many cases residents fear they will be left homeless. Many Irish Travellers at Dale Farm expressed concern about wider discrimination against their community, and feared they would be unable to find a home that they consider culturally adequate if a negotiated settlement was not reached. There has been no genuine consultation consistent with international human rights standards on options for alternative culturally adequate housing for those affected. While some have been offered 'bricks and mortar' housing, many do not want this, and the Council has not offered alternative culturally adequate housing to all those residents facing eviction.

### Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Urging the local authority to stop the planned forced evictions at Dale Farm and to refrain from cutting off electricity supplies to those caravans identified for eviction;
- Calling on the authorities to comply with regional and international human rights standards on evictions; and to ensure that any proposed enforcement is in accordance with the local authority's anti-discrimination obligations under domestic and international law; and
- Calling on the authorities to work towards a negotiated settlement with those living at Dale Farm which includes genuine consultation and, if an eviction is unavoidable, to ensure they have adequate alternative housing which allows them to express their cultural identity.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

#### Chief Executive

Bala Mahendran  
Basildon Borough Council  
The Basildon Centre, St Martin's Square  
Basildon, Essex SS14 1DL, UK  
Fax: +44 1268 294747  
Email: [bala.mahendran@basildon.gov.uk](mailto:bala.mahendran@basildon.gov.uk)  
Salutation: Dear Mr Mahendran

#### Leader of the Council

Councillor Tony Ball  
Basildon Borough Council  
The Basildon Centre, St Martin's Square  
Basildon, Essex SS14 1DL, UK  
Fax: +44 1268 294 350  
Email: [membersupport@basildon.gov.uk](mailto:membersupport@basildon.gov.uk)  
Salutation: Dear Councillor Ball

#### **And copies to:**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Bob Neill MP  
Department for Communities and Local Government, Eland House  
Bressenden Place, SW1E 5DU, UK  
Fax: +44 303 444 3986  
Email: [bob.neill@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bob.neill@communities.gsi.gov.uk)  
Salutation: Dear Mr Neill

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 245/11. Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR45/013/2011/en>

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Under international law, evictions may be carried out only as a last resort, once all alternatives have been explored in genuine consultation with the affected communities. The authorities then have a duty to provide them with adequate notice; legal remedies, adequate alternative housing (including culturally adequate housing) and compensation. They must ensure no one is made homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction.

Dale Farm, which is located on land owned by some Traveller, Romani and Gypsy families, is the UK's largest Traveller settlement. Part of Dale Farm was granted permission for residential use, and is regarded by Basildon Council as 'authorized'. The part of Dale Farm where up to 400 Irish Traveller residents now face forced eviction, however, has repeatedly been denied planning permission for residential use on the basis of local zoning restrictions. Some residents in the 'unauthorized' portion have lived there for over 11 years, and told Amnesty International that they have never before lived in one place for that long without being forcibly evicted or 'moved on' by police. Amnesty International delegates conducted two site visits to Dale Farm in April and May 2011, following the Council's March 2011 to "undertake a site clearance". The delegates spoke with several Irish Traveller residents of Dale Farm, local NGO volunteers, and representatives of the Dale Farm Housing Association and Gypsy and Traveller associations. The residents feared that a forced eviction would uproot the children of Dale Farm from a school that has served the community for several years, and potentially move them to a new school environment where they could face discrimination. Seriously ill residents raised anxieties about the effect of the planned eviction on their access to continuing medical care. NGO volunteers expressed serious concern about the negative impact on the health of seriously ill residents and those families with young children of cutting off electricity and water supplies. Several residents said that the Council has not provided a culturally adequate alternative, and feared that their extended family would be destroyed by breaking extended families up into groups and requiring some to live in "bricks and mortar" housing rather than caravans.

Irish Travellers are an ethnic group, originally from Ireland, who are recognized and protected as an ethnic group in English law. Many Irish Travellers live in caravans on unauthorized encampments or on authorized sites. A shortage in site provision following legislative changes in the mid-1990s removing the obligation on local authorities to provide sites for Travellers has meant that in recent years many Travellers have either had to live in unauthorized settlements or in 'bricks and mortar' housing. The same legislative changes also increased police powers to evict Travellers from a wide variety of sites including common land and highway verges. Irish Travellers, along with other Romani, Travellers and Gypsies in the UK, face widespread discrimination and significant obstacles in being able to fully enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights, including housing, education and health. The central government is in the process of proposing new planning guidelines, which are expected to contain stronger enforcement powers for local authorities to evict unauthorized sites. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's concluding observations of 5 September drew attention to the widespread discrimination against and marginalization of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK, the shortage of stopping sites, and called on the UK to ensure that affected Traveller and Gypsy communities are adequately consulted prior to the enforcement of any measures as proposed in the new planning guidelines.

On 5 August the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing and the UN Independent Expert on minority issues called for an agreement on relocation in conformity with international human rights standards and emphasized the needs of residents with disabilities or serious illnesses and the estimated 110 children living there. A number of religious or faith leaders in the UK have also called for a stop to the eviction on humanitarian grounds. On 2 September the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights reportedly called the proposed eviction "immature and unwise" and urged local authorities to reach a negotiated settlement with the affected residents.

Name: 86 families

Gender m/f: Both

Further information UA: 245/11 Index: EUR 45/015/2011 Issue Date: 5 September 2011