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Hungary urged to thoroughly investigate attacks on Roma

Fear spread to other villages and other counties. Roma were afraid everywhere, they felt that the police are not able to protect them.

Roma in Kisléta talking to Amnesty International

The Hungarian government should thoroughly investigate racially motivated violent attacks against Roma and provide the victims with access to justice, Amnesty International has said in a new report published today.

[*Violent attacks against Roma in Hungary*](#) shows how racially motivated crimes impact on individual victims, communities and society as a whole. It also shows how shortcomings in the Hungarian justice system hinder the prevention of and response to such attacks.

Between January 2008 and August 2009 Roma in Hungary were subjected to a series of Molotov cocktail attacks and shootings in which six people died. Among the victims were a couple in their forties, an elderly man, a father and his four-year-old boy, and a single mother with a 13-year-old daughter.

“The Hungarian authorities have a duty to prevent discrimination and to ensure justice for victims of hate crimes. This includes the obligation to investigate whether or not racial and ethnic hatred or prejudice played a role in these and any similar attacks,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

“By combating racism and racial violence, the authorities will send an important message that diversity should not be perceived as a threat. They must send a clear message that racism will not be tolerated.”

Hungarian law criminalizes incitement of hatred and racist crimes. However, the number of indictments and convictions on charges of racially motivated attacks appears low when compared to the number of reports of such attacks collated by NGOs.

Hungarian police said that there were 12 racially motivated attacks on Roma communities in 2008 and six in 2009. However NGOs recorded 25 racially motivated attacks in 2009 and 17 attacks in 2008.

This gap is attributed to the underreporting of hate crimes by victims often because of fear or by the failure of the police and prosecutors to take into account the racist motive of offences.

Many of the Roma victims interviewed by Amnesty International were traumatised and not aware of the support services or how to access them.

“The failure to record, investigate, prosecute, punish racially motivated crimes and provide remedies for the victims is letting down the Romani community in Hungary,” Nicola Duckworth said.

“The government is obliged under international law to combat discrimination and a key part of that is collating information on the existence and extent of hate crimes.”

Amnesty International also calls on the Hungarian authorities to:

- Ensure that members of the Romani community, as well as members of other vulnerable groups are protected from violence;
- Ensure that police officers and prosecutors receive training on the nature of hate crimes and the role of police in combating them;
- Work with Roma self-governments, NGOs and human rights organizations to encourage Roma to report hate crimes and ensure that the victims have access to redress, including access to justice, rehabilitation and compensation.

Cases

In the early morning of 23 February 2009, 27-year-old Róbert Cs. and his four-year-old son were both shot dead when they attempted to escape a house set on fire by Molotov cocktails in the village of Tatárszentgyörgy in Pest County. Although shots had been heard, the initial police investigation treated the case as an accident. Only after the intervention of Viktória Mohácsi, then a Member of the European Parliament, investigators found the bottles used for the Molotov cocktails, as well as lead shot and shot cartridges.

The police report was changed after the autopsy which confirmed that Róbert and his son were shot dead. The Independent Police Complaints Board concluded that the failure of the police to treat the murder as a hate crime seriously hindered the investigation and thus violated the rights of the victims.

On 15 June 2008, a 14-year old Romani boy K.H. and his cousin F.N. were stabbed by a 40-year old man following a verbal argument in a pub in a village of Fényeslitke.

According to a court judgement, the man started an argument with the victims because he resented the fact that F.N. had turned his back to him while the man was standing at the bar. K.H. and F.N. decided to leave the pub. Once they reached the door, K.H. allegedly told the man: “If you want something, let’s go out.” The man took out a 11 cm-long and 2.5 cm-wide pocket knife and stabbed K. H. three times in the chest. He then stabbed also F.N. in the chest and fled. K.H. died at the scene as a result of the stab wounds. F.N. suffered life-threatening injuries. F.N.’s and K.H.’s families were reportedly not provided with adequate advice and support during the investigation. The legal representative of K.H.’s family alleged that racial motivation was not pursued during the investigation. The victim’s legal representative told Amnesty International that he had identified two witnesses who claimed they heard the offender saying he would carry out the crime because “No Roma should turn his back on him”.

Background

Roma in Hungary are severely affected by poverty - seven times more than non-Roma. They are marginalized and discriminated against in their access to education, housing and employment. Romani children are frequently placed in special education designed for children with mental disabilities and are segregated in separate Roma-only classes and schools. Discriminatory rules and practices of local authorities towards Romani families impede their access to social housing. The unemployment rate of Roma is estimated to be 70 per cent, more than 10 times the national average.