

URGENT ACTION

VIGILANTES THREATEN ROMA COMMUNITY

Following an anti-Roma march by the far-right Jobbik party in the village of Gyöngyöspata on 6 March, three vigilante groups have been 'patrolling' the area harassing and intimidating Roma residents. Local Roma have allegedly been racially abused and there is fear for their safety. The vigilante groups have announced that their next target will be Roma in the town of Hajdúhadháza. Police have reportedly taken no action.

On 6 March, Jobbik held a 2 to 3,000 strong march in the village, situated to the north east of Budapest, reportedly invited there 'for the protection of Hungarians' following an alleged incident where an elderly man had committed suicide following harassment by Roma residents. Gabor Vona, the leader of Jobbik spoke of 'Gypsy terror'.

Following the march, up to 200 vigilantes from the groups New Hungarian Guard, Civil Guard Association for a Better Future and Vagabonds for the Protection of Hungarians, are alleged to have stayed in the village and are harassing and verbally abusing local Roma residents. The harassment has caused many Roma families to stop sending their children to school. The groups are also alleged to have shouted outside the houses of Roma residents during the night, made verbal death threats and threatened them with weapons and dogs. The vigilante groups were reportedly marching on the streets in military outfits, and in some cases carrying weapons such as whips and axes.

Local NGO representatives, Amnesty International Hungary's staff and other activists have witnessed some of these acts of harassment and stated that the police have not acted to prevent it. However, four people were arrested on 16 March 2011, following a village meeting in which Roma residents of the village allegedly did not participate due to the climate of racism. Police check-points were eventually established but some reports state that Roma residents were told to 'behave' and nothing would happen to them.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Hungarian or your own language calling on the authorities to:

- take immediate and proactive measures to protect Roma communities in Gyöngyöspata, Hajdúhadháza and other parts of Hungary from harassment and violent attacks;
- publicly condemn discriminatory violence, and incitement to discriminatory violence, against any section of Hungarian society;
- vigorously and thoroughly investigate acts of racially motivated harassment and violence;
- and ensure that the perpetrators of such acts are prosecuted under laws which provide penalties reflecting the gravity of the abuse.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 APRIL 2011 TO:

Prime Minister

Viktor Orbán
1357 Budapest, Pf. 6
Kossuth Lajos tér 2-4.
Hungary
Fax: +36-1-795-0381
Email: orbanviktor@orbanviktor.hu
titkarsag@me.gov.hu
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Interior

dr. Sándor Pintér
2-4. József Attila Street, 1051 Budapest
Pf.: 314
1903 Budapest
Fax: +36-1-441-1720
Email: ugyfelszolgalat@bm.gov.hu
Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

President & Vice-President of the
Parliamentary Human Rights Cttee
dr. Tamás Lukács & Tímea Szabó
1358 Budapest
Széchenyi rkp. 19.
Fax: +36-1-441-5986 +36-1-441-5180
Email: tamas.lukacs@parlament.hu
timea.szabo@parlament.hu
Salutation: Dear Dr Lukács; Dear Ms Szabó

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Hungarian authorities have an obligation under international human rights law to ensure the security and physical integrity of their citizens, without discrimination, and to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress for racially-motivated attacks including harassment by non-state actors. According to the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the authorities are obliged to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitements to, or acts of, discriminatory violence. In its General Recommendation no. 27, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) recommends that state parties ensure protection of the security and physical integrity of Roma, without any discrimination, by adopting measures to prevent racially motivated acts of violence against them. The authorities are also obliged to ensure prompt action by the police, the prosecutors and the judiciary for investigating and punishing such acts; and to ensure that perpetrators, be they public officials or other persons, do not enjoy any degree of impunity.

The European Court of Human Rights, in its 2005 judgment in the case of *Nachova and Others v. Bulgaria*, stated that racial violence is a particular affront to human dignity and requires from the authorities special vigilance and a vigorous reaction. The Court stressed that the authorities must use all available means to combat racist violence, and stated that, “[w]here there is suspicion that racial attitudes induced a violent act, it is particularly important that the official investigation is pursued with vigour and impartiality, having regard to the need to reassert continuously society’s condemnation of racism and ethnic hatred and to maintain the confidence of minorities in the ability of the authorities to protect them from the threat of racist violence.” The obligation to investigate possible racial motivation of attacks applies to attacks believed to have been carried out by state and non-state actors alike. In the case of *Šečić v. Croatia*, concerning police investigations into a racist attack against a person of Roma origin by individuals suspected of belonging to a skinhead group, the European Court underlined that “[t]reating racially induced violence and brutality on an equal footing with cases that have no racist overtones would be turning a blind eye to the specific nature of acts that are particularly destructive of fundamental rights”.

In Amnesty International’s report ‘Violent attacks against Roma in Hungary: Time to investigate racial motivation (AI Index: EUR 27/001/2010), the danger that racially motivated violence poses on Roma was highlighted through interviews with victims and their families. The report outlined a number of violent attacks against Roma in Hungary between 2008 and 2009 including a series of attacks in which six men, women and children were killed. The trial of the suspects in the so-called ‘series of attacks’ is due to start on 25 March 2011 in Budapest. These attacks highlight the necessity for the Hungarian authorities to address the seriousness of racially motivated violence by recognizing this danger and acting to prevent it.

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