

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Italy: stop forced evictions and provide adequate alternative housing for Roma families in Rome

One year after the launch of the briefing paper *The wrong answer – Italy's Nomad Plan violates the housing rights of Roma in Rome* (Index: EUR 30/001/2010), Amnesty International reiterates its call to stop forced evictions, to fully review the “Nomad Plan” to bring it in line with international law and standards and to provide adequate alternative housing after genuine consultation with the affected communities.

Amnesty International remains extremely concerned about the Italian authorities' failure to ensure the right to adequate housing and non-discrimination for Roma people in Rome. The organization reiterates its concern that the “Nomad Plan” drives those affected deeper into poverty, segregation and marginalization.

In December 2010, the national government extended for another year the special powers conferred to the Prefects to confront the so-called “Nomad Emergency” in five Italian regions, including Lazio, Rome's region. The “Nomad Plan”, devised by Rome's Prefect and Mayor in 2009, continues to be implemented. Based on the preconceived assumption that all Roma are nomads, this plan pursues the forced eviction of some existing camps, the upgrading of others and the building of new ones outside Rome, thus perpetuating segregation and failing to realize the housing rights of the Roma community of Rome.

The Italian government is obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of the Roma, including the rights to housing and non-discrimination. Forced evictions are prohibited under international human rights law. Evictions must only be undertaken as a last resort and only after genuine consultations are held with affected communities to explore all feasible alternatives to evictions. Legal and procedural protections such as prior notice, access to effective remedies, and provision of compensation must be in place before evictions are carried out and all those who are unable to provide for themselves must be given adequate alternative housing. In order to be adequate, housing must be in line with international standards. States parties of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, such as Italy, are required “to develop and implement policies and projects aimed at avoiding segregation of Roma communities in housing”, and “to refrain from placing Roma in camps outside populated areas that are isolated and without access to health care and other facilities”. (General Recommendation 27 of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination)

Segregation of Roma families, including children, in degraded and overcrowded settlements therefore violates international human rights law by which Italy is bound. The lack of security and inadequate living conditions in makeshift camps cannot be solved by forced evictions, which will leave the communities in a worse housing and living conditions.

When Amnesty International launched its report and campaign to stop the “Nomad Plan” in March 2010, Rome's authorities had just commenced its implementation, with the closure of the “Casilino 900” settlement, one of the biggest Roma camps in Europe. Although the authorities then suspended the eviction of the “Tor dei Cenci” camp, which remains on the

plans for the next future, in December 2010 they went ahead with the closure of the “La Martora” settlement. Those who were evicted and “temporarily” placed in five existing camps segregated from the rest of the city and monitored with 24 hours CCTV cameras, are still waiting for the adequate alternative accommodation they were promised. As a result of new arrivals, these camps have become overcrowded and living conditions therein have further deteriorated. In an interview released on 8 February 2011 on the major national TV broadcast, Rome’s Mayor publicly stated that the municipality is not offering better solutions – including access to social housing – “because otherwise we would risk attracting hundreds of thousands of nomads”, thereby further stigmatizing Roma and implying that rights are withheld from them in order to deter others from moving to Rome.

Further statements indicating that the total number of Roma people in the capital should be capped at around 6,000 and that evictions and expulsions would be used as a tool to achieve this number, are also a source of concern. Starting from September 2010, the authorities engaged in a wave of forced evictions of small, unauthorized settlements – the so-called “micro-camps”. Such evictions are ongoing, the latest in time having been reported to Amnesty International on 15 March. According to local NGOs, in most of the cases those being evicted are not notified in advance, nor provided with alternative housing, despite respective unequivocal safeguards in international human rights law. As a consequence, many families are trapped in a cycle of forced evictions, being forced to move from one unauthorized settlement to another, to build shacks with materials of recovery and to live in dangerous and unhealthy conditions. It is estimated that the number of Roma living in unauthorized micro-camps in Rome has remained around 2,000-2,500, although they would now be scattered in around 250 micro-camps, as opposed to the about 80 that could be counted in Rome when the Nomad Plan was devised.

The terrible and unsafe conditions in Roma micro-camps in Rome, without any long-term solution, as well as their potential tragic consequences, became apparent on the night of 6 February 2011, when four Roma children aged between four and 11 were killed in a fire while sleeping in a shack. A debate started immediately after as to the responsibility for the tragedy and to measures in order to prevent any similar disgraces to happen again in the future.

Amnesty International rejects the statement by the Mayor of Rome at the time, according to which such an incident would not have happened if only the Nomad Plan had been fully implemented, as “bureaucracy” had hampered the construction of a new camp nearby. As a matter of fact, the “Nomad Plan” has never foreseen the creation of any alternative housing for those living in the micro-camps. The children who died on 6 February had reportedly been evicted from another irregular settlement about one year before, without being offered any alternative accommodation, and thus took shelter in a shack in poor and unsafe conditions. It seems likely that, had the family's right to adequate housing been fulfilled at the time, the deaths of these four children could have been avoided. Since the tragedy, local authorities are at least acknowledging that solutions need to be found for those living in micro-camps, but options currently discussed do not seem to include plans for the durable provision of adequate alternative housing, nor a meaningful process of consultation of the affected communities.

Amnesty International has raised its concerns about the situation of Roma families in Rome in several circumstances, including in a letter to the Mayor of Rome, dated 22 September 2010, which remains unanswered. During the past year local and national authorities have often returned on the subject of the alleged “Nomad Emergency” in Rome and throughout the country, regularly recurring to the rhetoric of “security”. Amnesty International is dismayed by the fact that it is not the security of Roma people, which is being discussed, despite apparent security concerns linked to hazardous living conditions of the affected communities. Amnesty International believes that the real emergency consists of a pattern of forced evictions, which only drive Roma families further into poverty, disrupting children’s frequency at school and destroying any chance of integration and social inclusion. Amnesty International considers that the “Nomad Plan” itself is discriminatory and contravenes international law.

The Italian national and the Rome local authorities must immediately stop carrying out forced evictions and revise the “Nomad Plan” as a matter of urgency to bring it in line with international law. Adequate alternative housing solutions must be provided after a meaningful consultation of Roma communities, so that the Roma affected are enabled to live in real homes, where they are not deprived of their human rights. All those who were forcibly evicted must be provided with access to effective remedies.

Take action here: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/appeals-for-action/roma-children-and-their-families-should-live-real-homes>

Amnesty International publications:

Italy: The wrong answer: Italy's 'Nomad Plan' violates the housing rights of Roma in Rome,
EUR 30/001/2010, 11 March 2010,
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR30/001/2010/en/eadb2d84-ade5-467d-9da5-3cb5b2065ffe/eur300012010en.pdf>

This work forms part of Amnesty International's global Demand Dignity campaign and the European Fight Against Discrimination campaign.

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