

AI Index: PRE01/593/2011
29 November 2011

Italy needs to make things right for the Roma

The Italian authorities must act immediately to combat discrimination against Roma and provide redress for those affected by the widespread human rights violations perpetrated under the illegal state of emergency.

Amnesty International's call comes after the Council of State, the highest administrative court, in the country, ruled unlawful the 2008 decree declaring a state of emergency in relation to nomad settlements (the "Nomad Emergency").

Amnesty International's report [*Zero tolerance for Roma': Forced evictions and discrimination against Roma in Milan*](#), released today, describes how under the "Nomad Emergency" the authorities have been able to close down authorized and unauthorized Romani camps in Milan in derogation of laws that protect human rights.

"Declaring a baseless state of emergency targeting an ethnic minority and maintaining it in force for three and half years is a scandal. The nomad emergency was illegal and discriminatory under international human rights law; it should have never been declared," said Valentina Vitali Amnesty International's researcher on Italy.

"Under the "Nomad Emergency" the authorities were able to carry out forced evictions with impunity. Now Mario Monti's cabinet must make things right. They have to provide remedies for all those affected by forced evictions and other human rights violations. They must put human rights at the top of their agenda."

In May 2008, the Italian government declared a state of emergency in relation to the settlements of nomad communities in several regions including Lombardy, of which Milan is part, to address what they considered a "situation of grave social alarm, with possible repercussions for the local population in terms of public order and security".

The emergency referred to nomad settlements but in reality it targeted Roma communities, the vast majority of whom are not nomadic. On 16 November 2011, the Italian Council of State declared the "Nomad Emergency" unlawful. As of today, the Italian government has yet to announce how it intends to comply with this judgement.

The "Nomad Emergency" allowed the authorities to unleash a wave of forced evictions from unauthorized camps in Milan that made hundreds of Roma families homeless. These evictions were carried out in the absence of any proper procedure and without any offers of adequate alternative housing. The consequences for Roma families have been devastating, particularly for hundreds of children whose schooling has been disrupted.

A mother of five children who has been evicted several times with her family from a number of unauthorized settlements in Milan told Amnesty International:

“The evictions hurt us; they take away our rights and our happiness. The police treat us like thieves; they shout at us, they push us. It is traumatic, my eight-year-old son did not speak for months after an eviction because of the shock.”

Under international law, evictions may be carried out only as a last resort, once all other feasible alternatives have been explored and only when appropriate procedural and legal safeguards are in place.

These include genuine consultation with the affected people, prior adequate and reasonable notice, adequate alternative housing and compensation for all losses, safeguards on how evictions are carried out, and access to effective legal remedies and procedures, including legal aid where necessary.

Governments are also required to ensure that no one is rendered homeless or vulnerable to other human rights violations as a consequence of an eviction. To date Italy has failed to adopt and enforce a clear prohibition on forced evictions in line with international human rights standards.

“The authorities in Milan must immediately stop all forced evictions. They must provide adequate alternative housing, without discrimination, to all people being evicted who are unable to provide for themselves; in particular, the office of the Mayor must ensure that emergency shelter is offered to all persons who require it, without separating families,” said Valentina Vitali.

In Milan, the state of emergency also paved the way for the plan agreed by national and local authorities to close almost all authorized camps housing Roma. The plan is also linked to the universal Exposition to take place in Milan in 2015, as building projects for this international event have already led to the closure of two authorized camps.

“The authorities in Milan must suspend and revise plans to close authorized camps to ensure that they fully comply with human rights standards. They must put in place legal protections for those affected, engage in genuine consultations with them and provide them with adequate housing alternatives” said Valentina Vitali.

“Six months after taking up the function of mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia still has to show that the wind has really changed for Romani women, men and children in Milan. A real change for them would mean a stop to forced evictions and to discrimination together with the beginning of a meaningful dialogue aimed at addressing their housing conditions in accordance with international standards.”