

URGENT ACTION

STOP FORCED EVICTIONS OF ROMA IN SERBIA

The authorities in Belgrade, Serbia's capital, are preparing to carry out forced eviction of a Roma community, living in an informal settlement in an area known as Belvil. At least 300 households will be demolished to make way for a new road. The families could be left homeless as a result of the evictions, which are due to start within days.

On 30 March, Belgrade's Deputy Mayor publicly announced that evictions would begin at the end of April to make way for an access road for a planned new bridge over the River Sava. The Roma in Belvil have not yet been given any information about evictions plan. The authorities have made no attempt to consult with the affected community on the eviction plans or feasible alternatives to evictions. The community has not yet been informed of, or offered any alternative adequate housing. Instead, the Deputy Mayor has said that the families will be housed in containers. Other Roma families in Belgrade are currently living in these containers after being evicted last year. The containers are poorly ventilated, damp and overcrowded.

Over the past week Amnesty International has been informed by several sources that Belgrade city employees have visited Belvil and threatened Roma that they will be evicted soon. According to one report, four families have received an eviction notice. In the same week 35 families were evicted from another Roma settlement in the city, known as Vidikovac. According to NGOs, there will be more forced evictions in this community in the next week.

Under international law, evictions may be carried out only as a last resort, once other alternatives have been explored in genuine consultation with the affected communities. The authorities then have a duty to provide them with adequate notice. The authorities must ensure that no families are made homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction. This includes providing them with legal remedies, including provision of compensation for the destruction of their homes, possessions and loss of income. The Serbian government has a duty to ensure that the authorities in Belgrade abide by international law.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Urging the city authorities not to forcibly evict the Roma families living in Belvil or elsewhere in Belgrade.
- Urging them to ensure that there is genuine consultation with the residents of Belvil and other affected communities on all aspects of the resettlement project associated with the plans to build access roads to the planned new Sava Bridge.
- Calling on them to identify in consultation with all affected communities, all feasible alternatives to eviction, put in place procedural and legal safeguards and, if evictions are unavoidable, develop a comprehensive relocation and compensation plan for all affected communities.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 JUNE 2010 TO:

Mayor of Belgrade

Dragan Djilas
Dragoslava Jovanovica 2,
Belgrade 11000, Serbia

Email:

gradonacelnik@beogradsg.org.rs

Alternative email:

natasa.golubovic@beogradsg.org.rs

Salutation: Dear Mr Djilas

Copies to:

Prime Minister

Mirko Cvetkovic
Predsednik Vlade Republike Srbije
Nemanjina 11
11000 Beograd
Serbia

Email: predsednikvladesrbije@gov.rs

Also send copies to:

President of the Republic of Serbia

Boris Tadic
Predsednik Republike Srbije
Andricev Venac 1
11000 Beograd, Serbia

Email:

kontakt.predsednik@predsednik.rs

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

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Amnesty International visited the Belvil community in February and March 2010. The Roma community there were anxious about possible evictions. They had heard rumours that an eviction would take place, but had never been consulted by city officials about this. They told Amnesty International that in February 2010, city officials came to Belvil to compile a survey of the houses and collect names of those living there, but gave no explanation about why they were doing this. The seven families who may be facing eviction on 22 April arrived after this list was made.

Asked by Amnesty International in February whether an eviction would take place, the city authorities denied that there were any plans to evict those living in Belvil. However, later in March the Deputy Mayor publicly announced the eviction plans. This announcement was made following reports that the European Investment Bank had released funds for access roads to be built, as part of the new Sava Bridge project. Local non-governmental organizations have attempted to establish when these evictions will take place, but have not been provided with any information from the city authorities.

Amnesty International is concerned that Belgrade city authorities will evict people from Belvil in a similar way to that used in another forced eviction carried out in August 2009 in a settlement known as Gazela. In that eviction, 114 Roma families were relocated to various locations at the outskirts of the city. They now live in metal containers at the outskirts of the city, far from local public services. Amnesty International does not consider that these metal containers satisfy human rights criteria for adequate housing.

Houses in Belvil are built from recycled materials, including wood and cardboard, bricks and other salvaged building materials. Most families build their own houses. The most common occupation of the Belvil inhabitants is collecting and reselling scrap or recyclable materials, readily available in the centre of the city. They store the waste material in the settlement. If evicted, they will lose their only access to income.

Under international law, forced evictions are a gross violation of a range of human rights, including the rights to adequate housing guaranteed under Article 11.1 of the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights and the right to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interference with one's home under Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Serbia is a state party to both of these treaties. The right to adequate housing includes the right not to be forcibly evicted. A forced eviction is the removal of people against their will from the homes or land they occupy, without legal protections and other safeguards that include genuine consultation with those affected, prior and adequate notice, provision of adequate alternative housing and legal remedies for those affected. People are entitled to these safeguards regardless of whether they rent, own or lease the land or housing in question. If the appropriate safeguards are in place, a lawful eviction which involves the use of force does not violate the prohibition on forced evictions.

UA: 90/10 Index: EUR 70/007/2010 Issue Date: 22 April 2010

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