



JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Italy: Authorities placed Roma from Masseria del Pozzo in inhumane conditions

Amnesty International, Associazione 21 Luglio ONLUS, Associazione Garibaldi 101, European Roma Rights Centre, Associazione Cinema e Diritti - Festival del Cinema dei diritti umani and Osservazione strongly denounce the forced eviction on 21 June by the local authorities of Giugliano in Campania (Naples Province) of around 75 Romani families from the camp of Masseria del Pozzo and express concern at their transfer to an abandoned factory, in inhumane living conditions.

The organizations urge all relevant authorities to immediately ensure the affected families' access to adequate shelter and the development and implementation of a long-term plan, in consultation with the families and in full compliance with human rights standards.

The case of Giugliano, among many others documented by the undersigned organizations, once more shows the daily reality of Roma in Italy, often facing placement in segregated camps, discrimination in access to adequate housing and forced evictions. These represent grave human rights violations, prohibited by both international and EU law. In this context the undersigned organisations call on the European Commission to take decisive action to address these violations, constituting a breach of the Race Equality Directive, through the initiation of infringement proceedings against Italy.

Forced eviction

On 21 June, around 300 Roma, including dozens of children, some as young as a few months old, were rushed to vacate the camp of Masseria del Pozzo which has been their home for almost 3 years. The Romani camp was built in 2013 by the Giugliano municipality in close proximity to a landfill stocking toxic waste. The families were moved there by local authorities after being victims of repeated forced evictions in previous years.

The six NGOs acknowledge that the Romani families needed to be urgently relocated away from Masseria del Pozzo, due to health and safety concerns – in fact the camp of Masseria del Pozzo should have never been built in the first place. However, the need to urgently address the emergency situation, itself created by the local authorities who had set up the camp in an area unsuitable for human habitation, does not justify the forced eviction, which constitutes a grave human rights violation.

No written notice had been handed to the inhabitants by the authorities, who had only provided the Romani families scattered information orally. Since 14 June, Roma families had been told by representatives of the local authorities and police that the eviction would take place on either 16 or 23 June. The community were forcibly evicted on 21 June, and were transferred to the site of a former fireworks factory.

The community had been informed that the eviction was necessary since the land of Masseria del Pozzo had been seized by judicial authorities, already in October 2015, as it was deemed potentially dangerous for the health and safety of inhabitants. No genuine consultation was carried out by local authorities to explore alternative options with the Roma. After initially considering the transfer of the community to a remote plot of land, with no facilities, water or sanitation in place, local authorities eventually decided to transfer the 75 families to the abandoned factory site. Very little information on the new location had been given to the families. In fact, dozens of inhabitants, interviewed by Amnesty International on 22 June at the new site, stated that they had not been made aware of the new location and had not been given a chance to see it before the move. Authorities presented the new site to the community as the only possible alternative, and were faced with the impossible dilemma of agreeing to be moved to an unknown location or be rendered completely homeless.

As necessary safeguards – adequate written notice, genuine consultation of the community and provision of adequate alternative housing - had not been put in place ahead of the relocation, the NGOs conclude that the eviction amounted to a forced eviction, which represents a grave human rights violation. This brings Italy in breach of its obligations under a range of international and regional human rights treaties, including EU legislation (Race Equality Directive), that guarantee the right to adequate housing and protection against all forms of discrimination based on ethnicity and race. This forced eviction and transfer to yet another mono-ethnic camp also flies in the face of commitments undertaken by Italy in its own National Strategy for Roma Inclusion, adopted in 2012.

Highly inadequate alternative

The alternative provided by the municipality is gravely inadequate. The approximately 1000m² plot of land is on the outskirts of Giugliano's industrial area, in an enclosed area surrounded on three sides by wild vegetation and one side by a wall with a gate. Only two toilets are in place next to the land, one of them broken and the other in a degraded state forcing the inhabitants to use the bushes instead, with a consequent impact on both their health and the environment.

Upon arrival, the Romani families found rubble, rusty nails and leftovers from the former fireworks factory which was destroyed by an explosion in 2015. Amnesty International representatives saw one broken bag containing grey powder of unknown nature and several barrels labelled "powder" and "spontaneously combustible", as well as what appears to be asbestos in the only fragile structure still in place although badly burnt.

On 22 June, the inhabitants had no access to electricity and were using open fires, batteries and car lights to illuminate the place after dark. Access to water is provided through four taps which are insufficient for the number of families in the camp.

Local authorities have not provided any structures or facilities to shelter the families. The inhabitants who own caravans were allowed by authorities to bring them to the new location. In the new location, too many adults and children are forced to sleep into cramped caravans or outdoors for lack of alternative shelter. At least three families who do not own a caravan and lived in shacks in the old camp are now homeless and are forced to sleep in their cars or outdoors. At the time of the visit, people were starting to build improvised shacks with the few materials they managed to salvage from the previous camp.

Long term plan for segregation

The authorities indicated to the families that this relocation will be a “temporary” measure while a permanent camp is being built. According to documentation seen by the NGOs and statements of authorities, in February 2016, the construction of a new segregated camp with 44 pre-fabricated units was approved by local, national and regional authorities. While 1.3 million Euros were designated by the Ministry of Interior and Region Campania for the pre-fabricated units at the time, no funds were secured for wider integration measures as envisaged by the project. There is also no plan to achieve the medium and long-term inclusion of the Romani community in adequate housing. The community has not been adequately consulted for the definition of the project, and their placement in a camp is the only option made available to them through the project. The plan raises serious concerns and risks, representing yet another example of an ethnically segregated housing project for Roma only, prohibited by international and regional law. The active involvement of the Ministry of Interior in the project, including through financial support, raises serious concerns about the intention of the national government to comply not only with international and regional human rights law and standards, but also with its own National Strategy for Roma Inclusion, adopted in 2012, which promised to “overcome camps”.

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