

PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Slovakia must urgently investigate allegations of arbitrary use of force by police against Roma in the village of Vrbnica

Amnesty International calls on the Minister of Interior to urgently carry out a thorough investigation into the police raid targeting Romani residents in the village of Vrbnica in eastern Slovakia, carried out on 2 April. The organization learned that during the action the state police arbitrarily beat up to 19 individuals. Following the raid, 16 residents, including the mayor, filed criminal complaints against the police. At least 10 of them were injured.

“They kicked our front door, entered the house, forced my brother and my father out and started to beat us. When we asked what was going on, one of them called me a demented Gypsy and threatened to shoot me,” 22-year Lukáš told Amnesty International.

According to testimonies obtained by Amnesty International, the police did not present residents with any search or arrest warrants, nor did they explain to them the purpose of their action. They used truncheons to break the front doors of the houses and police dogs to intimidate the residents. The action was carried out by 15 police officers and lasted approximately an hour.

Afterwards the injured residents called for ambulance. “The hospital [in the town of Michalovce] refused to send an ambulance saying that they may be needed for emergency situations, so we had to go to the hospital by cars,” said 20-year old Ondrej.

As a result of the police action in Vrbnica several Roma residents suffered bruises and other injuries; the police action also caused damage to their homes. The police raid also affected the entire community, as it was witnessed by most of the residents, including small children. The mayor told Amnesty International that it left many children traumatised.

Amnesty International notes that the Director of the Regional Department of the Police in the city of Košice stated to the media that the police raid in Vrbnica was carried out as part of a broader action aimed at arresting suspected criminals in 46 “problematic locations”. However, the mayor of Vrbnica told Amnesty International that the police didn’t arrest anyone during the action. According to the mayor, the Roma did not offer any resistance to the police.

Under international human rights law and standards, police may use force only when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty. They must as far as possible apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force, which they may use only if other means remain ineffective. If the use of force is unavoidable they must exercise restraint and only use force which is proportionate to the legitimate objective. They must ensure that assistance and medical aid are given to any injured persons at the earliest possible moment. Governments must establish effective investigation procedures for any incidents where people are injured as a result of police use of force, and must ensure that arbitrary or abusive use of force by police is punished as a criminal offence.

The Slovak Act no. 171/1993 Coll. on Police Forces regulates the duties of police officers when on duty. It obliges them not to interfere with rights of others more than the extent unavoidable to pursue the legitimate aim they are following.

Amnesty International considers that these requirements were not met in the police action in the village of Vrbnica. The reports which the organization has received from residents provide strong indications that the use of force against the Roma in Vrbnica was unnecessary and excessive, and that in particular the beatings of residents who were offering no resistance amounted to arbitrary use of force.

Amnesty International calls on the Slovak Minister of Interior and the Chief of the state police to ensure the police action carried out in Vrbnica on 2 April 2015 is promptly, independently and thoroughly investigated. The investigation should also look into whether the action by police contained any discriminatory element. The Ministry of Interior must make the outcomes of the investigation public. Amnesty International also reminds the Slovak authorities that they have an obligation under international human rights law and under EU law to ensure adequate reparation to victims of ill-treatment for the harm they suffered.

Similar police action targeting Romani community in eastern Slovakia was carried out in [June 2013](#). The Public Defender of Rights concluded that the police used excessive force excessively and subjected the Roma to derogatory treatment and arbitrary searches.

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