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SLOVAK REPUBLIC: PRIME MINISTER'S RACIST REMARKS ABOUT ROMA PEOPLE ARE IRRESPONSIBLE, SAYS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International wrote to Vladimir Me_jar, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, on 13 September expressing concern about racist remarks that he was reported to have made about the Roma population on 3 September in the town of Spišska Nová Ves.

Vladimir Me_jar's comments on the Roma, according to the reportedly official transcript were:

"So if we do not deal with them now, in time they will deal with us. It is necessary to understand them as a problematic group which rises in numbers."

In another reference to the local Roma population he reportedly stated:

"Furthermore what we must consider is the extended reproduction of socially unadaptable populations."

Amnesty International has written to Vladimir Me_jar in the past about alleged incidents of ill-treatment of Roma by police officers in Slovakia, which the organization believes may have occurred because of their ethnic background. Amnesty International urged the Slovakia Government to initiate full, independent and impartial investigations into all such incidents.

In bringing these incidents to the Prime Minister's attention, Amnesty International noted that racist attitudes among police officers not only lead to human rights violations, but also leave those most vulnerable to racist attacks without adequate protection.

The public statements of political leaders are vital in creating an environment in which human rights violations are either encouraged or clearly made unacceptable. Amnesty International is concerned that the references to the Roma population in Vladimir Me_jar's public statement in Spišska Nová Ves do not set the proper example to law-enforcement officers in the Republic of Slovakia, who should protect the rights and freedoms of all people without discrimination. Amnesty International is also concerned that such comments might result in further incidents of ethnically motivated ill-treatment by police officers.

As a State Party to both the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Republic of Slovakia is bound to ensure that all the rights guaranteed by those treaties are enjoyed by everyone in the country. This should be without discrimination on a number of grounds including race, colour, language, national or social origin, property, birth or association with a national minority. Such discrimination is a human rights violation in itself and can lead to other violations including ill-treatment. Furthermore, under international standards, the Republic of Slovakia has a positive obligation to ensure the rights guaranteed in these conventions are implemented. States Parties are required to "adopt such legislative or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant". The public pronouncements of a Prime Minister are as significant as legislation in fulfilling this obligation.

Amnesty International urged Vladimir Me_jar to refrain from making statements which contribute to an atmosphere in which human rights violations become acceptable. The organization also urged that he publicly and unambiguously demonstrates his government's firm policy that everyone in the Republic of Slovakia has the inalienable right to enjoy their fundamental human rights without discrimination.

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