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## **France must commit to ending forced evictions of Roma**

French cabinet members must take action to halt forced evictions of Roma communities and set a housing policy that respects and protects their rights, Amnesty International said ahead of a high-level ministerial meeting.

The 22 August meeting called by Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault is the first of its kind since a new government came to power in France in May.

At a similar ministerial meeting two years ago, former President Nicolas Sarkozy referred to irregular camps inhabited by Roma as “sources of criminality”. Roma in France have been facing continuous forced evictions ever since.

In recent weeks, some French cabinet members have spoken out on the issue in the media amid a spate of recent police operations in different parts of France to dismantle unauthorized Roma camps and forcibly evict their residents.

“Most if not all of these recent operations to dismantle Roma camps – including in Lille, Lyon and Marseilles – appear to constitute forced evictions, as reportedly, most inhabitants have not been properly consulted or offered any alternative to housing,” said Jezerca Tigani, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Europe and Central Asia Programme.

“This meeting is an opportunity for the new government to reverse the unacceptable practices of the past. Cabinet members must make meaningful public commitments to end forced evictions and make sure that all evictions respect France’s obligations under international human rights law. In particular, they must ensure that no Roma are made homeless and all evicted people have access to adequate housing.”

On 17 August, Amnesty International wrote to Prime Minister Ayrault calling on the French government to ensure that respect for human rights is placed at the heart of any policy discussion about the situation of the Roma.

Key to this would be to make a firm, public commitment that any eviction operations will be in line with France’s obligations under international human rights law – in particular, to ensure that nobody is made homeless and vulnerable to further human rights violations as a result of such evictions.

An estimated 15,000 Roma people live in France, out of an overall population of 66 million – prompting the French Housing Minister to admit “it is a problem we have the means to deal with”.

In a 13 August article in French newspaper *Libération*, Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls said that “firmness” was necessary in public policy around Roma evictions, due to what he termed “the multiplication of unsanitary camps, dangerous as much for their occupants as for their neighbours”.

“This need for ‘firmness’ must never be at the expense of human rights, and adequate alternative housing

must always be offered to people facing an eviction,” said Tigani.

Earlier this year, Amnesty International conducted in-depth research into the housing situation of Roma in France. This included site visits to interview residents at several unauthorized camps and squats, as well as villages d’insertion (so-called integration villages) and other ad hoc facilities provided by local authorities.

Most of the Roma reported having been forcibly evicted numerous times in recent years, and being forced into ever-more precarious conditions with each new move.

One 32-year-old Roma woman who is a mother of three in a camp in Saint Denis, north-east of central Paris, has been living in France since her family moved from Romania when she was 9 years old. She has been evicted repeatedly – as a result she has only been able to spend between five and seven months living in any one place.

Her family was left homeless after each forced eviction.

“We are forcibly evicted from everywhere, we have no home,” she told Amnesty International.

A major concern Amnesty International has identified is that the French legal system lacks the necessary safeguards against forced evictions. As well as failing to make consultation with residents obligatory before a planned eviction, French law does not prohibit evictions that leave people homeless and vulnerable to other human rights violations.

“Any new French government policy should include reforming the laws applicable to evictions to bring them in line with international standards,” said Tigani.

In November, Amnesty International will release a report of its findings on the situation of the Roma in France.