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Serbia: Belvil forced eviction highlights need for new laws

The new Serbian government must introduce legislation which prohibits forced evictions, Amnesty International said in a briefing published today.

[*After Belvil: Serbia needs new laws against forced eviction*](#) looks into the devastating impact on the lives of almost 1,000 Roma who were forcibly evicted on 26 April 2012 from the informal settlement at Belvil in New Belgrade.

The organization says that this mass forced eviction demonstrates the need for legislative changes in Serbia. The authorities need to urgently adopt a law which prohibits forced evictions and sets out safeguards that must be complied with prior to any eviction so that the right to adequate housing and other human rights of any community due for evictions are respected.

The authorities completely failed to apply crucial safeguards prior to the eviction, including genuine consultation with the nearly 1,000 people affected. They failed to explore all feasible alternatives to eviction and on resettlement. They failed to provide people with information, even on the reason for the eviction, or provide adequate notice or legal remedies.

“While the Belgrade authorities claim that they aimed to improve the situation of Roma by evicting them from Belvil, many have ended up in a far worse situation,” said Sian Jones, Amnesty International’s expert on Serbia.

“For many Roma who were sent back to southern Serbia, the lack of consultation or alternative housing options means that they have been returned to municipalities where they are homeless, and where there is no work.”

Other Roma families have been resettled in segregated container settlements on the outskirts of Belgrade. For many, used to earning their living collecting and recycling materials in the centre of Belgrade, finding work there is impossible. Without work, many families are now dependent on the authorities for food, and have difficulty in accessing healthcare and other services.

A former Belvil resident sent to a container settlement around Belgrade told Amnesty International: “[A]t lease [in Belvil] we could make a plan how we would survive each week, how we will feed our children. Here we are completely dependent on help. Our children are hungry and I don’t know where to go and earn some money to feed them.”

“International standards clearly state evictions may only be carried out as a last resort, once all other feasible alternatives have been explored in genuine consultation with affected people. This was clearly not the case with the residents of Belvil,” said Sian Jones.

In April 2012, the European Commission agreed to allocate money for adequate housing for those forcibly evicted from Belvil. However, Amnesty International is concerned that five of the six sites

proposed by the Belgrade authorities are far from the city centre, with poor public transport links to access to healthcare and schools, and far from possibilities for work

The organization is calling on the EU, the Belgrade authorities, the new government and other authorities involved in resettlement to new housing, to reconsider the sites proposed for resettlement, so that evicted Roma do not end up living permanently in segregated settlements on the outskirts of Belgrade.

“The Serbian authorities as well as the EU must ensure that the funding for resettlement is not used to place the Roma in racially segregated housing which would breach both Serbian law and international law” said Sian Jones.

“The only way out is the introduction and strict implementation of legislation which prohibits forced evictions which should be followed by the improvement and legalization of informal settlements throughout Serbia.”

Note to editors:

This report is a part of Amnesty International’s Demand Dignity campaign launched in May 2009. Through the Demand Dignity campaign, Amnesty International is calling for an end to the human rights violations that drive and deepen poverty. The campaign mobilizes people all over the world to demand that governments, corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognize and protect their rights.