

AI Index: PRE 01/492/2012
15 October 2012

France: Scores of Roma left homeless in forced eviction near Paris

Around 150 Roma – including some 60 children – have been left homeless outside Paris after being forcibly evicted and having their homes bulldozed on Monday morning, Amnesty International said.

The forced eviction in Noisy-le-Grand, in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis east of the capital, is the latest in a string of similar operations in Roma settlements across France in recent months.

“Authorities in Seine-Saint-Denis utterly failed to live up to their human rights obligations when conceiving and carrying out this operation, which amounts to a forced eviction,” said Marek Marczyński, Deputy Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“In a scenario that has become all too common for Roma communities across France, scores of families including young children have again been rendered homeless because the local authorities failed to provide alternative housing.”

As many as 150 Roma from Romania have been living in shacks in the Noisy-le-Grand settlement for the last two years.

In April this year, a court in nearby Bobigny ruled that the settlement was to be evicted on or after 13 June 2012. The ruling cited the camp’s precarious conditions and noted that given the large number of children, a delay of two months – the standard length in most eviction cases – would be granted in order to give residents time to find an alternative housing solution.

On 8 October, the Seine-Saint-Denis Prefecture called a meeting to discuss best practice for operations to evict the unauthorized settlement of Noisy-le-Grand. Although local NGOs attended, Roma were not invited to the meeting, and no precise date was given for the planned eviction.

Police officers and officials from the Prefecture visited the camp several times in the week prior to the eviction, and informally warned residents that the eviction would take place on the morning of 15 October. Since mid-September, police officers – often dressed in plain clothes – had visited the camp several times to tell inhabitants to leave and that eviction was imminent, leaving inhabitants unsure of when the eviction would actually take place.

According to media reports and local activists, at around 8:15am on Monday some 10 police vans circled the settlement, and residents were given just an hour to gather their belongings and leave. An hour later, the camp was vacated and bulldozers started destroying the settlement’s shacks.

Camp residents have been waiting outside the local Mayor’s office all day, but he has so far refused to meet anyone regarding this morning’s eviction operation. The 150 Roma are currently still waiting in front of the town hall with no solutions on where to shelter.

“We are in disarray. We are trying to think of solutions so that they don’t sleep on the streets tonight,”

local activist Didier Cusserne told Amnesty International.

“It was brash action by the local authorities that led to this tragic situation for scores of Roma families in Noisy-le-Grand – they must now work with the community and come to an acceptable alternative housing solution in line with international human rights standards”” said Marczyński.

“The French authorities must ensure that evictions they carry out are in compliance with the French government’s international human rights obligations. Families should not be left homeless following evictions.”

The informal settlement in Noisy-le-Grand features in a new Amnesty International report on forced evictions of Roma in the Ile-de-France region due to be launched next month.