

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 72/001/2009
8 April 2009

Slovakia: Police to investigate ill-treatment of Romani youngsters

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of six Romani youngsters - three of them who are reported to be under the age of 18 – detained at a police station in Košice which was depicted on a video published on the internet. The footage shows the boys being forced by police officers to slap and kiss each other repeatedly. The clip also shows them being forced to take off all of their clothes while being watched by more police officers who were taking pictures of them. In dialogue audible on the clip the boys are shouted at, and racially abused. The incident is said to have taken place on 21 March 2009 but the video was only circulated on 7 April, initially by a reporter from the Slovak newspaper *SME*.

Amnesty International condemns the treatment of these youths, which appears to violate the government's obligations under international human rights treaties which absolutely prohibit cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of the like appearing on the video, including the European Convention on Human Rights, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The head of Slovakia's police force, Jan Packa, publicly condemned this incident at a press conference today and announced an investigation. He is travelling to Košice himself in connection with the events.

Roma in Slovakia, as elsewhere across Europe, continue to face discrimination in access to education, housing and health services, and remain vulnerable to racist attacks and police ill-treatment. While welcoming the swift response in this case, Amnesty International urges the Slovak authorities to ensure that the investigation is prompt, thorough, independent and impartial. Anyone reasonably identified as responsible should be brought to justice in fair proceedings, and the victims provided with reparation and redress.

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