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Serbia: Two years after Belvil forced eviction, Roma still wait for adequate housing; Amnesty International reports to UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

On 26 April 2012, around 250 Roma households (around 1,000 people) were forcibly evicted from an informal settlement at Belvil in Belgrade. More than 120 families were put on buses and moved into metal containers in settlements mainly on the very outskirts of Belgrade. They were told that they would be resettled into social housing by the summer of 2013.

In April 2014, these Roma families are still living in metal containers. They have spent the past two years living in temporary settlements, in containers which do not meet international standards for adequate housing. Most of these settlements are far from schools, social services and access to employment and with poor transport links to the centre of Belgrade. Most of them are racially segregated from the majority community.

Amnesty International is concerned at the continued delay in implementing the €3.6 million resettlement programme, which is funded by the European Commission, and aims to provide the Roma families with social housing. More than 150 families are due to be resettled, yet to date only two of the sites proposed for resettlement by the city authorities have met the criteria set by the Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights, which is part of a working group on the resettlement, which also includes the EU delegation in Serbia and the city authorities. Construction has yet to start on those sites.

Amnesty International considers that one of the proposed resettlement sites at Jabučki rit will in effect create a racially segregated settlement.

Amnesty International will be writing to the new Mayor of Belgrade, shortly due to be elected, urging him/her to take immediate action to identify suitable sites for resettlement of the remaining Roma households. These sites should meet international standards relating to adequate housing, and should not result in the creation of racially segregated settlements.

Amnesty International's concerns about forced evictions and the right of Roma to adequate housing in Serbia have been set out in a report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is due to review Serbia's implementation of the Convention next month.

Serbia: Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 52nd Session, May 2014, focuses on Serbia's failure to guarantee the right to adequate housing to Romani people without discrimination. It documents 19 forced evictions of Romani communities in Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia, which took place between April 2009 and April 2013 – all of which failed to meet international standards. The organization also found that resettlement provided to forcibly evicted Roma did not meet international standards relating to the adequacy of housing and, in a number of cases, contributed to the further segregation of these communities.

The briefing also highlights the current lack of safeguards against forced evictions under national law, while welcoming the government's plans to introduce a law prohibiting forced evictions.

Further information

Another 50 families still live at Belvil, awaiting resettlement. They were not evicted in April 2012, but promised that they would be resettled into new social housing, under a Resettlement Action Plan agreed between the City of Belgrade and the European Investment Bank (EIB). This part of the site is due to be cleared in advance of construction work, funded by the EIB.

In February 2014, they were told that they would be resettled into permanent housing at Orlovsko naselje and Jabučki rit before September 2014. However, Amnesty International is concerned that some Roma eligible for resettlement, who temporarily left Belvil, but have subsequently returned, have been excluded from the resettlement plans. The city authorities have threatened that if they remain on the site after the other families are resettled, they will be forcibly evicted. Unless the city authorities and the EIB can be persuaded to honour their obligations to these families, they are at risk of forced eviction and homelessness.

Serbia: Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 52nd Session, MAY 2014, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR70/008/2014/en>

For further information, see Amnesty International, *After Belvil: Serbia needs new laws against forced eviction* (Index: 70/015/2012), 17 October 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR70/015/2012>

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International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK

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