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France must withdraw order targeting Roma for eviction

Amnesty International is urging the French authorities to immediately withdraw the interior ministry order specifying the systematic eviction of Roma illegal camps as a priority.

The Ministry of the Interior order, issued on 5 August and published by the French media over the weekend, provides specific instructions to French police to undertake “a systematic dismantling of illegal camps” prioritizing those inhabited by Roma.

“The Ministry of Interior is clearly targeting a particular ethnic group following the objectives stated by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy that identify ‘illegal camps’ inhabited by Roma as ‘sources’ of criminality,” said David Diaz-Jogeix, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia programme.

“Ethnic profiling of this kind has no place in the EU. The withdrawal of these instructions is the first step that the French authorities must take to show they are committed to respect for human rights and not to enforcing discriminatory policies against Roma and Travellers.”

European MPs passed a key resolution on 9 September strongly criticizing France and demanding that governments across the continent promote the integration of Roma.

The European Parliament also expressed its deep concern at “the inflammatory and openly discriminatory rhetoric” of the political discourse as well as the measures taken by the French authorities targeting Roma and Travellers”.

France has deported around 1,000 Roma to Bulgaria and Romania since August and has been accused by Amnesty International of “stigmatizing” both Roma and Travellers communities living in the country.

In response to the European Parliament resolution Eric Besson, the Immigration Minister, insisted that France had not specifically targeted the Roma.

“This order prioritizing Roma ‘illegal camps’ for dismantling contradicts earlier claims by the French authorities that France had not taken specific measures against Roma.” said David Diaz-Jogeix.