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SLOVAK REPUBLIC: REPORTED ILL-TREATMENT OF ROMA BY POLICE OFFICERS

Amnesty International's concerns

Amnesty International is concerned about the alleged police ill-treatment of members of the Romani community in Hermanovce. If confirmed, this incident would represent a violation of the Slovak Republic's international treaty obligations, including Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which state that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Background

According to information received from the European Roma Rights Center, a regional non-governmental organization, on 27 October 1998 at around 4.30am in Hermanovce, police officers arrested 14-year-old M.S. and 21-year-old K.M., both of whom are of Romani origin. Police officers reportedly beat them, handcuffed them and, when they were taken to the police station in Chminianska Nová Ves, forced them to ride in the boot of a car. The police reportedly did not present search warrants when they entered the Romani homes or arrest warrants when they took M.S. and K.M. into custody.

At the police station M.S. and K.M. were allegedly beaten with truncheons and kicked by police officers. They were interrogated and reportedly coerced into confessing to stealing various objects which were shown to them at the station. The minor was interrogated in the absence of his parents or a legal representative. M.S and K.M. were released later the same day, apparently without being charged with any criminal offence. They were then examined by a physician who reportedly issued a certificate describing bruising which was consistent with their allegations of beating.

The following day, on 28 October 1998 at around 6am, around 20 police officers, some leading dogs, came to Hermanovce. Without presenting search warrants, they reportedly broke down the doors of Romani houses and beat men, women and children, many of whom were still in bed.

B.K., a Romani woman, was reportedly beaten by a police officer¹, who subjected her to racist and vulgar abuse. The police then took four men, all of whom are Roma, and another man, a Czech anthropologist, to the office of the village mayor. One man was subsequently released, while the other four men were taken to the police station in Chminianska Nová Ves. They were released at around 12pm without being charged with any criminal offence.

Amnesty International's recommendations

As a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture), the Slovak Republic is bound to initiate a prompt and impartial investigation whenever an individual has alleged that torture or other ill-treatment has occurred or, even if no complaint has been made, there are reasonable grounds to believe that such ill-treatment has occurred.

Amnesty International urges the Slovak authorities to ensure that the investigation into the described incident is carried out promptly and impartially, as required by Article 12 of the Convention against Torture, that the findings are made public and that anyone found responsible for human rights violations is brought to justice.

In February 1999 Amnesty International, expressing its concern about this incident, wrote to Ján Čarnogurský, the Minister of Justice, and requested that a prompt and impartial investigation is carried out.

¹ The officer's identity is known to Amnesty International.