

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Hungary: Report into vigilante activities in Gyöngyöspata fails to address discrimination**

Amnesty International wrote to the Hungarian authorities expressing its concern that the report by the Parliamentary ad-hoc Committee, published on 30 March regarding the vigilante activities in the village of Gyöngyöspata in March 2011 failed to address the human rights abuses suffered by the Romani residents.

The organization is concerned that the report does not address the slowness of public authorities in responding to the abuses, instead puts the blame on NGOs who have monitored the vigilantes' activities. It fails to acknowledge the insufficiency and inadequacy of the police action. Report's conclusions as well as the Committee's original remit fell far short of the standards expected from an independent investigation into the allegations by the Romani residents of Gyöngyöspata that the law enforcement authorities' failed to protect them.

Following a march attended by up to 2,000 people in the village of Gyöngyöspata by the far-right party Jobbik on 6 March 2011 three vigilante groups patrolled the village for almost a month. During this time, they were threatening, intimidating and harassing Romani residents.

Amnesty International and other NGOs who visited the village at the time documented a number of incidents of intimidation, harassment, abuse and threats reported by the Romani residents of the village. During the first two weeks, of the vigilantes' presence in the village in particular, according to eye witnesses and Romani residents, law enforcement officials failed to prevent acts of intimidation, harassment and threats of violence.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Committee failed to focus on the actual problems during its investigation and give the impression that the most significant concerns regarding the events of last March were related to unfavourable media coverage of Hungary and the work of the NGOs who were raising their concerns about the seriousness of the situation in Gyöngyöspata. Amnesty International is disappointed that the Committee did not speak to the Romani residents about the impact of the vigilantes' activities and the lack of action by the authorities to protect them.

Amnesty International reminded Hungarian authorities, that they have an obligation under international human rights law to ensure the security and physical integrity of their citizens. Such protection must be provided without discrimination.

In its letter, Amnesty International also referred to the complaints by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) to the Prosecutor in relation to four cases of verbal abuse and attempt of physical violence against Romani people in Gyöngyöspata. The HCLU alleged that in two cases the police failed to investigate in accordance with international human rights standards. The police allegedly failed to classify the acts as violence against a member of a community, a criminal charge under which racially motivated violence can be prosecuted. They also failed to inform both victims about the relegation of these crimes to minor offences and of the stages of investigation. The Prosecutor subsequently ordered the police to reopen the investigation in one of these cases.

The European Court of Human Rights, in its 2005 judgment in the case of *Nachova and Others v. Bulgaria*, stated that racial violence is a particular affront to human dignity and requires from the authorities special vigilance and a vigorous reaction. In the case of *Šečić v. Croatia*, the European Court stated that “[t]reating racially induced violence and brutality on an equal footing with cases that have no racist overtones would be turning a blind eye to the specific nature of acts that are particularly destructive of fundamental rights”.

In the letter to the authorities, Amnesty International repeated its call on Hungary to fulfil its obligations under international human rights law to ensure the security and physical integrity of its citizens, without discrimination, and to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress for racially-motivated attacks including harassment by non-state actors.

#### **Timeline:**

1 March 2011 - “Civil Guard Association for a Better Future”, a vigilante group with extreme discriminative and anti-Roma views went into the village of Gyöngyöspata, in East Hungary, and started “patrolling” the streets inhabited by Romani people. During which they made verbal and physical threats against the Roma, and harassed them.

6 March 2011 – Jobbik – extreme right-wing parliamentary party held a demonstration “against gypsy-terror” and for the protection of Hungarians. It was attended by 1500-2000 people. Vigilantes continue to march in the village applying racist threats and harassment towards Romani people. The police did not intervene.

17 March 2011 – Amnesty International issued a letter together with the European Roma Rights Centre and Human Rights First to the Prime Minister, other members of the government, MPs, and the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minorities urging them to intervene to ensure that the situation does not escalate to physical violence. [http://www.amnesty.hu/item/koezoes-level-a-miniszterelnokhoez-a-gyoengyoespatai-esemenyek-kapcsan?category\\_id=1](http://www.amnesty.hu/item/koezoes-level-a-miniszterelnokhoez-a-gyoengyoespatai-esemenyek-kapcsan?category_id=1)

19 March 2011 – Amnesty International issued an urgent action entitled “[Vigilantes threaten Roma community in Hungary](#)”

21 March 2011 – AI Hungary holds a demonstration and a candle light vigil in front of the Ministry of Interior.

11 April 2011 – The same vigilante groups enter Hajdúhadhaz, a much bigger town, also in east Hungary, with similar intentions: to “patrol” the streets.

14 April 2011 – Amnesty International issues a letter together with several other NGOs to call on authorities to act promptly and unlike in Gyöngyöspata, take appropriate steps to provide protection to the Romani communities.

15 April 2011 – Vigilantes are arrested by the police in Hajdúhadhaz, but the Court overrules the arrest. The Ministry of Interior issues a statement claiming: marching in black uniforms should be considered threatening to communities, and thus could constitute a crime of rowdyism.

16 April 2011 – Vederó, a vigilante group wearing military-like uniforms arrives at Gyöngyöspata, and announces to hold a training camp over the weekend, at Easter

22 April 2011 – A group of frightened Romani women and children are taken away from the village for a two-day trip organised by the Hungarian Red Cross. Eight members of the Vederó are arrested for rowdyism. The Minister of Interior visits the villages, and announces that the

public order has been restored. Two days later the Court overrules the decision, and the Vedero members are free to come back to the village.

26 April 2011 – Serious physical altercation breaks out between Roma and members of Vedero resulting in serious injuries after long provocation by the vigilantes.

27 April 2011 – Amnesty International issues a press release (in Hungarian only) *Time to stop racist violence and threats*. The government announces an amendment to the Criminal Code to address vigilante violence.

2 May 2011 – The Criminal Code Amendment is adopted criminalising “ostensibly anti-communal” that is “suitable for inducing indignation or alarm in other people”.

7 June 2011 – The Parliamentary Committee to investigate “criminality in uniforms, its background and the events at Gyongyospata” is set up. It starts its operation on 12 July.

17 July 2011 – Oszkar Juhasz, member of Jobbik – who originally invited the vigilantes to Gyongyospata – wins the municipal elections, and becomes the mayor of Gyöngyöspata.

30 March 2012 – The Parliamentary Committee publishes its report.