

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE01/386/2013
02 August 2013

Czech Republic: Protect Roma at risk of violence ahead of far-right demonstrations

Czech authorities must protect Roma communities from violence and intimidation, Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) said ahead of planned anti-Roma demonstrations across the country.

Far right groups are staging anti-Roma protests in up to 13 different Czech towns. One demonstration is planned in the town of Vítkov. Here, in 2009, far-right supporters almost killed a two-year-old girl, Nataalka, when they set fire to a house belonging to Roma.

“The government must ensure that these protests do not lead to violence against Roma communities, and that those at risk get the protection they need,” said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director for Amnesty International.

The ERRC has documented nine anti-Roma marches and rallies in the Czech Republic since April 2013, some of them in the same towns.

“The situation is extremely tense in the Czech Republic at the moment, with far right groups rapidly gaining in influence. Many Roma families and activists we talk to fear for their safety, in particular ahead of demonstrations like those planned tomorrow,” said Dezideriu Gergely, Executive Director of the ERRC.

The mother of two-year-old Nataalka recently told ERRC: “We are afraid of further attacks. We cannot understand how the government allows them to march in this town, when everybody knows who they are. These marches will fuel more violence against us and we are afraid that more Roma families will be attacked.”

There are between 150,000 and 300,000 Roma in the Czech Republic today, a community that has historically, and continues to be, subject to widespread discrimination, racism and prejudice.

Discrimination affects Roma in all aspects of society, including housing, health care and employment. The last years have seen an upsurge in violent attacks against Roma, with ERRC documenting at least 48 attacks between January 2008 and December 2012.

Recently, the Czech Intelligence Service (BIS) has raised serious concerns about the widespread anti-Roma atmosphere in the Czech Republic, while the Czech Government Human Rights Commissioner has called on 1 August a working group meeting to deal with the situation.

In July this year, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concerns over the anti-Roma climate in Czech Republic - including discriminatory remarks against Roma made by politicians, in the media and at demonstrations by far-right groups.

“We have seen a deeply worrying trend over the past year with entrenched discrimination against Roma reaching new heights. This is a fundamental issue that the Czech authorities can’t ignore,” said Dalhuisen.

In July, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in respect of vigilante marches through Roma settlements in Hungary, that the right to peaceful assembly can be restricted where it is repeatedly exercised to intimidate local residents.