

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

Index: EUR 39/003/2011

27 April 2011

Romania: Miercurea Ciuc authorities undermine obligations to protect the right to adequate housing

Amnesty International is calling on the local authorities of Miercurea Ciuc and the government of Romania to take urgent action to ensure that the Romani families that were forcibly evicted in 2004 and resettled next to a sewage treatment plant can live in dignity and enjoy their human right to adequate housing.

In 2004 approximately 100 Roma, including families with children were forcibly evicted from a dilapidated building in the centre of the town by local authorities and to metal cabins placed next to the sewage treatment plant at the outskirts of Miercurea Ciuc. Although this was supposed to be a 'temporary' housing solution for the evicted families and individuals, they have been living there for almost seven years.

On 18 April 2011 Amnesty International together with members of the Romani community handed over to the local authorities 36,500 letters signed by activists across France. During the last year tens of thousands of additional individual appeals by Amnesty International activists from across the world, including from Austria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Greece, Mauritius, New Zealand, Puerto Rico, Switzerland and the United States, have been sent to the town's authorities.

Since 2009 Amnesty International activists having been calling on the authorities to engage in a genuine consultation with the Romani community living by the sewage plant, in order to find a solution that would include the relocation of the Romani families to adequate housing at a safe location.

Having declined repeated requests for a meeting in the weeks leading up to the recent visit of Amnesty International to Miercurea Ciuc on 18 April, the Vice Mayors of Miercurea Ciuc, Domokos Szőke and Attila Antal, invited Amnesty International delegates to a meeting as they were delivering the appeals to the City Hall before a significant media presence.

Despite expressing some concern at the problems faced by the Romani community, the Vice Mayors conspicuously failed to inform Amnesty International of any concrete plans to address the ongoing violation of their right to adequate housing or, indeed, make any commitment to doing so in the future.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned by recent media reports quoting the local authorities stating that the municipality is not planning to take any action regarding the Romani families living by the sewage plant. Vice Mayor, Domokos Szőke, as reported by newspaper *Informația Harghitei* on 19 April 2011, stated that "It is their right, to find it [another space]. They are not obliged to stay there... [T]he Miercurea Ciuc City Hall does not have the possibility to offer a home for everyone [...] They stay there. They have a roof. It is a chance given by life. They had a first chance; they received a home that other citizens have not received. The city hall cannot provide another."

This statement ignores the fact that the ongoing violation of the Romani families' right to housing was directly caused by the action of local authorities, namely the forced eviction

carried out by the municipality in 2004, and their resettlement to inadequate conditions at an environment unfit for human habitation.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the failure of the local authorities to remedy the ongoing human rights violations flowing from the original forced eviction in 2004 breaches the obligations assumed by Romania through its signing up to international and regional human rights treaties. These include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Revised European Social Charter.

Background

Affected Roma had been living at 27 Pictor Nagy Imre Street in the centre of Miercurea Ciuc since the 1970s when one Romani family began to rent an apartment there. By 2004, 12 Romani families had legal residence in the building owned by the Miercurea Ciuc municipality, while others had moved into the building or built shacks in the yard without any form of legal tenancy. The authorities and members of the community agree that the building was run down and no repairs had been carried out on the property for many years.

The eviction of approximately 100 Roma in 2004 constituted a forced eviction in breach of Romania's human rights obligations. The Romani families were not given an opportunity to engage with the decision-making process and influence their own future or to challenge the eviction decision. The authorities also made no attempt to explore possible alternatives to the eviction. Even if after consultation the eviction was considered necessary due to the state of the building and the need to protect the occupants' safety, the affected community should have been given an opportunity to explore feasible alternative relocation sites. Those who agreed to move to the metal cabins provided by the municipality next to the sewage plant, did so on the understanding it was a temporary relocation until proper housing was built.

The placement of the Romani families within the protection zone of the sewage treatment plant, established by Order No 536/1997 to separate human habitation from potential toxic dangers, was characterized by the National Council for Combating Discrimination in 2005 as an act of discrimination, constituting a violation of the right to private life and the right to a healthy environment.

END/