

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

21 September 2012  
AI Index: EUR 71/005/2012

### **Czech Republic: Ostrava municipality must act now to provide a sustainable housing solution to the Roma from Přednádraží Street, Ostrava**

Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre are deeply concerned over the failure of the local authorities of Ostrava, Czech Republic to take adequate measures to fulfil the right to adequate housing of the Roma from Přednádraží Street, who are living without full access to basic services including water, heating and cooking facilities.

Approximately eighty families currently live in the rented houses in Přednádraží Street but are facing difficulties in enjoying their right to adequate housing, particularly in relation to access to basic services. Access to water is severely limited and on 18 September electricity was cut in three of the houses, leaving the families in complete darkness and with no access to cooking and heating facilities.

*“On the morning of 18 September, electricity was cut in three of the houses. In the early afternoon, when children came back from school, the mothers were upset as they could not cook and give any hot meals to their children, not even a hot tea. The parents were extremely upset and did not know what to do. They don’t have gas, or stoves with wood, and electricity is their only way of heating and cooking. Some mothers were crying as the dark was approaching and their children could not study without light. The mothers with newborn children were also extremely worried as they could not warm any milk for their babies. They are also worried as autumn is approaching and they will not be able to stay warm without electricity. It is a really bad situation”* a local activist told Amnesty International.

Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Centre have been informed that the local authorities are refusing to allocate other housing alternative except dormitories to the Roma inhabitants. In order to be eligible, a person should meet criteria requested by the local authorities. They include a requirement of regular employment or being of retired age. However most of the Roma from Přednádraží Street are not employed and they cannot benefit from the flat allocated by the municipality.

Over 300 Roma have been living in increased uncertainty since August in Přednádraží Street. They first faced eviction in early August as Ostrava’s construction office delivered an eviction notice to the owner of the houses inhabited by more than 40 Roma families living in rented houses on Přednádraží Street, giving them just over 24 hours to leave the premises voluntarily. The inhabitants were told that if they failed to leave, they risk having the police coming to enforce the eviction order.

In early August the construction office had reportedly justified the planned eviction by claiming the houses on Přednádraží Street were unsafe for human habitation due to damage to the structure and electrical installations, as well as inadequate sanitation. However, after negotiations with the Romani inhabitants the construction office expressed openness to finding a solution for the sewage problem and people started doing repairs to the building themselves.

For the past several weeks, Ostrava municipality has been offering dormitories as alternative housing to the Romani families. Although many of the Romani families did not want to move,

since August approximately 300 Roma have taken this option through fear of eviction and the risk of homelessness, and because of the uncertainty of not knowing for how long they would be allowed to remain in Přednádraží Street.

Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre have expressed concerns over the inadequacy of the dormitories. In most cases, one room was allocated per family, some of which have up to nine members, raising serious concerns of overcrowding. Four families share two toilets and two shower facilities, while approximately sixteen families share one kitchen. The rental price for a room at the dormitories are more than double what the families were paying for a flat – raising additional concerns about the ability of the inhabitants to afford the proposed alternative.

Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre are calling on the Ostrava municipality to immediately prioritise the housing issue of the Roma from Přednádraží Street. The local municipality should not consider dormitories as an adequate and unique solution to the housing situation and should engage meaningfully with the representatives of the Roma community and local NGOs and actively seek a solution that would allow the inhabitants to fully enjoy their right to adequate housing.

### **Background**

Czech Republic is party to a range of international and regional human rights treaties, which guarantee the protection of the right to adequate housing. These treaties include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and the Revised European Social Charter.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has emphasized that “[a]dequate housing must be habitable, in terms of providing the inhabitants with adequate space and protecting them from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind and other threats to health, structural hazards, and disease vectors”. It must also contain “certain facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition. All beneficiaries of the right to adequate housing should have sustainable access to natural and common resources, safe drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, refuse disposal, site drainage and emergency services.”

End/