

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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France: Authorities must act swiftly to fully investigate suspected arson attack on Roma squat in Paris

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by recent reports of a possible arson attack on the night of 24 October against a Roma squat in a disused warehouse on the Rue des Pyrénées in the 20th district of Paris. News reports indicated that one unidentified body had been recovered from the fire. Reports from media and civil society organizations, as yet unconfirmed directly by Amnesty International, also indicated that a witness had seen a group of masked individuals throwing Molotov cocktails at the Roma squat. The prosecutor's office has ordered an investigation by the Judicial Police.

The events of 24 October are taking place against a backdrop of a broader political rhetoric which stigmatizes Roma. Amnesty International reiterates its calls on French political authorities to encourage respect for the rights of Roma and to refrain from further stigmatizing an ethnic minority already vulnerable to human rights violations.

Amnesty International urges the French law enforcement authorities to ensure an independent, impartial and thorough inquiry into the events of 24 October at the Roma squat on the Rue des Pyrénées. In particular, given the general climate of intolerance and prejudice towards Roma in France, Amnesty International calls on French law enforcement authorities to consider, with due diligence, whether there was a racial motivation behind the incident leading to the fire.

Amnesty International calls for anyone reasonably suspected of involvement in the incidents leading to the fire to be charged promptly with criminal offences which provide penalties reflecting the gravity of the abuse, and to be brought to justice with the guarantees of a fair trial.

It has been reported that most of the approximately 100 Roma who had been living in the squat were provided with emergency accommodation following the fire, but according to a local civil society organization approximately 40 are now homeless. Amnesty International urges local authorities to ensure that emergency accommodation is made available to anyone left homeless by the fire.

Background:

Under international human rights law, French authorities have an obligation to protect the lives and personal integrity of all people, including Roma and other ethnic or national minorities, without any discrimination, and adopt measures to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress for racially motivated attacks by non-state actors. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in its General Recommendation no. 27, calls on states parties to the ICERD, such as France "to ensure protection of the security and integrity of Roma, without any discrimination, by adopting measures for preventing racially motivated acts of violence against them; to ensure prompt action by the police, the prosecutors and the judiciary for investigating and punishing such acts; and to ensure that perpetrators, be they public officials or other persons, do not enjoy any degree of impunity."

For further information:

France: Authorities must stop forcibly evicting Roma, Public statement, AI Index: EUR 21/001/2011, 5 September 2011 <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR21/001/2011/en>
France president urged not to stigmatize Roma and Travellers, 23 July 2010, AI News Story, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/france-president-urged-not-stigmatize-roma-and-travellers-2010-07-23>
France: France urged to end stigmatization of Roma and Travellers, AI Public Statement (Index: EUR 21/005/2010), 26 August 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR21/005/2010/en>
France must heed EU call to end Roma discrimination, 10 September 2010, AI News Story, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/france-must-heed-eu-call-end-roma-discrimination-2010-09-10>
France must withdraw order targeting Roma for eviction, 13 September 2010, AI News Story, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/france-must-withdraw-order-targeting-roma-eviction-2010-09-13>

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