

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Belgrade must stop forced evictions

The government of Serbia must intervene urgently and stop the ongoing practice of forced evictions by the City of Belgrade, after 12 families were removed without any notice from their homes under the Pančevo Bridge on Tuesday, 7 June. The eviction took the Roma community completely by surprise.

This eviction is unlawful under Serbian law. Under international law it violates almost every rule in the book as 12 families have been forced from their houses and dumped on a site in the middle of nowhere, with no facilities, and expected to live instead in containers.

According to local human rights organizations and Roma activists, the families did not have any prior notice of the eviction, There was no formal eviction notice, let alone a consultation prior to the eviction.

City officials, police and social welfare workers arrived at 10am in the morning, and gave the families less than two hours to pack their belongings. They were then put onto a bus – escorted by the police - and told only that they were being taken to Obrenovac, a municipality on the outskirts of Belgrade.

They were then taken to a site in the village of Dren, to live in metal containers lacking any furniture at all.

Conditions are even worse than at other containers settlements in the city -- there is no electricity and no sewage, just two portable toilets and water from a cistern.

Interviewed by local Roma human rights defenders, the Roma families were clearly traumatised by their experience. They have nowhere to turn to, and have no idea what is going to happen to them. They told a local Roma activist, “There’s no work here, there’s no medical centre and - there’s no school for the children – but of course they don’t expect that Roma want to go to school”.

In March, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights called on the government of Serbia to stop forced evictions. In April 2011, Amnesty International issued a report on forced evictions in Belgrade, calling on the city to stop forced evictions and to stop people to live in containers. It also called on the government to introduce a law prohibiting forced evictions. However, no action has been taken to date.

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