

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

16 March 2011
AI Index: EUR 71/002/2011

Czech Republic: Police fails to protect the Roma of Nový Bydžov

Amnesty International is dismayed at the failure of the police to protect three members of the Romani community from violent attacks by a group of far-right activists following the demonstration by the far-right Workers' Social Justice Party on 12 March in Nový Bydžov.

The organization is deeply concerned about the fact that in addition to failures to prevent these attacks, eye witness's statements substantiate that the police used excessive force against peaceful counter-demonstrators of the Initiative "Nový Bydžov is not alone!" who were opposing the far-right rally.

These incidents add to a climate of intimidation against members of the Romani community in Nový Bydžov, characterized by discriminatory statements by local authorities and some Czech far-right groups during the past few months.

On 12 March, approximately 500 far-right demonstrators marched through the town chanting anti-Roma slogans and wearing insignias and waving symbols of the Workers' Party, which had been dissolved by the Supreme Administrative Court in February 2010 on the grounds that its "programme leads to incitement to national, racial, ethnic intolerance" and "amounts to an attempt to infringe the basic rights and freedoms of certain groups, in particular the minorities."

According to media reports approximately 200 counter-demonstrators, including local Roma, gathered in the town and attempted a non-violent blockade to prevent the far-right demonstrators from marching through the Na Šarlejích Street, which is mainly inhabited by Roma. The police anti-conflict units reportedly tried to convince the counter-demonstrators to let the march of the Workers' Social Justice Party through.

After police called on counter-demonstrators to disperse, and following their refusal to end their blockade, Amnesty International staff present at the scene witnessed mounted police officers charging their horses at the counter-demonstrators and delivering blows against them with nightsticks. Reportedly three counter-demonstrators had to be treated for injuries caused by the horses. In an interview published by *Romea.cz* on 13 March the Regional Police spokesperson justified the police intervention by stating that the counter-demonstrators "were warned that they were preventing the procession of a properly announced gathering."

International human rights law to which the Czech Republic is a party requires that Czech authorities respect and protect human rights, including by ensuring that law enforcement officials do not use unnecessary or disproportionate force. The United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials states, in Article 3, that "[l]aw enforcement officials may use force only when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty." Amnesty International considers the intervention against the counter-demonstrators disproportionate and unnecessary, and therefore excessive.

According to media reports, only an hour after the far-right rally was over, a group of 20 far-right demonstrators who stayed behind attacked three Roma people, one of whom suffered a concussion.

Amnesty International is dismayed by the failure of the police deployed in the town during the day to apply due diligence in effectively protecting the Romani inhabitants of Nový Bydžov following the march.

The Czech Republic has an obligation under international human rights law to ensure the security and physical integrity of its inhabitants, without discrimination, and to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress for racially-motivated attacks by non-state actors.

Amnesty International called on the Czech authorities today to publicly condemn discriminatory violence, and incitement to discriminatory violence, against any section of Czech society, to ensure vigorous and thorough investigations into acts of racially motivated violence and to prosecute the perpetrators under laws which provide penalties reflecting the gravity of the abuse.

In relation to reports that an act of ill-treatment and excessive use of force against counter-demonstrators has occurred, Amnesty International called on the Czech authorities to ensure that a prompt, independent, impartial and thorough investigation is conducted, and that anyone reasonably identified as having used arbitrary or abusive force is punished.

Background

Czech Republic: Obligation to protect the Romani community in Nový Bydžov (AI Index: EUR 71/001/2011), available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR71/001/2011/en>