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Czech Republic: Amnesty International in support of nationwide action against attacks on Roma

Amnesty International's 2 million members from around the world today declared their support and solidarity with the Roma community and civil society activists in the Czech Republic as they prepared to take part in a nationwide protest on 3 May against the latest violent attack on a Romani family.

"Amnesty International joins the Czech Romani civil society in their call to the authorities to stand up to growing extremism in the country," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

Violent attacks by far-right groups against the Romani community have intensified in some areas of the Czech Republic. An increasing number of marches and statements by some Czech far-right groups include incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence against the Romani community. Many Roma in the country say they fear for their lives.

During the latest incident, on 18 April in the village of Vítkov, Molotov cocktails were thrown into Robert Kudrik's home, where he lived with his partner, four children and three more family members. The fire completely destroyed their home and seriously injured the parents. Their two-year-old daughter, Natálka, is in a coma with burns covering 80 per cent of her body. According to the police, the motive of the attack remains unclear, but racially motivated crime cannot be ruled out.

Outgoing Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek publicly denounced the attack, saying that it must be fully investigated and that police must identify whether it was racially motivated. President Vaclav Klaus denounced the attack as "a brutal, abominable crime" and a "monstrous act".

"The Czech authorities must now take a further step by lending their support to the nationwide protest, delivering an unequivocal message that all parts of society condemn such attacks in the strongest terms," said Nicola Duckworth.

"They must ensure that the Roma community and civil society activists can go through the streets of Czech towns demanding their rights in safety and dignity."

Roma in the Czech Republic are estimated to number between 160,000 and 300,000, or about 1.6-3 per cent of the overall population. Roma in the country continue to suffer discrimination at the hands of both public officials and private individuals, including in the areas of housing, education, health care and employment. Not only do they face forced evictions, segregation in education and racially motivated violence, but they have been denied justice when seeking redress for the abuses against them.