

10 August 2012

TO:

Mr Manuel Valls, Minister of Interior  
Mme Martine Aubry, President, Lille Métropole Communauté urbaine (LMCU)  
Mr Dominique Bur, Prefect, Nord-Pas-de-Calais  
Mr Pascal Joly, Delegated Prefect for Equal Opportunities  
Mr Bergamini, OFII (Office Français de L'Immigration et de l'Intégration)  
Mr Gilles Pargneaux, Mayor, Municipality of Hellemmes  
Mr Gerard Caudron, Mayor, Municipality of Villeneuve D'Ascq

**Re: Forced Evictions and Returns of Roma in France**

The European Roma Rights Centre is writing to express concern about a number of recent forced evictions and expulsions of Romani individuals from France in the last week.

According to media reports, more than 200 Romani people were evicted in settlements close to Lille. One eviction from the Roma settlement of La Friche took place on 9 August 2012, in the town of Hellemmes close to Lille.<sup>1</sup> Authorities evicted approximately 150 Roma people. The second eviction took place in a smaller settlement in Villeneuve D'Ascq, involving around 50 Romani people.<sup>2</sup> The Prefect of Lille-Metropole and national police forces arrived around 6:00 am.<sup>3</sup> The current situation of these Romani individuals is not clear. Some may have been sent back to Romania on a flight to Bucharest that departed on the same day. As far as the ERRC is aware, no adequate alternative accommodation was provided.

Media reports suggest a wave of evictions and expulsions in the last week. On Monday 6 August, in Vaulx-en-Velin, 150 Roma left their camp under the risk of expulsion, preferring not to wait for the police.<sup>4</sup> On Tuesday 7 August a hundred people were evicted from their settlement by police in Villeurbanne, near Lyon. Since then, the families – not all from the Roma community – have been roaming the streets of Lyon in search of a new site, but police have prevented them from settling.<sup>5</sup> On Wednesday 8 August a camp housing about 160 Roma in the 19th arrondissement of Paris was dismantled. Its inhabitants, knowing about the imminent expulsion, had left before police arrived. Reports suggest that authorities offered short-term accommodation in the suburbs, far from personal and community networks, scattering the families and without access to cooking facilities, which the Roma declined.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> « Roms à Lille : François Hollande doit arrêter les expulsions sans solution », *Le Plus* in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Stephanie Bocquet, published on 10/08/12, <http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/607530-roms-a-lille-francois-hollande-doit-arreter-les-expulsions-sans-solution.html> (accessed August 10th 2012)

<sup>2</sup> « Deux camps de Roms démantelés près de Lille, expulsions à Lyon », *Le Nouvel observateur*, published on 09/08/12, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20120809.OBS9307/un-camp-de-roms-demantele-pres-de-lille.html?xtor=RSS-17> (accessed August 9th 2012)

<sup>3</sup> « Evacuations de campements et expulsions dans la communauté rom à Lille et Lyon », *Le Monde*, published on 09/08/12 [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2012/08/09/un-campement-de-roms-evacue-pres-de-lille\\_1743965\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2012/08/09/un-campement-de-roms-evacue-pres-de-lille_1743965_3224.html) (accessed August 10th 2012).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> « Les expulsions de Roms continuent: colère à gauche », *Le Point*, published on 09/08/12, [http://www.lepoint.fr/fil-info-reuters/les-expulsions-de-roms-continuent-colere-a-gauche-09-08-2012-1494597\\_240.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/fil-info-reuters/les-expulsions-de-roms-continuent-colere-a-gauche-09-08-2012-1494597_240.php), (accessed August 10th 2012).

<sup>6</sup> « Le plus grand camp de Roms de Paris a été évacué », *Dix neuf info*, <http://www.dixneufinfo.com/societe/article/le-plus-grand-camp-de-roms-de> (accessed August 10th 2012).

Approximately 240<sup>7</sup> of the evicted Roma have been sent back to Romania under the Humanitarian Aid Return scheme. The ERRC is concerned that these so-called voluntary repatriations are carried out following forced evictions, under situations of high stress for individuals and communities, and as such cannot be considered voluntary. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers ruled on a collective complaint against France regarding the expulsions of Roma from France that took place in 2010. It noted that so-called voluntary returns were actually disguised forms of forced collective expulsions, given that the returns were typically accepted following forced eviction and under the threat of expulsion from France, saying, "...the willingness to accept financial assistance of € 300 per adult and € 100 per child reveals a 'situation of destitution or extreme uncertainty'...in which the absence of economic freedom poses a threat to the effective enjoyment of their political freedom to come and go as they choose."<sup>8</sup>

France has commitments under international human rights law to provide alternative adequate accommodation following forced evictions. France submitted its National Strategy on Roma Inclusion<sup>9</sup> to the European Commission earlier this year. The Commission's own feedback said there was 'no real national strategy concerning migrant Roma.'<sup>10</sup> The ERRC urges the new government to act proactively to help migrant Roma integrate, with sustainable, long-term housing solutions instead of a cycle of forced evictions and expulsions.

The ERRC calls on the relevant authorities to:

- Refrain from carrying out forced evictions in the absence of legal safeguards, including adequate alternative housing;
- Ensure that no Romani individual is made homeless in the process of eviction;
- Develop sustainable, adequate integrated housing solutions for all Roma;
- Refrain from collectively expelling Romani EU citizens from France;
- Introduce clear guidelines on how authorities should safeguard rights in accordance with the requirements of the Directive 2004/38/EC on free movement;
- Ensure that returns to other EU Member States are truly voluntary, accompanied by reintegration assistance and take account of the needs of vulnerable peoples in the process of humanitarian returns;
- Ensure independent monitoring of all immigration processes and programmes, including both return and reintegration; and
- Redirect funding earmarked for expulsions and returns to the implementation of long term inclusion policies.

We respectfully request to be informed of any and all actions undertaken by your respective offices in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Dezideriu Gergely  
Executive Director

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<sup>7</sup> "Lille: un campement de Roms évacué", *L'Express*, published on 09/08/12, [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/lille-un-campement-de-roms-evacue\\_1147805.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/lille-un-campement-de-roms-evacue_1147805.html) (accessed August 10th 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Committee of Ministers, Decision on the Merits, Complaint No. 63/2010, 28 June 2011, available at: [http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter/Complaints/CC63Merits\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter/Complaints/CC63Merits_en.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> France, An equal place in French society: French government strategy for Roma integration within the framework of the Communication from the Commission of 5 April 2011 and the Council conclusions of 19 May 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_france\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_france_strategy_en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, Commission staff working document accompanying document to the National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework, SWD(2012) 133 - 21 May 2012 available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_nat\\_integration\\_strat\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_nat_integration_strat_en.pdf).