

16 June 2011

Mayor of Belgrade Dragan Đilas
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Ms Vesna Ivić, Head of the City Administration
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Dear Mayor Đilas, Ms Ivić and Mr Nedeljković,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), a public interest law organisation working to combat anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma, is writing to express deep concern about the 7 June 2011 eviction of 12 Romani families from the settlement under Pančevo Bridge in Belgrade during which the families concerned were forced out of their homes and relocated to the village of Dren in the municipality of Obrenovac.

According to media and NGO reports, without prior notice police and social workers arrived at the settlement on 7 June and informed the 12 families that they were being evicted, without providing an official eviction notice. The families were given only a few hours to prepare their belongings before they were taken by bus the same day to Dren, a village in the municipality of Obrenovac. In this village, authorities left the families in empty containers which do not meet minimum standards of adequate housing: they are without furniture and have no connection to electric, water or sewage systems.¹ No introduction or integration actions are known to have been implemented to promote good relations between Romani and non-Romani neighbours in the new location.

The new container site is also not secure. Since the forced relocation, poor relations have developed between the relocated Roma and their new neighbours. According to the Regional Centre for Minorities, during the night of 11-12 June, one of the Romani women forcibly relocated to a container in Dren was attacked by an unknown man. Entering her container in the middle of the night, the perpetrator attacked the woman with a stick, beating her and causing minor injuries. When her screams began to alert the other residents, the attacker fled. Although the local authority contracted a private security company to protect the site, the security guard present did not manage to prevent the attack or detain the perpetrator. Local activists raised concerns that this woman may have been targeted because of her outspoken opposition to the eviction and vocal complaints about the inadequate conditions in the containers.²

According to international and domestic law, Serbia is legally obligated to respect, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing as defined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, Article 11), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, Article 17), and General Comment 4 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,³ including strict criteria governing forced evictions.⁴ In the event of an eviction, the State is obliged to provide: genuine consultation with those affected, reasonable notice and provision of adequate, alternative housing. The

¹ Amnesty International, "Belgrade Must Stop Forced Evictions", public statement, 10 June 2011, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR70/008/2011/en/619f35c2-8a1f-438c-adc0-868d56ff1fe7/eur700082011en.html>.

² Regional Centre for Minorities, "Napad na Maricu Jurakić u kontejnerskom naselju u Drenu", press release, 13 June 2011, available at: <http://minoritycentre.org/sh/actuals/napad-na-maricu-juraki%C4%87-u-kontejnerskom-naselju-u-drenu>

³ United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 4: The right to adequate housing*, 1991, available at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e?Opendocument>.

⁴ United Nations, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)*, available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm> and United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*, available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>.

ICCPR (Article 9), the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 5) and the Serbian Constitution (Article 27) also establish the State's obligation to ensure every citizen the right to liberty and security of the person. Finally, the ERRC recalls the recent recommendations by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to Serbia: "The Committee urges the State party to ensure that any resettlements do not involve further forced evictions and that procedural protections which respect due process and human dignity be put in place."⁵ Under the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Serbia has committed to comprehensively and sustainably reconstructing and improving the living conditions in Romani settlements,⁶ a goal that is actively frustrated by illegal evictions and the provision of unsustainable and inadequate container housing.

Mayor Đilas, Ms Ivić and Mr Nedeljković, Serbian authorities must ensure that evictions comply with international standards. The ERRC calls for the immediate provision of adequate alternative housing for the evicted Roma, ensuring a minimum basic standard of living conditions, connection to local infrastructure and security of the residents. We also request that you promptly investigate the reported attack of a Romani woman in Dren. We respectfully request to be informed of any and all actions undertaken by your respective offices in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Robert Kushen
Executive Director

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⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Serbia*, 13 April 2011, available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/cerds78.htm>.

⁶ Republic of Serbia, Roma Housing Action Plan, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/files/downloads/Decade%20Documents/ap-housing-serbia.pdf>.