



*Public letter from Roma and pro-Roma activists and NGOs
against forced eviction of Roma*

Róbert Fico
Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

Bratislava, 19th September 2007

Honourable Prime Minister,

As representatives of organisations addressing social and human rights issues, we are alarmed at the increase in cases of forced eviction of Roma, the legality of which is frequently questionable. On the basis of our information from various localities it appears that for many municipal governments it is easier to absolve themselves from their responsibilities for their citizens' social problems than to look for adequate solutions. They opt for simpler means, namely the eviction of socially dependent Slovak citizens into smaller municipalities. These actions frequently deeply infringe the dignity of the persons concerned.

Additionally, these actions often result in an increase in interethnic tensions as the residents of those municipalities into which Roma are moved frequently object to their relocation. Their frustrations frequently lead to threats or, ultimately, to the direct use of violence.

These evictions, which are frequently carried out in contravention of domestic and/or international law, also often exploit the low legal awareness of the Roma. The targeted persons or communities are often unable to effectively defend themselves against violations of their fundamental rights. Municipalities count on the fact that Roma are an unpopular group within the majority population; they take advantage of the fact that the public will ignore such actions or even support them. In the majority of cases in which forced eviction has occurred, municipalities have chosen not to tackle the situation early on, for example, by instituting the substitute payment of social benefits which would guarantee both tenants' security of tenure and ensure the timely payment of rent. Instead, properties are frequently sold to private owners who proceed to evict Roma, thus saving the municipalities from embarrassment and public outcry. These practices intensify the racial segregation of communities in Slovakia.

In Slovakia, in practice, forced eviction is often not the last resort in the chain of justice system. Instead it is frequently the first course of action that municipal governments make use of, where Roma are concerned. Under the rule of law there must be protection of rights and legal procedures should be observed for all citizens irrespective of their ethnicity.

In one of the most recent examples forced eviction of Roma, taking place in Nové Zámky, new owners – with the assistance of a private security firm – evicted Roma citizens from their apartments and moved them to inadequate houses in the surrounding municipalities. The properties appear to have been sold to private owners for the express purpose of carrying out the eviction. Victims of this forced eviction have been left homeless, and camped out in front of the municipality in protest for several days. These facts render the eviction highly legally questionable, and apparently in contravention of international human rights law.

Institute of Roma Public Policy



Milan Šimečka Foundation – Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions – European Roma Rights Centre

In addition, we would like to point out that the case in Nové Zámky is not an isolated example, but is part of a wider trend, a trend which remains unrecognised by the public, by the responsible institutions and by politicians. The fact that in the last two years literally thousands of citizens – mainly Roma – have been forcibly evicted and generally rendered homeless as a result is not tolerable. In a number of instances, police have assisted in such actions.

It is in this context that we recall the international human rights obligations of the Slovak Republic, under which forced evictions are a last resort and as a measure that should be avoided at all costs. In addition, according to the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights “States parties must ensure, prior to carrying out any evictions, and particularly those involving large groups, that all feasible alternatives are explored in consultation with the affected persons”. (General Comment 7 - The right to adequate housing - forced evictions, International Covenant on Economical, Social and Cultural Rights, 16th session, UN document E/1998/22, (1997))

Honourable Prime Minister, it is for the above reasons that we hereby request:

1. That you raise this issue at the Government session; and
2. That you initiate a meeting with representatives of the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia to address this issue.

To ensure the most rapid solution to this situation we recommend that the following steps are taken:

1. Consult with the persons recently rendered homeless by the forced evictions in Nové Zámky, in order to secure sustainable and adequate housing solutions for all of the persons concerned;
2. Monitor the observance of housing law and in cases such as in Nové Zámky, to exert the maximum effort in providing legal remedy;
3. Consult with experts as quickly as possible on potential solutions in these cases and adopt measures to prevent similar cases and to secure legal recourse;
4. Exercise substitute payment of social benefits to a greater extent than up to present in localities with high rates of non-payers of rent;
5. In social policy provisions, systematically support community development, social fieldwork and form additional local public and social services that contribute to inclusion and prevent similar situations from occurring;
6. Define social housing and in so doing define a relevant government strategy;
7. Expand the program of social fieldworkers into localities in which no such services have yet been employed; and
8. Ensure that any persons responsible for violations of domestic and/or international law as a result of forced evictions are swiftly brought to justice.

We believe that it is in the interests of the Government to execute effective measures and thus avoid further such cases.

Institute of Roma Public Policy, *Bratislava*
Milan Šimečka Foundation, *Bratislava*
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For the attention of:
Deputy Prime Minister, Chiefs of Political Parties, Mayor of Nové Zámky, media