



The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton

2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

September 21, 2010

Dear Madam Secretary,

You have been a consistent and outspoken leader in defending and promoting the dignity and human rights of the Roma population. For this reason, we urge you to comment publicly on the expulsions of Roma from France and the discourse of intolerance used by some French politicians. Your support would not only draw attention to this particular violation of human rights, but also signal to other countries where Roma are facing significant challenges that the U.S. takes seriously discrimination and collective action against ethnic minorities.

We are thankful for your long-term commitment to highlighting and eradicating the plight of Roma. In particular, we commend you for the public statements you made on behalf of the Obama Administration, including on the occasion of International Roma Day in April 2009:

The United States is committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of Roma through our bilateral relations and through our involvement in organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Governments have a special responsibility to ensure that minority communities have the tools of opportunity they need to succeed as productive and responsible members of society. I urge governments throughout Europe to continue their efforts to address the plight of Roma, end discrimination and ensure equality of opportunity in education and employment so that Roma can fulfill their greater promise of success and achievement.

What has happened in France undermines this vision. Since July 2010, the French government dismantled two hundred camps populated by Roma and Traveler groups, and expelled approximately 1,230 Roma individuals from France back to their countries of origin, mainly Romania and Bulgaria, though a variety of means, including mandatory deportation orders and so-called “voluntary” repatriation.* A public Communiqué issued by the President of France

* The French authorities claim that the forced repatriation of Roma is “voluntary” because the expelled are being compensated financially at the rate of 300 Euros per adult and 100 Euros per child. This claim has been refuted by experts from the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), who affirmed that not all individuals had given their “free and full consent” to be expelled, nor had they understood their rights during the expulsion process. Furthermore, CERD’s independent experts said: “Our concern is that the removal or return of the Roma has been done on a collective basis rather than examining their individual circumstances.” The Committee also expressed its concern “about the increase in incidents and violence of a racist nature against Roma.”

dated July 28, 2010, and a Circular from the Ministry of Interior dated August 5, 2010, made explicit the racial basis for the French evictions and expulsions. (The Circular was later formally withdrawn following a public outcry.) In addition to the impermissible singling out of a particular ethnic group for law enforcement action, the French expulsions appear to violate numerous due process guarantees provided for by EU law.

The U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE, Ian Kelly, has recently urged OSCE governments “to review their policies concerning immigration and the rights of ethnic minority communities, especially Roma communities.” Ambassador Kelly’s remarks at the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna were timely and valuable, but given the scope of this expulsion—and the atmosphere of discrimination surrounding it—we believe his statement must be reinforced by a direct communiqué from Washington.

Since you have championed human rights and Roma rights in particular, your response to these expulsions is critical. We urge you to speak today to show political condemnation of France’s handling of the Roma evictions and expulsions, as well as the negative stereotyping of Roma by French politicians. The alternative—silence—may only undermine the security and safety of Roma throughout Europe.

We look forward to continuing our engagement with you and your staff on Roma rights in the future.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director, European Roma Rights Center

Edwin Rekosh
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Ian Kelly, U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE
Charles H. Rivkin, U.S. Ambassador to France and Monaco