



CERD: Slovakia must significantly improve efforts to fight discrimination of Roma

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) issued its Concluding Observations in which it points out the ongoing substantial shortcomings in fighting racism and racial discrimination in Slovakia. The Committee encourages the Slovak government to effectively fulfil its international obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) to which it is a State party.

In advance of issuing its recommendation, the Committee met with the delegation of the Slovak Republic during its 41st meeting held in Geneva in February 2013, where the Committee evaluated how Slovakia complies with its obligations arising from the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which Slovakia has ratified and incorporated into its system of domestic law. In its March 2013 recommendations, the Committee acknowledged some positive measures, such as recent amendments which allow temporary equalising measures approved by the Parliament, and the introduction of the National Roma Integration Strategy up to 2020. **On the other hand however, the Committee expresses serious concerns over substantial shortcomings in many areas and requests the Slovak Government to start dealing with these shortcomings in a more consistent and more effective manner.**

Among other issues, the Committee expresses its concern about the limited possibilities of invoking the anti-discrimination law, which has not yet met the level of effective legal protection for victims of discrimination and has in fact rarely been used by Slovak courts. The Committee mentions specifically ongoing cases of police brutality against members of minorities and their ineffective investigation, including failures in investigation of potential racial motivation. According to Vanda Durbáková from the Counselling Centre for Civil and Human Rights, *“The investigation of violent criminal activities conducted by the police, whether we consider its quality or independence, shows serious deficiencies in our country. In this regard, the Committee recommends us to establish a monitoring body, which would be entirely independent on the Ministry of Interior, and which would investigate and prosecute the alleged incidents of the police misconduct.”*

The Committee has also repeatedly addressed the theme of forced sterilisations and urged the Slovak Government to dedicate more attention to this issue. Against the background of three judgements of the European Court of Human Rights in cases of forced sterilisation of Romani women decided against Slovakia, the Committee requested that the Slovak Government effectively investigates the previous practice of forced sterilisation. *“It is indeed remarkable how systematically has the government been ignoring and hiding this problem over the years. However, this illegal practice has to be adequately investigated and the victims should be compensated,”* said Durbáková.

The Committee focused a considerable part of its recommendations on two issues – the ongoing *de facto* segregation of Romani children in education, and the violation of the right to adequate housing in Roma neighbourhoods. The UN Committee notes the existence of Roma-only schools and classes, as well as the disproportionately high number of Romani children in special education. The Committee also expressed its concerns regarding the proposed compulsory pre-school education measure written in the Roma Reform Plan. The Committee appeals to the Slovak Government to pursue all necessary

steps to eradicate segregation in education. According to Dezideriu Gergely, the Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), *“the CERD conclusions confirm that the trend of segregating Romani children continues, and there has been no significant progress attained in this field. The results of the recent UNDP research, according to which one in five school-age Romani children attend special education, are highly alarming. Under these circumstances, a significant proportion of Roma in Slovakia will find it hard to gain employment in the future, and we already know that there are many systemic problems for Roma in accessing employment even now.”*

Regarding the housing situation, the report draws attention to serious deficiencies in the infrastructure of Romani settlements, especially in Eastern Slovakia, and to recent trends of erecting walls, demolitions and forced evictions in many areas. Laco Oravec from the Milan Šimečka explains that *“domestic non-governmental organisations have been systematically pointing out that the spacial segregation of Roma is one of the gravest violations of the right to adequate housing. This pressing fact has been now reconfirmed by the UN Committee, which furthermore added that the measures on legalisation of properties envisaged in the Roma Reform Plan could lead to intensifying of segregation. The Committee’s recommendations also urge Slovak authorities to provide adequate alternative housing in eviction cases.”*

The Committee also criticises racially and ethnically motivated expressions of hate speech occurring in Slovak media and online; widespread negative attitudes towards minorities, especially towards Roma; and the inability of the Slovak Republic to enforce respect of international human rights provisions at the communal level.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination consulted two civil society submissions – the first prepared jointly by the Counselling Centre for Civil and Human Rights and People in Need Slovakia, the second by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Milan Šimečka Foundation and Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture (CVEK). These non-governmental organisations welcome the CERD Concluding Observations, which are in many areas informed by the data from their submissions. The organisations call on the Slovak Government to consider the fight against racial discrimination in our society as a high priority in all government measures and public policies.