

14 September 2011



Prime Minister David Cameron
Tony Ball, Leader of Basildon Borough Council
Bala Mahendran, Chief Executive of Basildon Borough Council
Mo Larkin, Mayor of Basildon Borough Council

Madách tér 4
Hungary – 1074 Budapest
Office Tel: +36 1 413 2200
Office Fax: +36 1 413 2201
E-mail: office@errc.org
www.errc.org

Dear Mr Prime Minister, dear Councillors,

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 planned forced eviction of 86 families, including 110 children, at the site of Dale Farm, in Essex County on 19 September 2011.

According to media and NGO reports, the Irish Travellers and English Gypsies, some of whom have been living at the site for more than a decade, own the land and lack only planning permission for half of the plots in Dale Farm. The residents have made repeated efforts to legalise their residence at the site, but all negotiations with the Basildon Borough Council have failed. No other adequate housing options have been offered to the residents threatened with eviction from the Dale Farm site. The planned forced eviction from Dale Farm raises concern about potential human rights violations, as there are currently no plans to provide the affected families with adequate alternative housing, or ensure their access to water, medical care or education. Furthermore, Basildon council authorities have failed to provide adequate halting sites, as prescribed by law. Given the lack of adequate alternative infrastructure this eviction is particularly counterproductive, and risks exacerbating the already widespread problem of homelessness among Irish Travellers and English Gypsies.

The United Kingdom is legally obliged 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, which include strict criteria governing forced evictions. Forced evictions are only permitted in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the State is obliged to ensure genuine consultation with those affected, reasonable notice and provision of adequate, alternative housing.

Joining international and domestic actors including the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing and the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues,¹ the ERRC calls for a halt to the evictions planned for the Dale Farm site and a return to negotiations between residents and local authorities. In the case of any forced eviction, the ERRC urges local and national authorities to ensure the immediate provision of adequate alternative housing for the evicted Irish Travellers and English Gypsies, a minimum basic standard of living conditions, connection to local infrastructure and access to local health and education services. 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

¹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "UK urged to find negotiated settlement to eviction stand-off with 86 Irish Traveller families – UN experts", available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11282&LangID=E>

Prime Minister David Cameron
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA
United Kingdom
Fax: +442079250918

Councillor Tony Ball, Leader of Basildon Borough Council
Bala Mahendran, Chief Executive of Basildon Borough Council
Mo Larkin, Mayor of Basildon Borough Council
The Basildon Centre
St. Martin's Square
Basildon, Essex SS14 1DL
Fax: +44 1268 294350