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Marco De Giorgi, General Director

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Dear Sirs,

The European Roma Rights Centre is writing to request that your respective offices open an investigation into the anti-Romani statements made publicly by Mr Gianfranco Fini, leader of the Italian political party National Alliance, as quoted in the Italian national newspaper Corriere della Sera on 4 November 2007, which may constitute incitement to racial hatred.

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation, which monitors Roma rights and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse of Roma. The ERRC works to combat prejudice and discrimination against Roma, and to promote genuine equality of treatment and equality of respect.

In particular, the ERRC is referring to the following statements by Mr Fini, made 3 days after the arrest of a Romanian Romani man in the suspected murder of an Italian woman in Rome:

Mr Fini said Gypsies [Roma] considered "theft to be virtually legitimate and not immoral" and felt the same way about "not working because it has to be the women who do so, often by prostituting themselves." He was quoted as having claimed that Roma "have no scruples about kidnapping children or having

children [of their own] for the purposes of begging.” Mr Fini reportedly added that, “To talk of integration with people with a "culture" of that sort is pointless.”

Honourable Prosecutor, Mr De Giorgi, the ERRC urges you in your respective capacities to investigate both the statements made by Mr Fini, as well as the responsibility of Corriere della Sera for publishing such racist statements without any sort of editorial remark.

The ERRC is gravely concerned that Mr Fini’s statements in his capacity as a public political figure with influence on public perceptions, and Corriere della Sera’s irresponsible publishing of his remarks without editorial comment, have contributed to an escalation of anti-Romani hostility in Italy and have lead to violent negative consequences for Roma. According to information relayed by Italian media, international and local organisations, there have been several attacks on Romanians and a bomb exploded outside a Romanian-owned store in a town just outside Rome, causing property damage. Prefects in Rome, Turin, Verona, Genoa and Milan have issued expulsion orders for more than thirty Romanian citizens and are considering additional orders in the coming days.

We request that you officially investigate whether Mr Fini’s public statements and their national dissemination by Corriere della Sera constitute violations of:

1. Article 3(1)(a) of Law 654/1975 as amended by Law 205/1993 which prohibits the dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, and incitement to commit or the commission of discriminatory acts for racial, ethnic, national or religious reasons.
2. Article 2(3) of Law 215/2003 which declares an offence the harassment or an unwanted conduct related to racial or ethnic origin takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
3. Articles 43 and 44 of the Immigration Law 286/98 which prohibits discrimination and provides for specific actions by the authorities.

Honourable Prosecutor, Mr De Giorgi, the ERRC calls on your office to ensure that thorough and expeditious investigation be conducted and that any and all responsible parties be brought to justice. We respectfully request to be informed of all the steps taken by your office in the enforcement of Italian law.

Respectfully,



Vera Egenberger
ERRC Executive Director

CC:

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