

Úrad vlády Slovenskej republiky
Att: Prime Minister Robert Fico
Námestie slobody 1
813 70 Bratislava
Slovak Republic

10 March 2010

Dear Prime Minister Fico:

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) expresses its grave concern regarding your recent statement presenting boarding schools for Romani children as the only alternative to the current lack of development in Romani communities living in social exclusion. In fact boarding schools for Romani children will further cement the segregation of Roma and is therefore illegal under domestic and international law.

In a public address on 8 March 2010, you stated that the Government should “continuously enroll as many Romani children as possible into boarding schools and continually remove these children from the way of life they are currently leading in the settlements.” You appear to present boarding schools as the sole solution to the severe exclusion of Roma living in settlements. The suggested approach shifts the blame for Roma exclusion onto Roma themselves, and represents a dangerous extension of a policy and practice of separating Romani children from the majority in education. Already, Romani children are routinely segregated in schools from their non-Roma peers. Frequently, Romani children are channeled into special schools intended for children with disabilities, where they are consigned to inferior education and no prospect for productive employment in the future. This segregation has been well documented in past and recent reports by domestic and international non-governmental organisations monitoring the right to education of Romani children. Non-governmental organisations have forwarded a series of recommendations to your Government requesting it to promote full and inclusive education. Rather than heeding the call for truly integrated education and providing Romani children the necessary support to succeed in an integrated setting, your Government is proposing an approach - ethnic boarding schools – that has been discredited by the experience of other countries.¹

The ERRC notes that discrimination of Romani children is widespread in Europe, including in Slovakia. In September 2009, the Roma Education Fund published a report that confirms the existence of systematic and widespread discrimination in education of Romani school children in Slovakia, including through segregation in special schools. Such discrimination has been expressly condemned as illegal by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*. Similar cases pertaining to discrimination of Romani school

¹ For example, in 2008, the Canadian government offered a full apology to its native Indians for the Indian Residential School system.

children in accessing education are pending in or against different countries in the immediate region, such as Hungary and Croatia, illustrating that such discriminatory practices are widespread.

The ERRC calls on the Slovak Government to adopt sustainable measures and reforms to the educational system that facilitate the integration of Romani children into mainstream schools and that promote inclusive education with quality outcomes for all children.

Sincerely,

Robert Kushen
Managing Director
European Roma Rights Centre