

7 February 2011

Mayor of Rome Gianni Alemanno
Prefect of Rome Giuseppe Pecoraro
Prefect Francesco Paolo Tronca
City Councillor for Social Policy Sveva Belviso

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Re: Measured Response to Roma Housing Needed in Rome

Dear Mayor Alemanno, Prefect Pecoraro, Councillor Belviso and Prefect Tronca,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), an international human rights law organisation, is writing to urge well-planned and sustainable housing solutions to the substandard and dangerous conditions prevailing in Rome's Romani camps, in light of the 6 February 2011 death of four Romani children, aged between 4 and 11 due to a fire in their home.

According to the media reports, the four children were Romanian Romani migrants, living with their family in a makeshift shack in a small informal camp located in via Appia Nuova. Their family, like many other Roma and Sinti, had reportedly been subjected to repeated evictions by local authorities, which forced them to move constantly just to find shelter.¹ This morning, Rome authorities evicted the 20 remaining Roma from this settlement, offering them temporary accommodation in a shelter.² While media coverage of this incident indicates that the fire was accidental, we call on responsible fire officials to conduct a thorough investigation into the cause of the fire.

Repeated forced evictions of Roma have been conducted in Rome since the May 2008 enactment of the State of Emergency. In the two and a half years since that time, the evidence has shown that a strategy of evictions in the absence of adequate consultation and social support to families to access other adequate forms of housing does not eliminate the problem: it merely pushes it to another location to be addressed at another time because the Roma targeted seek shelter anywhere they can, resorting to building temporary shacks in extremely dangerous conditions. People affected by such practices face deteriorating living conditions with each eviction. The formal camps administered or planned within the Piano Nomadi are not the answer: segregating Roma in camps will prevent them from regularly working or attending school. Even as a temporary solution the camps are inadequate as there are an insufficient number of places planned in comparison to the demand.

The ERRC is alarmed by Mayor Alemanno's call for extended powers to eliminate so-called illegal camps in Rome: the powers of local authorities have already been greatly extended under the State of Emergency and there is nowhere to move the residents because the housing planned under the Piano Nomadi is not yet completed. Further forced evictions will not help, and any expulsions of EU citizens to their country of origin must be accompanied by procedural safeguards that cannot be circumvented by a State of Emergency.

We urge your offices to comply with international law, under which Italian authorities are obliged to ensure the availability of adequate housing.³ Furthermore, to be legal, any eviction must be conducted with the following procedural protections: "[A]n opportunity for genuine consultation with those affected; adequate and reasonable notice for all affected persons prior to the scheduled date of eviction; [...] evictions not to take place in particularly bad weather or at night unless the affected persons consent otherwise [...] Evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights. Where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the State

¹ "Via Appia Nuova, a fuoco una baracca in un campo rom: morti quattro bimbi", *Roma Today*, 6 February 2011, available at: <http://www.romatoday.it/cronaca/quattro-bimbi-morti-incendio-campo-rom-via-appia-nuova.html>.

² "Via Appia Nuova: sgomberato il campo nomadi della tragedia", *Roma Today*, 7 February 2011, available at: <http://www.romatoday.it/municipio/9-sangiovanii/arco-di-travertino/sgombero-campo-nomadi-via-appia-nuova.html>.

³ General Comment No. 4 on the right to adequate housing of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) defines adequate housing as that which is: habitable (in terms of space and providing protection from hazards), accessible (including to children, the elderly and disadvantaged groups) and well located (in an area with access to necessary institutions and in an area free from pollution or health hazards). Available at: <http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e?Opendocument>.

party must take all appropriate measures, to the maximum of its available resources, to ensure that adequate alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, as the case may be, is available.”⁴

We urge you to work with Romani and Sinti organisations and individuals to develop sustainable, adequate housing solutions for all Roma and Sinti on the territory of Rome. We request that a full investigation into the cause of the fire be conducted. We request a meeting with your offices to discuss adequate and integrated private or social housing solutions for Roma in Rome. Finally, we ask to be informed of any and all actions undertaken by your offices in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Robert Kushen
Executive Director

TO:

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⁴ See: CESCR, General Comment No. 7, available at:
<http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/959f71e476284596802564c3005d8d50?Opendocument>.