

3 May 2012

Mr Miladin Despotovic, Chief of the Police Directorate for Belgrade
Ms Zagorka Dolovac, Chief Prosecutor for the Republic of Serbia
Mr Dragan Đilas, Mayor of Belgrade
Mr Vladimir Cucić, Commissioner for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia
Mr Nenad Milenković, President of the Municipality of New Belgrade

Re: Attack against Roma relocated from Belgrade's Belvil settlement

Dear Sirs/Madam,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)¹ is writing to express deep concern about the 1 May 2012 attack on Roma in the Belgrade settlement, Jabučki Rit. The victims of this incident were Romani individuals who had been forcibly evicted and relocated from Belgrade's Belvil settlement by city authorities on 26 April.

According to media and NGO reports, on 1 May at around 9:00 AM, a group of between 15 to 20 masked individuals attacked the settlement, shouting racist slogans including "Serbia for Serbs, Roma out of Serbia." They also drew a swastika on one of the metal containers to which the Roma had been relocated.² To date, only one suspect has been arrested; a resident of Jabučki Rit.³ Since the Roma were forcibly relocated, relations have deteriorated between the relocated Roma and their new neighbours.

Serbia is legally obligated to respect, protect and fulfill the right to adequate housing as defined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, Article 11) and the right to be free from unlawful interference in the home under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, Article 17). The United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, which oversees implementation of the ICESCR, has elaborated that "Evictions should not result in individuals being [...] vulnerable to the violation of other human rights."⁴ Article 16 of the Serbian Constitution sets out that "ratified international treaties shall be an integral part of the legal system in the Republic of Serbia and applied directly."⁵

The ERRC requests that Belgrade police and prosecutors fully investigate the attack, including its racial elements, identify and bring to justice all perpetrators, and ensure full assistance and compensation to the affected persons. We request that Belgrade city authorities provide adequate and appropriate protection to all forcibly relocated Roma from the Belvil settlement, and ensure that any re-housing plans include appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the affected Roma and foster real integration and inclusion in their new locations.

¹ The ERRC is an international public interest law organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma. The approach of the ERRC involves, in particular, strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development, and training of Romani activists.

² b92, *Uhapšen zbog upada u romsko naselje*, 1 May 2012, available at: http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2012&mm=05&dd=01&nav_category=16&nav_id=605434.

³ Ibid.

⁴ CESCR, *General Comment No 7: The right to adequate housing (art. 11.1 of the Covenant): forced evictions*, available at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/959f71e476284596802564c3005d8d50>.

⁵ See: http://www.srbija.gov.rs/cinjenice_o_srbiji/ustav_odredbe.php?id=217.

We respectfully request to be informed of all actions undertaken by your respective offices in response to this letter and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

Robert Kushen
Chair

TO:
Mr Miladin Despotovic
Chief of the Police Directorate for Belgrade

Ms Zagorka Dolovac
Chief Prosecutor for the Republic of Serbia

Mr Dragan Đilas
Mayor of Belgrade

Mr Vladimir Cucić
Commissioner for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia

Mr Nenad Milenković
President of the Municipality of New Belgrade

CC:
Mr Eduardo Arboleda
UNHCR Representative in Serbia

Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos
Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

H.E. Ambassador Vincent Degert
Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia

Mr William Infante
United Nations Country Team, UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia,

Ms Judita Reichenberg
UNICEF Area Representative for Serbia and Croatia, UNCT Roma Theme Group Chair

Mr Werner Hoyer
President of the European Investment Bank

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
Human Rights Treaties Division (HRTD)
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Ms. Rita Izsák,
Independent Expert on minority issues,
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights