

Albania: Roma Housing Rights Abuses

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Albanian Authorities Urged to Resolve the Situation of 21 Romani Families Rendered Homeless by Forced Eviction

On 7 August 2006, the ERRC sent a letter to Mr. Z. Ardian Turku, Mayor of Elbasan, expressing concern about the forced eviction and resulting homelessness of 109 Romani individuals. The ERRC urged Mayor Turku to ensure that the urgent housing needs of these evicted families are addressed immediately. The full text of the ERRC letter follows:

Dear Mayor Turku,

The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), an international public interest law organisation which monitors the human rights situation of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse, is writing to express concern for the 109 Romani residents of 5 Maji Street in Elbasan who have been forcibly evicted and whose homes have recently been destroyed. We urge you to act on behalf of the 21 families who are now homeless.

According to the Albanian Romani Union Amaro Drom, 109 Romani individuals have been evicted from homes they have occupied since 1991. At the time of the evictions, the community was in the process of legalising their homes. However, on 15 July, local building authorities reportedly notified residents that the building would be destroyed beginning 21 July, and on this date proceeded to destroy the building. Individuals were not allowed to remove their personal belongings, including furniture and other items, before the destruction of their homes.

Since this date, the 21 families that occupied the buildings have been left homeless, including pregnant women and children. According to information provided by representatives of the Elbasan Municipality, the municipality intends to build municipal social housing for poor families on the site, which is intended to benefit the same evicted families. However, evictions should not have taken place until alternative housing was made available so as to avoid homelessness. Local activists have voiced doubts as to the commitment of local housing authorities to solving the housing problems of Roma.

Mayor Turku, the absence of such alternative housing or compensation for these families as well as the initial lack of reasonable notice or adequate consultation with residents make this action a gross violation of Albania's obligations under International Human Rights Law. Under international treaties, including the European Convention on Human Rights, evictions should not proceed unless there is exceptional justification; adequate notice; a search for alternatives to eviction in genuine consultation with affected people; due process; and the provision of remedies, including compensation and adequate resettlement within a reasonable distance to sources of employment and education. Under no circumstances should evictions result in homelessness. It is evident that these provisions have not been met in the case of the families of 5 Maji Street.

We urge you to ensure that the urgent housing needs of these evicted families are addressed immediately. It is imperative that these families are provided with an adequate housing solution. We look forward to your response and intervention and an ongoing dialogue with you on the right to adequate housing. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dimitrina Petrova
Executive Director

Persons wishing to express similar concerns are urged to contact:

Mr. Z. Ardian Turku
Mayor of Elbasan
Elbasan
Albania

Mr Sali Berisha, Prime Minister of Albania
Bulevardi „Deshmoret e Kombit“
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