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15th Anniversary of the “Erased”: time for EU to ensure Slovenia complies with obligations

(Brussels, 26 February) The EU cannot continue to ignore the plight of thousands of citizens who are still living in legal limbo or awaiting compensation from the Slovenian authorities for being denied their most basic rights, says Amnesty International.

Exactly fifteen years ago today, a few months after Slovenia declared its independence, the authorities took an extraordinary decision that has since been condemned by the country’s highest courts, the UN and the Council of Europe: the removal of over 18, 000 persons, mostly of Roma origin, from the Slovenian registry of permanent residents.

The “erased”, so called because they were effectively erased from the registry, lost a series of basic rights overnight. Amnesty International has consistently documented cases of people denied access to health care and education and who very often lost their homes, jobs and pensions as a direct result of this measure,

“There are dramatic cases of people who were denied care even though they were in the middle of health treatments, children who were not allowed to enroll in schools for several years and families that were put in situations of dire poverty after losing their jobs and homes,” said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International’s EU office.

Slovenian courts have partially redressed the situation by recognizing this measure as unconstitutional and as a result a number of “erased” were granted permanent residency. But Slovenian authorities have been slow and ineffective in remedying the serious human rights problems caused by the 1992 measure: around five thousand continue to live in legal limbo, without rights, and those reinstated have not been granted reparation.

“Much remains to be done and the EU cannot afford to ignore this problem, especially since this is happening the context of the EU’s Equal Year of Opportunities and in a country that is soon going to be taking over the EU Presidency,” said Oosting. .

In a letter to the Commission, the Council Presidency and the European Parliament (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International asks that the EU should obtain clearly benchmarked commitments from Slovenia to remedy this continuing injustice in the course of 2007 and certainly before Slovenia assumes the EU Presidency in January 2008