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Belgium: Round-up and deportation of Slovak Romani asylum-seekers

The Belgium government has ordered the rounding-up of dozens of Slovak Romani asylum-seekers and plans to deport hundreds more in what appears to be “a discriminatory targeting of asylum-seekers by their group and ethnic identity, rather than an impartial application of the asylum procedure,” Amnesty International said today.

The Belgian and Slovak governments have announced plans to collaborate in the deportation of several hundred Slovak Romanies to Slovakia, beginning with a group of about 70 detained asylum-seekers, for which the Slovak government has sent a special plane today.

Seventy one Slovak Romani asylum-seekers presented themselves at a police station in Ghent last week, in response to mailed invitations from the authorities to attend there to complete documentation for their asylum applications. Instead, 53 of them were detained and transferred to 127-bis Steenokkerzel detention centre for aliens.

Belgian police in Ghent were yesterday and today reported to be visiting the homes of Slovak Romani asylum-seekers in a further stage of a planned round-up, and Slovak Roma asylum-seekers in Tirlemont are reported to have received similar postal invitations to present themselves at police stations.

Amnesty International received reports today that not all the detained asylum-seekers had exhausted the asylum procedure; that they had no access to interpretation in their own language, and were not fully aware of what was happening.

“The deportation plan agreed between the Belgium and Slovak governments appears to be guiding, overriding, and contaminating what should be an impartial asylum procedure.”

Amnesty International calls upon the Belgium authorities to ensure that all asylum-seekers gain access to a fair and impartial asylum procedure and, in particular, ensure that no expulsion or deportation plans are drawn up before all appeals procedures are exhausted in the individual cases.

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