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Albania: 44 Roma families desperately need adequate housing, not forced eviction

Amnesty International calls on the Minister of Urban Development and the minister of Social Welfare and Youth to stop the forced eviction of 44 Roma and Egyptian families (200 individuals) by the Tirana municipal authorities, and ensure that if an eviction is necessary, it is carried out lawfully, and in accordance with international standards. The eviction is due to start today.

The organization also urges the authorities to provide these families with a sustainable housing solution, as proposed by the People's Advocate. Amnesty International's own research has shown that many of them have been repeatedly forcibly evicted since 2011 (see background), without ever being offered access to alternative adequate housing.

This is unacceptable and exposes the Roma and Egyptian families to repeated and multiple human rights violations. People at risk of eviction should be fully consulted and provided with adequate notice, and of the reasons for their eviction. Further, they should be provided with adequate alternative housing. As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Albania is obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing.

On 5 October, Tirana municipal employees were seen at the informal settlement near the Artificial Lake. Although the eviction of the informal settlement had been publicised in the media, prior to this date, the affected families had not been consulted, nor had they received any formal notice of the eviction or any other notification of the authorities' intention to evict them. The municipal authorities did not produce a court order for the eviction, as required by Albanian law. This has denied the affected Roma and Egyptians their right to appeal against the eviction – a key safeguard against forced evictions as highlighted by international human rights standards.

The Tirana authorities have proposed a range of solutions, which Amnesty International considers to be inadequate. They include access to subsidized rents (*bonus strehimi*); but research by Amnesty International and others has found that few Roma and Egyptians meet the income, documentation and employment criteria to qualify for, or afford, such rents.

Affected families registered as living in Tirana have been offered places in the National Emergency Transition Centre: however, the centre has very little space to take in more families, and provides only basic needs. Only nine of over 50 families forcibly evicted from Rruga e Kajaves in 2013, who now live at the centre, have been offered any alternative housing.

A significant number of families not registered in Tirana have been offered assistance and transport to return to their cities of origin, including Berat and Elbasan. Although, according to the Mayor of Tirana, this is not obligatory, even if they have housing there, in the absence of employment, they are more than likely to return again to Tirana.

In 2014, Albania agreed to implement the Human Rights Council's recommendation following their Universal Periodic Review of Albania, including to ensure the right to adequate housing to

Roma and Egyptians, and to redouble its efforts to fully implement the National Action Plan and Strategy for the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Yet little has been done in this regard. Roma and Egyptians continue to live in inadequate housing, without security of tenure, and – following the introduction of Law on the Legalization, Urbanization and Integration of Illegal Constructions in 2014 – are repeatedly vulnerable to forced eviction.

Background

The affected families include some of those who were forced to flee their homes near the Tirana railway station after arson attacks in 2011. They were subsequently offered resettlement in tents at a grossly inadequate site at Babbru, but were forced to leave due to a dispute over unpaid rent between the landowner and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Some families were subsequently moved again to inadequate and decrepit military barracks in the Sharrë area of Tirana, but most left after intimidation and threats from the local community.

In January 2012, families who had moved from Babbru to the Artificial Lake site dismantled their own houses (in order to save the building materials) in the face of a threatened eviction. They returned a few weeks later, only to be forcibly evicted yet again. They were then provided with shelter in a courtyard at the Ombudsperson's Office, but remained without any housing solutions.

Other families at risk today at the Artificial Lake include some of those evicted in 2013 from Rruga e Kajaves, who did not wish to move to the National Emergency Transition Centre; no other alternative accommodation was provided.

The People's Advocate has proposed in his Recommendation to the Tirana authorities (No.K1/1118-4, dated 8 October 2015) that any eviction should be conducted in accordance with international standards, including by

- Providing an acceptable, long-term and sustainable solution for those affected;
- Stopping any activities associated with eviction until an officially documented and verifiable solution - is in place;
- Working in cooperation and full consent of the affected community;
- Avoiding human rights violations, including forced eviction and use of violence against the affected Roma and Egyptians.

Public Document

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