



Ref: CommHR/GC/sf 035-2013

Mr Ignazio MARINO
Mayor of Rome

Strasbourg, 12 November 2013

Dear Mayor,

As Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, an important aspect of my work consists of visits to member states of the Organisation and dialogue with the authorities and civil society aimed at fostering better protection of human rights. On the occasion of a visit to Rome, which I carried out as part of this work in June 2012, I looked at a number of human rights issues of particular relevance to Italy. This visit was followed by a report I published in September 2012, which you will find enclosed. I would like to draw your attention to two concerns I raised in this report which are of direct relevance to the Municipality of Rome, namely the segregation of Roma and Sinti on the one hand, and the living conditions and integration of beneficiaries of international or humanitarian protection on the other.

Both my predecessor in his reports on Italy in 2008, 2009 and 2011, and I in my 2012 report raised the issue of measures taken by the Italian authorities on the basis of the so-called “Nomad emergency”, which raised particularly serious human rights concerns. One of the legacies of the approach based on the “Nomad emergency”, which I understand to have now been struck down by the Italian judiciary, was the building of segregated camps (also called formal camps or “equipped villages”, *villaggi attrezzati*) for Roma and Sinti families and their forced eviction and resettlement in these camps. In 2012, I visited one such camp (*Via Salone*) and witnessed the conditions which led to a lack of interaction with the outside world, lack of reasonable prospects of employment, school absenteeism and general social exclusion for its inhabitants, who were exclusively Roma and Sinti. I also raised serious concerns about the ongoing construction work at the time on a similar camp (*La Barbuta*), as well as continuing forced evictions coinciding with my visit.

Since my visit, I have been following with attention the housing situation of Roma and Sinti in Italy, including Rome, in order to monitor progress towards the discontinuation of policies of forced evictions and segregated camps for Roma and Sinti, which I highlighted as priority areas for action for the Italian authorities in my report. I was therefore concerned about reports concerning guidance provided by the former municipal administration of Rome at the beginning of this year that persons living in formal camps would not be considered as living in “greatly disadvantaged housing conditions”, and therefore would not be eligible for prioritisation for the assignment of social housing. Of particular concern to me was the fact that under this guidance, these segregated camps were to be considered as permanent structures. I call on you to ensure the possibility for Roma and Sinti living in these camps to have access to social housing on an equal footing with the rest of the population.

I also took note with concern in September 2013 of the forced eviction of Roma families from the informal camp of Salvati, next to a ‘tolerated’ camp which I had also visited in June 2012, and their relocation to the formal camp of Castel Romano against their will. I was particularly concerned about the criticism I received according to which no genuine consultation with the inhabitants took place before this eviction, despite their appeal for dialogue with the municipality. In this connection, I would like to stress that international standards on the right to adequate housing, which are binding on Italy, establish that evictions should only take place as a last resort and following appropriate procedural safeguards, which include genuine consultation with those affected.

Forced evictions and segregated camps must ultimately be relegated to the past along with the “Nomad emergency”, and ordinary housing solutions must be found for Roma and Sinti in Italy, in accordance with Italy’s National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Communities. I believe that future measures of the authorities of Rome to achieve these goals will be of crucial significance, not only due to the number of Roma and Sinti who currently live in segregated camps around Rome (more than 4 000 persons living in 8 camps) but also due to the symbolic value of the policies of Italy’s capital city for the rest of the country. I am fully conscious of the challenges involved in reversing a long history of harmful policies violating human rights and appreciate your considerable responsibility in this connection.

The situation of beneficiaries of international or humanitarian protection was another major issue I raised in my 2012 report. In this report, I referred in particular to the destitution and shocking living conditions faced by around 800 persons living at the time in the so-called “Selam Palace”, an abandoned university building in the south-eastern periphery of Rome. One of the problems I highlighted was administrative hurdles to residence registration (*iscrizione anagrafica*), which is necessary to access social assistance measures.

In this connection, I warmly welcome information I have received from NGOs working with the inhabitants of this building that you have personally visited the building and that the situation concerning residence registration has improved considerably.

Nonetheless, there are also reports that the number of people living in the building has increased to around 1250 persons and that the sanitary conditions have further deteriorated. I am confident that you are exploring solutions to resolve this situation, which should involve genuine consultations with the inhabitants. I would appreciate it if you could inform me of any developments in this respect.

The living conditions and integration of beneficiaries of international and humanitarian protection are crucial human rights challenges for Italy, which require concerted efforts from national, regional and municipal authorities, and I consider you to be one of my key interlocutors in this respect.

I trust that we can start a constructive dialogue in order to address the issues highlighted in this letter together, and I stress my readiness to provide you with any support I can in this context.

Looking forward to receiving your reply, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Nils Muižnieks