



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



Ref: CommHR/HB/sf 007-2016

Mr Matteo RENZI
President of the Council of Ministers
of the Italian Republic

Strasbourg, 26 January 2016

Dear President,

I am seriously concerned about reports of evictions of Roma families in different localities in Italy, and in particular in Rome and Milan. I had already expressed myself previously on this matter, notably in a report following my official visit to Italy in July 2012 and in a letter I sent to the former Mayor of Rome, Mr Ignazio Marino, on 12 November 2013.

I would like to recall that any eviction without due process and without the offer of adequate alternative housing is a violation of Italy's international obligations, particularly if these evictions result in homelessness. The European Committee of Social Rights has stressed that when alternative solutions to evictions cannot be found, evictions must be carried out under conditions which respect the dignity of the persons concerned, be governed by rules of procedure sufficiently protective of the rights of the persons, and be accompanied by proposals for alternative accommodation. As you know, the same Committee found in 2005 and 2010 that Italy had violated Article 31 of the revised European Social Charter on the right to housing, owing to the inadequate housing conditions and forced evictions of Roma and Sinti. In its 2010 decision, the Committee also found violations of three other articles of the revised European Social Charter, read alone or in conjunction with the Charter's non-discrimination clause, in connection with the living conditions of Roma and Sinti.

In this respect, I would like to point out that during my aforementioned visit to Italy, I have witnessed first-hand the sub-standard living conditions endured by Roma living around Rome in informal settlements, but also in authorised settlements or "equipped villages" constructed during the so-called "Nomad emergency". As regards the latter, I have expressed my view that the segregation that characterises these camps seriously undermined the prospects of residents to receive education, obtain gainful employment, interact with non-Roma persons and integrate into society. They should therefore not be considered as adequate alternative housing in the context of forced evictions.

Unfortunately, many reports of forced evictions continued to reach my Office in 2014 and 2015. I was particularly troubled by the reported increase in the number of forced evictions in Rome, where 64 forced evictions took place after 13 March 2015 according to the Association 21 luglio. I have also received distressing information that in Milan, where more than 2 000 Roma were reportedly forcibly evicted in 2014, further evictions are planned for early 2016, including from the regular settlement of Via Idro which my predecessor had visited in 2011 and where some residents have been living for decades. Roma rights organisations also report that in many cases evictions are carried out without a formal notice or sufficient advance warning, and most importantly without any meaningful consultation of residents. I have received reports of Roma families being rendered homeless as no alternative solutions were provided, or that the only alternative proposed was to be relocated to segregated, Roma-only camps.

Although local authorities are responsible for these forced evictions, they represent serious violations of Italy's international obligations and their prevention requires national co-ordination. It was in this context that I had warmly welcomed the adoption by Italy in February 2012 of its first National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Communities. Segregated camps and forced evictions are diametrically opposed to the letter and spirit of this document, which rightly states that "the liberation from the camp as a place of relational and physical degradation [...] and relocation to decent housing is possible". It is therefore with regret that I observe the continuation of past policies in contradiction not only with Italy's international obligations, but also with its national strategy. In this respect, I would like to stress my preoccupation regarding the lack of resources devoted to the implementation of the strategy at the national level in comparison with the magnitude of the task ahead, including as regards the capacity of UNAR which was designated as the focal point in the strategy.

I therefore would like to draw your attention to my continuing concerns regarding the human rights of Roma and Sinti in Italy and would be grateful if you could provide me with information regarding the concrete measures that Italian authorities are intending to take in order to prevent homelessness, stop forced evictions which are incompatible with international standards, and close existing Roma-only settlements and reception facilities by offering genuinely integrated, ordinary housing alternatives to the families concerned.

I look forward to maintaining a constructive dialogue with you and your government on these issues.

Yours sincerely

Nils Muižnieks