



Ref: CommHR/CL/sf 006-2016

Mr Zoltán BALOG
Minister of Human Capacities
Hungary

Strasbourg, 26 January 2016

Dear Minister,

In recent months, I have received numerous worrying reports of planned evictions of hundreds of Roma families in the “Numbered Streets” neighbourhood of the city of Miskolc, without provision of alternative accommodation. In particular, I am informed that during the summer 2015, around 450 mainly Roma families living in this neighbourhood have received letters from the municipality asking them to leave their houses, allegedly without prior communication on these evictions and without indication in the letters about alternative housing solutions or compensation for their evictions.

Other measures targeting Roma which have recently been taken in Miskolc include a municipal decree on housing granting compensation for tenants leaving public rented flats under the condition that they agree to use the compensation to purchase property outside the municipality and do not return to Miskolc for five years. I note that the Hungarian Supreme Court subsequently annulled this municipal decree as unlawful. The recurrent joint raid-like controls carried out by a number of administrative authorities in segregated areas of Miskolc have also been considered by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and his Deputy Commissioner responsible for the protection of the rights of nationalities as raising serious human rights issues, including in terms of the right to private life. The Equal Treatment Authority also raised its concern at the local authorities' policy towards Roma in Miskolc in July 2015.

I would like to recall that any eviction without due process and without the offer of adequate alternative housing is a violation of Hungary's international obligations, particularly if these evictions result in homelessness. In its latest report on Hungary (June 2015), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) strongly recommended that the central Government takes action in all cases where local authorities attempt to force Roma out of social housing, evict them from their homes without ensuring suitable alternatives or subject them to directly or indirectly discriminatory rules in respect of housing.

I note that the objectives of the National Social Inclusion Strategy (2011–2020) include promoting the social integration of those living in poverty, including among Roma, improving housing conditions and reducing local segregation. I also note that a number of initiatives have already been taken by the central authorities in this respect.

However, I have received worrying reports according to which local authorities in Miskolc have continued to threaten Roma families living in segregated areas with evictions and other measures and have not yet started to take inclusion measures, despite numerous calls to do so from national and international human rights institutions. It is also disturbing to learn that local authorities in the surrounding areas have taken openly negative stances against the possibility of Roma families moving to their municipalities.

As I have already stressed in my report on the visit I carried out in Hungary from 1-4 July 2014, I am concerned about the dire housing situation of Roma in Hungary. I again urge the authorities to address this problem as a matter of priority and to take urgent measures to protect Roma from forced evictions. Local authorities, including in Miskolc, must be made accountable for any policies and actions leading to segregation. Any measure leading to forced evictions of Roma families without provision of adequate alternative accommodation should be stopped. Long-term housing solutions, respectful of international human rights standards, should be identified for all persons at risk of eviction. Finally, noting the continuing general negative climate of opinion against Roma, I call on Hungarian political leaders to speak up and take action against anti-Gypsyism in all its forms.

Given the seriousness of the human rights issues at stake, I should like to request you to provide me with information on measures the Hungarian authorities intend to take to prevent future forced evictions and to provide those evicted with adequate alternatives and effective remedies.

Looking forward to receiving your reply, I remain,

Yours sincerely

Nils Muižnieks