



Ref: CommHR/EB/sf 003-2016

Ms Eglantina GJERMENI
Minister for Urban Development
Albania

Strasbourg, 26 January 2016

Dear Minister,

I have received and been concerned at reports of forced evictions of Roma and Egyptians in Albania, especially after the enactment in 2014 of the Law on Legalisation, Urbanisation and Integration of Illegal Constructions.

Of particular concern to me were the October 2015 evictions of about 200 Roma and Egyptians, including children and elderly persons, from the irregular settlement near the Artificial Lake in Tirana. These evictions took place without adequate alternative accommodation having been offered, despite repeated calls to do so, notably by the national Ombudsman. Reportedly, the Roma and Egyptians evicted from the Artificial Lake settlement had not received official notice of the evictions and were thus deprived of a possibility to legally challenge them. Moreover, no consultations with the persons concerned took place prior to the eviction. The Tirana authorities proposed the following alternative solutions: subsidised rents in social housing, places in the national Emergency Transitional Centre, or transportation to their areas of origin. The Albanian Ombudsman, NGOs and international human rights organisations considered that these proposals were inadequate, given that few Roma and Egyptians met the criteria for subsidised rents, and few places were available in the National Emergency Transition Centre. In its 2015 report on Albania, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted that the main constraints preventing Roma and Egyptians from accessing social housing in Albania were, firstly, lack of regular income and, secondly, the very onerous bureaucratic requirements.

It is of concern that adequate housing solutions have not been found either for the Roma families affected by previous evictions. For example, it has been reported that most families evicted in 2014 from the Selita settlement, in connection with the construction of the Tirana ring road, were not provided with assistance to find new accommodation suited to their specific needs beyond being offered two years' worth of rent.

The lack of access to adequate housing by Roma and Egyptians is a long-standing human rights issue in Albania. In its Resolution CM/ResCMN(2014)1 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Albania, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers noted that despite measures taken by the authorities in recent years, the housing situation of Roma remained worrying. It also noted that the living conditions faced by the Roma inhabitants of some settlements, without access to running water, sewers and a lack of roads, were matters of deep concern.

In light of the above, I urge you to take all necessary measures in order to put an end to the evictions of Roma and Egyptians without provision of adequate alternative accommodation. The persons who have already been evicted must urgently be provided with adequate housing, giving priority to families with minor children and other vulnerable persons. In this context, the development and implementation of long-term housing solutions, and of a strategy aiming at the full and effective social integration of this population in Albania is highly recommended.

I look forward to receiving your reply and to continuing a constructive dialogue with you and your government.

Yours sincerely

Nils Muižnieks