

Mr. Sali Berisha

Prime Minister of Albania

Mr Spiro Ksera

Minister of Labor and Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities

Ms. Jozefina Topalli

Speaker of the Parliament

Mr Lulzim Basha

Mayor of Tirana

Mr. Et'hem Ruka

Head of the Parl Commission of Labor,
Social Issues and Healthcare

Stockholm, 20 February 2012

Dear Sirs/Madam,

On behalf of Civil Rights Defenders, I call on you to express my concern about the lack of proper attention from the Albanian authorities to respect the right to housing of Roma families. We deem the measures undertaken, to protect families from forced eviction, as insufficient and inappropriate.

At least two cases of evictions have been reported recently: by our partner the Albanian Helsinki Committee, by the media, by Roma organizations and Roma families themselves. Other cases of evictions have gone unnoticed.

We fear that forced evictions might continue taking place, and urge you to address the issue of adequate housing for Roma families properly.

According to international standards, Albania has the duty to respect, protect and ensure the right to adequate housing to all its citizens. The Albanian Government, in its draft Plan of Action addressing the Opinion of the EU Commission, has declared this as a priority.

Evictions should be considered only when all other alternatives have been exhausted, and must be done with proper notification and consultation with the affected families. Long-term and dignified alternative accommodation should be provided, in accordance with Albania's international obligations. I would appreciate very much to hear your comments on the issue.

Sincerely,



Robert Hard

Executive Director, Civil Rights Defenders

We defend people's civil and political rights and empower human rights defenders - in Sweden and globally. Become a human rights defenders, you too! Read more about how you can support our work on: www.civilrightsdefenders.org

Attachment 1 - Brief background to some of the most urgent cases:

On 20th February 2011, around 45 Roma families were evicted from the barracks where they had been living for more than seven years, in an area around Tirana Train Station.

Following a reaction from local and international organisations, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAEO) provided tents in a camp located in the suburbs of Tirana and some families moved to the camp. The tent camps and the barracks were insufficient; they did not protect the residents against bad weather, they lacked running water, proper sanitation and access to services. The families endured for one year in the camp. MoLSAEO had promised to shelter them in old military barracks, in buildings run by the Ministry of Defense, without ever delivering.

On January 24th 2012, some of the families, temporarily at the other Roma settlement around Tirana Artificial Lake, were threatened and asked to move elsewhere by a local government police officer.

Meanwhile, on February 1st, arguing over an unpaid rent dispute, the camp landlord sent eight families away. Around 50 persons, amongst whom 25 are children, got temporary shelter at the People's Advocate offices, in an attempt to prompt adequate reactions and solutions from the authorities.

Several solutions were proposed, including a school gym, but the families demanded to be consulted and offered sustainable solutions and houses in good conditions.

For the moment, the families are hosted at the premises of a kindergarten run by a Roma NGO, awaiting a long term solution as promised to them but MoLSAEO. The remaining Roma families at the Tirana Artificial Lake still risk eviction. They have been able to stay only thanks to the mediation of civil society organizations.

Roma families live in dare conditions all over Albania, and particularly in Tirana. They lack running water, sanitation and electricity. They do not have access to services such as health care and education. Roma and Egyptian suffer from poverty and marginalization, which especially affects the women and children.

Issues related to improper housing do not receive proper attention from the authorities. For instance the so-called social houses, hundreds of apartments in newly built apartment buildings, are supposed to be distributed to families in need. But, the criteria set out to benefit from the social houses clearly discriminate Roma, as they require families to have been registered in Tirana for many years. Even though Roma families live in Tirana for years they are not registered, hence making it difficult for them to be part of the social houses schema.