



KOMITETI SHQIPTAR I HELSINKIT ALBANIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

Nr. prot _____

Tirana, 2 May, 2012

To: Mr. Flamur BIME
Mayor
Gjirokastra Municipality

To the knowledge: Mr. Spiro KSERA
Minister
Ministry of Labor, Social Affair and Equal Opportunities

Z. Igli TOTOZANI
People's Advocate

From: Znj. Vjollca MEÇAJ
Executive Directors
Albanian Helsinki Committee

Goran Miletic,
Programme Director for Western Balkans,
Civil Rights Defenders

Subject: Regarding the living conditions of Roma families located near the river Drino in Gjirokastra

Honorable Mr. Bime,

On the 14th and 18th of April 2012, the correspondent of the Albanian Helsinki Committee in Gjirokastra verified the complaint addressed to our organization, in which some Roma families located along the river Drino lacked drinking water and electricity.

The case verification showed that along the river Drino Gjirokastra city, in a place called "Xhemali" live, since 12 years around 30 Roma families, some of them come from the city of Korca. The majority are children and elderly. Living conditions of these families are difficult and problematic. Roma families live in tents, covered in plastic, fixed in wood and iron, in which penetrates water in rainy weather. The road that leads to where Roma families are located is very difficult to pass on foot as a result of mud and water.

Roma families complained about the lack of power and water. They claimed they had not signed a contract to the company that supplies electricity or the water supply company. Water supply rubber pipes carry through some water for about an hour per day, by some private firms against payment. However, despite the provision of this alternative method for providing drinking water, according to Roma families there has been lack of water for several days. Residents use river water for washing clothes, which especially during the summer can pose a risk to the community.



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Regarding water supply, the Director of the Water Supply company, Mr. Dasho Qeli, contacted by AHC correspondent, informed us that there it is not possible to supply drinking to the area where the Roma families are located, due to barriers such as the fact that families do not live on their own property, and the river nearby can flood the surrounding area. Mr. Dasho suggested to transfer Roma families to another safer neighborhood, for example Zinxhira in Gjirokastra, where lives the rest of the Roma community, which has regular water supply.

The verification also pointed out that the power supply is problematic: Roma families provide it through unsafe connections without proper technical conditions, putting at risk their lives. Some families claimed they possessed power generators but visits to their tents were not observed any such device. Residents claimed that have demanded from CEZ (power supply company) to supply electricity, but CEZ representatives could not supply electrical lines along the river, in the tents, due to lack of secure conditions.

As for above, the Albanian Helsinki Committee and Civil Rights Defenders express their concern about poor living conditions of Roma minority families, in the river Drino Gjirokastra, lack of community services, lack of drinking water and electricity. Alternative solutions that these residents have found to meet their vital needs, pose a risk to their life and health.

Albanian Helsinki Committee and Civil Rights Defenders suggest that within you possibilites, in cooperation with the relevant structures of the central government to seek for possible and safer solutions that can be offered to Roma families who live along Drino River, in order to guarantee the essential conditions for development of a dignified lifestyle. If it considered as a reasonable solution to establish 30 families in the neighborhood Zinxhiraj, we suggest to assess in advance if this district has sufficient space and the conditions necessary for the accommodation if there are adequate community services that can provide the city Roma families so they feel confident about moving them from one neighborhood to another. Every decision should be done in consultation with the Roma families themselves.

Thank you for the collaboration and we look forward to your response,

Faithfully

Vjollca Meçaj
Executive Director,
Albanian Helsinki Committee

Goran Miletic
Programme Director
for Western Balkans,
Civil Rights Defenders