

7 February 2011

Mayor of Rome Gianni Alemanno
Prefect of Rome Giuseppe Pecoraro
City Councillor for Social Policy Sveva Belviso

Dear Mayor Alemanno, Prefect Pecoraro and Councillor Belviso,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is writing to express deep concern about the poor and dangerous conditions in Roma camps in Rome, particularly in light of the tragedy in which four children, aged between 4 and 11, died during a fire in their home on the evening of 6 February 2011.

According to the media reports, the four children were Romanian Roma migrants, living with their family in a makeshift shack in a small informal camp located in via Appia Nuova. Their family, like many other Romanian Romani migrants and Italian Roma and Sinti, had been subject to repeated evictions which force them to move constantly just to find shelter. ERRC research indicates that authorities routinely order such evictions to be carried out by the police: expelling residents, destroying the structures and any remaining property and fail to provide any alternative accommodation as prescribed by international law. Such families face great obstacles to maintaining jobs and school attendance for the children as they live in constant fear of another eviction.

Authorities undertake these evictions as part of a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the informal camps in Italy, undertaken as part of the State of Emergency in effect since 2008. However, rather than eliminating informal camps, this policy forces those Roma and Sinti targeted in these evictions to seek shelter anywhere they can, often resorting to temporarily constructing shacks from poor materials and living in extremely dangerous conditions. The formal camps administered by authorities do not provide an adequate alternative as there are insufficient numbers of places and they offer a segregated, monitored environment, further marginalising the Roma and Sinti residents and not supporting their inclusion.

The ERRC is particularly concerned that officials are blaming bureaucracy for this tragedy. The vulnerable and deteriorating living conditions of these EU citizens is the result of their constant evictions, a targeted policy that makes their life in Italy difficult and prevents their integration. Furthermore, authorities have indicated that such incident prompt the implementation of additional extraordinary powers to the Prefect of Rome, which raises serious concerns. Rather than treating the housing of migrants as a matter of security, authorities should simply ensure that sustainable housing options are available to Roma and Sinti in Rome and encourage their inclusion through housing, employment and education.

The ERRC urges authorities in Rome to bring a swift end to the practice of forced evictions of Roma and to arrange a more sustainable and secure housing solution for the Romanian Roma migrants and other Roma and Sinti living in vulnerable conditions. Furthermore, the ERRC strongly recommends that authorities bring an end to the extraordinary powers of regional authorities, instead providing access to adequate and integrated private or social housing which allows for the social inclusion of the Roma and Sinti.

We respectfully request to be informed of any and all actions undertaken by your respective offices in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Robert Kushen
Executive Director