



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/HRC/11/NGO/3
2 June 2009

ENGLISH ONLY

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Eleventh session
Agenda item 3

**PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL,
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS,
INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

**Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 May 2009]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Violence against Roma women in the EU – with special focus on Italy and Slovakia

Roma and Sinti are the biggest minority in Europe. Prejudice against them is widespread and dates back centuries. The “European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey” found in 2009 that in average every second Roma respondent was discriminated against at least once in the previous 12 months. Roma who were discriminated against experienced on average eleven incidents of discrimination over a 12 months period. As to the forms of discrimination a shocking one in four Roma respondents were victims of personal crime including assaults, threats and serious harassment. 81% of the respondents perceived the crimes committed against them as being racially motivated. The Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply worried about the dire situation of the Roma and Sinti groups in most EU countries.

Roma women as a rule are victims of discrimination because of their ethnicity and their gender. This is why the Society for Threatened Peoples wants to draw your attention to the situation of Roma and Sinti women in Italy and Slovakia, where their plight is especially difficult.

The photographs of two dead Roma girls at a beach near Naples in the summer of 2008 shocked Italy. People at the beach continued sun-bathing close to the bodies of the 12 and 13 year olds, whose bodies were barely covered with towels. “They let our children die like dogs, we have to live like dogs in the garbage of Italian towns!”, was one comment of a relative of these girls. Since this scandalous incident the situation has not in the least improved. On 21 May 2008 the Italian Government adopted an Emergency Degree (“Nomad Emergency Decree) proclaiming a state of emergency and enacting a series of measures targeting Roma and Sinti individuals. These measures were accompanied by racist political statements which suggested that Roma were criminals or should be expelled from Italy and that all Roma camps were to be closed down. Using presidential decrees and implementing orders, the Government conducted a census of all Roma in the regions concerned. At the same time there have been widespread physical attacks by civilians, which the government has failed to prevent or condemn. The aim of the adopted measures is the collection of personal data, fingerprints and photographs of Roma living in unofficial settlements, allowing the creation of a “Roma database”. This database was used to expel certain categories of Roma from Italy, where between 150.000 and 160.000 Roma live.

Most of the Roma were forced to submit their data. Fingerprints and pictures were even taken of children and babies, often without the agreement of their parents. The Emergency measures and their implementation are in direct breach of the EC Racial Equality Directive and fundamental rights law. The Roma and Sinti population, a vulnerable minority group, has been singled out for special, invidious treatment. The group’s mere presence has been designated as a cause of a state of emergency. Roma and Sinti have been subjected to discriminatory treatment.

In 1978, then Charta 77 spokesmen Vaclav Havel and Ladislav Hejdanek issued a document on the “situation of Gypsies in Czechoslovakia” In this document they gave particular attention to the state policy designed to reduce the birthrate of Roma: “The question of sterilization is very important. [. . .] In some areas the sterilization is carried out as a planned administrative program and the success of employees is judged by the number of Gypsy women an employee has been able to talk into sterilization. [. . .] In this way, sterilization is becoming one of the instruments of the majority aimed at preventing childbirth in a particular ethnic minority.”

While coercive sterilization of Romani women was state policy in communist Czechoslovakia, the practice was continued after the fall of communism. The most recent cases date back to 2004. Germany, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland all have histories of coercive sterilization of minorities and other groups. Especially in light of this and the holocaust against the Roma and Sinti the continuation of coercive sterilization after the fall of communism and the reaction of the Slovak government to these cases is scandalous.

After pressure from human rights groups and EU governments the Slovak Government chose to investigate the cases of sterilizations, however, only in the period beginning in 1993. Presumably, this date was chosen because it marks the separation of Czechoslovakia into two independent states. (In general, Slovakia has been more reluctant than some of its neighboring countries to examine crimes of the communist period.)

Slovak Government statements have been inconsistent and sometimes vague in their description of the scope of the 2003 investigations. However, it appears that the investigations of the sterilization allegations were limited to an examination of whether the crime of genocide had occurred. In short, the Slovak Government has failed and up until today fails to demonstrate any compassion for women and girls who were sterilized without their consent and deprived of the opportunity to bear children again. By treating their claims as lies, the government has effectively treated these victims as liars, and compounded their original injury with this indignity. If the Slovak Government is to counter the endemic prejudice faced by its most marginalized minority, it must acknowledge the fact – and state it publicly – that wrongful sterilizations of Romani women did occur.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to:

- Send the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences to Italy and Slovakia respectively to research the situation of Roma women in these countries, thereby highlight the issues in question
- Urge the Italian government to stop its policies directed against the Roma minority and grant them with the rights guaranteed not only in the constitution of Italy but also in all relevant international treaties.
- Urge the Slovakian government to acknowledge the fact of coercive sterilizations of Romani women and compensate the victims. The medical staff needs to be coached to end discriminatory treatment of Romani women.
