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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up to and implementation

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.

[10 May 2013]

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

Situation of Roma in Hungary

Roma in Hungary are still facing discrimination in all fields of life including employment, education, housing, health care and access to public services. Major policy documents adopted by the Hungarian Government to improve the situation of Roma have not yet resulted in substantive improvements.

Continuing violence against Roma

Since 2006 paramilitary groups have been marching and organizing demonstrations. In 2011 Roma in the village Gyöngyöspata were harassed and terrorized by patrolling groups. The government justifies such actions by characterizing them as an 'exercise of freedom of assembly'. However, in recent years cases of attacks against Roma-people or against their property have been dramatically increasing. Repeated racist actions often include the usage of Molotov cocktails or hand grenades.

Between 2008 and 2012 the attacks took a total of nine lives, including two minors. The assaults left dozens of people injured, some of them in an extremely critical condition.

Acts of violence are still continuing in 2013. The Society of Threatened Peoples is particularly concerned about the recent reintroduction of the Swastika-symbols (in May 2013), which could exacerbate the already critical situation.

Currently, no systematic monitoring of racist violence is provided and there are still no directions, protocols or guidelines developed for the police to investigate and prosecute hate crimes. There is an increasing tendency towards hatred against Roma, which is being either ignored by policy makers and the general media, or actually supported by them. One of the latest examples was the publication of an article in the Hungarian daily "Magyar Hírlap" in January 2013 by a leading journalist, Zsolt Bayer, calling Roma "animals" that "need to be eliminated" – "right now by any means". The journalist was initially criticized by the Deputy Prime Minister Tibor Navracsics, who later defended him saying that he could not imagine that Bayer seriously thought what he said.

Neither Prime Minister Orbán nor the Minister responsible for Roma issues, Zoltán Balog reacted to the statements.

Segregation in schools is still a problem

In January 2013 the European Court of Human Rights declared that Hungary had violated Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (right to education) of the European Convention on Human Rights in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination). The case dealt with the complaints of two young Roma men, who had wrongly been placed in schools for mentally disabled and whose education there had led to further social discrimination.

The Court underlined the long history of wrongful placement of Roma children in such special schools in Hungary and other European countries. A report on Hungary published by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in 2009 found that the vast majority of children with mild learning disabilities could easily be integrated into mainstream schools, but instead it is being often misdiagnosed because of cultural differences. Once misplaced, those children are rather unlikely to break out of the system of inferior education.

Roma women as an extremely vulnerable group

Roma women often lack access to medical services due to direct discrimination and degrading treatment at the hospital. A disadvantaged position within their families often

makes it difficult for them to address the particular situation of women. Strategies for the empowerment of women often fail because a lack of knowledge about their circumstances and needs.

In 2009, after the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination of women intervened, the government of Hungary finally provided a Roma woman a financial compensation for having been sterilized during emergency obstetrical services without her informed consent. From 2006 to 2009 no domestic court had ever acknowledged that her rights had been violated. The Hungarian Public Health Act still mandates the procedure on the basis of a medical indication and still does not guarantee to fully inform the patient about the permanent consequences of sterilization.

In this context, Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of Hungary to:

- Seriously investigate and prosecute hate crimes against Roma and other minorities,
 - Integrate Roma children into mainstream schools and ensure that they are not segregated or disadvantaged,
 - Seriously investigate and prosecute hate crimes against Roma and other minorities,
 - Implement an adequate monitoring system for racist violence,
 - Closely observe the implementation of national strategies for the integration of Roma-people,
 - Ensure that special needs of women are addressed to improve parlous family situations.
 - Take serious action against the discrimination of Roma in the country.
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