



UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

XXXXXXXXXXXX **UN EXPERTS CALL FOR EUROPEAN ACTION TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA** XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

20 November 2008

Two UN human rights experts today expressed grave concern over the recent rise in anti-Roma sentiment and violent incidents in several European countries.

"Effective action is required to stem the growing tide of hostility, anti-Roma sentiment and violence across Europe" stated the UN Independent Expert on minority issues, Gay McDougall. "Where a hard-core of extremism exists in society and is willing to perpetrate violence, the full force of the criminal justice system must be used to protect targeted populations."

Equally, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, Githu Muigai, stressed that "such actions reveal serious and deep-rooted problems of racism and discrimination against Roma at the heart of modern Europe that must be addressed in the most vigorous manner and through the rule of law."

In the latest incident on 17 November, far right supporters armed with stones and petrol bombs besieged a Roma community in the Czech town of Litvinov and were prevented from attacking the community only by a concerted police response.

"Extremists may feel they have license for their attacks when the message they receive from government activities in other spheres is also that the Roma are a problem," stated Ms. McDougall.

"Governments must strongly condemn such actions. Moreover they must be committed to finding ways to create safe environments for all by carefully monitoring and strengthening their own anti-racism activities, through leadership and public education, by swiftly denouncing hate speech and prosecuting the racist and violent actions of others in society." she said.

Both UN experts consider that the policies and actions of numerous States have been, at best, inadequate to resolve intolerable conditions of poverty, marginalization and exclusion experienced by the Roma minority in Europe. Policies such as finger-printing of Roma, abuse by police, and racist statements by senior public officials contribute to creating a climate in which societal discrimination and racism are sustained and enhanced.

The experts stated their belief that the growing number of such incidents requires both a national and Europe-wide response. "A strong message must be sent by the European Union and acted upon by Member States. It is unacceptable for any sector of society to be vilified, threatened and attacked," said Mr. Muigai.

While welcoming the actions of the Czech authorities and police to protect the Roma community in the most recent incident, the experts noted that solutions must address the root-causes of problems as well as their violent symptoms. International law, European directives and national policies, they point out, must be strongly enforced by national governments and at the level of local government where, Ms. McDougall says, "the message of anti-racism is simply not getting through".

For more information on the work and mandate of the Independent Expert on minority issues, write to: minorityissues@ohchr.org, or visit the website <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/expert/index.htm>

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