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23 May 2007

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**RE: Forced eviction of more than 10,000 Roma Announced in Italy**

Honourable Excellencies,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and osservAzione are writing today to request your urgent intervention in the wake of “Pacts for Security” in Rome and Milan, signed by various authorities on 18 May 2007, which reportedly foresee the forced eviction of more than 10,000 Roma from their homes.<sup>1</sup> The Pacts were signed in the midst of racist media statements by the same authorities, apparently intended to fuel anti-Romani attitudes in Italy and secure broad support for the impending illegal actions.

The European Roma Rights Centre is a public interest law organisation that works to combat human rights abuse of Roma in Europe. osservAzione is a non governmental organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma and Sinti in Italy.

The Rome Pact was signed by the Prefect of Rome, the Mayor of Rome, the President of the Province of Rome and the President of the Region of Lazio, in the presence of the Minister of Interior (also a signatory). According to the Rome Pact, commencing this week a joint commission of the regional government will be established which will have 3 months to identify locations for 4 “villages of solidarity” on the periphery of Rome and another 9 months to build pre-fabricated container houses and prepare the areas for inhabitation by 4,000 Roma. At the same time, a task force of 150 police officers (75 from the military and 75 from the state police) is being set up to “rehabilitate the areas.”

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<sup>1</sup> See “Pact for Security in Rome” and “Pact for Security in Milan”, appended to this letter. In their wording, both Pacts made clear that the actions sanctioned therein target individuals considered inherently alien to each city.

The Milan Pact was signed by the Prefect of Milan and the Mayor of Milan, in the presence of Vice-Minister of Interior (also a signatory). The Milan Pact agrees to reduce criminality and to address the problem of unauthorised camps for Nomads. Within 3 months of signing the Pact, the responsible authorities must “define a strategy in which extraordinary power will be given to the Prefect to implement the strategic plan for solving the Roma emergency in Milan.” The Pact also foresees the “intensification of controls” on the periphery (where many Roma live) to guarantee the security of Milan residents.

Media coverage surrounding the Pacts has been explicitly racist, the result of direct quotes from Italian authorities published by mainstream Italian newspapers, without any kind of editorial remark. The most alarming article was published on 19 May 2007 by the Italian national newspaper La Repubblica, entitled: “Prefect Serra: Those who live in the squatter settlements must go. Police to control order in the camps. And in the capital, order increases: “Away with 10,000 unregistered Roma”.

The article was based on statements made by Mr Achille Serra, the Prefect of Rome, who announced the “Pact for Security in Rome”. According to Mr Serra, “ten thousand [Roma] who live in squatter settlements on the banks of the Tiber and the Aniene must go”, while only 4,000 places will be made available in the “villages of solidarity”. Many of the Roma concerned are reportedly from Romania. Mr Serra has reportedly been granted “unlimited power” within all institutions and organisations relevant. Mr Serra made explicitly racist remarks about Roma, referring to them as Nomads and recalling a personal visit to existing camps. Mr Serra was quoted as having stated:

“[...] at ten o’clock in the morning I saw children, dirty, playing with a ball. [...] The women were not around because they are at the metro stealing purses and the men were sleeping because perhaps they worked all night robbing apartments.”

Regarding the real purpose of the task force established in Rome, Mr Serra was quoted as having stated that the task force will begin systematically patrolling the existing camps, “encouraging the Nomads to leave. If they return, the police officers will remove them again and this will continue until they understand that they must go somewhere else.” According to La Repubblica, Mr Serra plans that by the time the “villages of solidarity” are completed, 10,000 Roma will have been removed from the center of the city and the task force will shift their responsibilities to “preventing the villages from becoming a centre of car theft, weapons, drugs, and prostitution.”

Honourable Excellencies,

On 21 December 2005, the European Committee of Social Rights unanimously concluded that Italy had violated Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter taken together with Article E, with respect to the insufficiency and inadequacy of camping sites for Roma in Italy, that the recurrent forced eviction of Roma by Italian authorities, and the lack of permanent dwellings made available for Roma. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted this decision on 3 May 2006 in Resolution ResChS(2006)4.

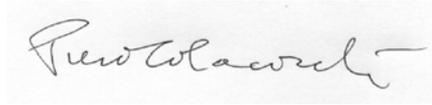
In this light, the Pacts for Security signed in Rome and Milan are especially worrying and call into question the commitment of the Italian government to upholding the various international treaties it has ratified that guarantee respect for the right to housing and freedom against forced eviction, including the Revised European Social Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They also indicate a total disregard for the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

The ERRC and osservAzione call on you to use the powers of your office to rescind the racist Pacts for Security and ensure respect for the housing rights of the Roma implicated, many of whom will apparently be made homeless. We request that you comply with your international law obligations and adopt housing policies and programmes which avoid homelessness and the further segregation of Roma, and which provide real and adequate housing solutions for the Roma currently living in squatter settlements in Italy.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you further. We respectfully request to be informed of actions undertaken by your office in this regard.

Thank you very much for your attention to this most urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Vera Egenberger  
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ERRC

Piero Colacicchi  
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