

RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CONDEMN ROMA EVICTIONS

Call for Protection of Hundreds of Roma Rendered Homeless in Kaliningrad Region

Budapest, July 6, 2006—The Open Society Justice Initiative and the European Roma Rights Centre today condemned the forced eviction and destruction of homes belonging to more than 200 Roma, including over 100 children, in the village of Dorozhnoe, in Russia's Kaliningrad region.

From May 29 to June 2, authorities bulldozed 37 houses belonging to Roma families and set fire to the ruins. The destruction followed flawed proceedings in the Russian courts that denied the Roma fundamental due process.

Over 100 of the displaced Roma, who had lived legally for years in their homes, are currently in tents and other temporary shelters and are being threatened with physical expulsion from their land. Others have fled elsewhere or been expelled from the area.

“This wanton attack on the Roma of Dorozhnoe must cease immediately,” said Dimitrina Petrova, executive director of the European Roma Rights Centre. “The Russian authorities must provide the now-homeless Roma with humanitarian aid and adequate compensation for their losses, and restore legal title to their property.”

Regional authorities began their eviction campaign by initiating court proceedings to have the Roma families' ownership of their homes declared illegal. An attorney with the Justice Initiative and local counsel appeared before the local high court to assist the families in securing legal title to their properties. But in proceedings that violated fundamental standards of due process, the court issued decisions on May 3, 2006 rejecting the families' claims and opening the door to the forced evictions that would follow.

The Justice Initiative then filed a request for interim measures with the European Court of Human Rights, which was denied.

The Justice Initiative will pursue an application with the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of several of the families.

“The destruction of this community is especially brazen at a time when Russia holds the presidency of the G8 and is hosting the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg,” said James A. Goldston, executive director of the Open Society Justice Initiative.

Additional information is available at www.errc.org and www.justiceinitiative.org.

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