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UN BACKS THE DALE FARM TRAVELLERS IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST EVICTION



Basildon, UK: A United Nations committee is calling on the Basildon District Council to freeze its plans to bulldoze Britain's largest Traveller community, at Dale Farm in southeast England.

Yves Cabannes, Chair of the UN Advisory Group on Forced Evictions, visited Dale Farm last week (photo), and told residents that they should not have to negotiate with the Council while under the threat of eviction.

"We have heard you say you want to stay where you are," said Mr Cabannes (shown below, with residents), who is also a professor at University College London. "We support you in that." Yves Cabannes at Dale Farm

About 90 families at Dale Farm stand to lose their homes following a [January ruling](#) by the British Court of Appeal that allows the eviction to proceed. The Court decision overturned an earlier [May 2008 High Court ruling](#) ordering the Council to find alternative land for the Travellers. A final appeal to the British House of Lords is being pursued.

The Advocacy Project (AP) has supported the Travellers since they were ordered out in June 2005 and sent two Peace Fellows to volunteer at Dale Farm.

The UN intervention occurred as a result of the first face-to-face discussion between the Basildon Council Leader, Malcolm Buckley, and Dale Farm residents. Mr Buckley, who has since resigned his post, initially agreed to a closed meeting with seven residents. But members of

the Essex Racial Equality Council, Essex Fire & Rescue Service and the UN group also insisted on attending.

In total, 20 Dale Farm residents expressed fears for the safety of their children, the elderly and the sick in the event of an eviction. Afterward, Mr Cabannes assured them that his committee's report to the British government would recommend against an eviction. He said the UK has signed international legal agreements that strongly oppose forcible evictions.

Mr Cabannes also commended the Dale Farm residents for their resistance, and praised them as an example to all Roma who are fighting anti-Gypsy racism in Europe.

The Travellers are defined as a distinct ethnic group by British law and have long been targets of discrimination in the UK. The Dale Farm crisis erupted in June 2005, when the Council ordered the Travellers to leave because they were living on Green Belt land that is protected from development by environmental regulations. The Council issued a second eviction order in 2007.

After the latest Court of Appeal decision, the Council promised that families would be given 28 days warning before any eviction. With Mr Buckley's resignation, much will now depend on Council Member Tony Ball, who is likely to succeed Mr Buckley as leader of at the end of May.

Advocates hope that the financial crisis will persuade the Council to consider giving planning permits to all Travellers who own land at Dale Farm. The two court rulings both agree that the Travellers cannot be made homeless, but finding new housing for all 90 families could be costly.

In the event of an eviction, local churches have offered to provide shelter to children and other vulnerable Travellers. Lord Eric Avebury, a member of the British House of Lords, has also organized a May 14 meeting at the Houses of Parliament, to brief potential human rights monitors and the UN group on their roles in the event of an eviction.

- Read the [Court of Appeals decision](#)
- Read the [High Court decision](#) (May 2008)
- Read AP Executive Director Iain Guest's [Washington Post Article](#) on Dale Farm
- See a [timeline](#) of the Dale Farm case