

ROMA EVICTIONS ERUPT ACROSS EUROPE AS NEW 'DECADE' SEEKS TO END DISCRIMINATION

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Washington, DC, January 31, 2005: On the eve of the launch of a new 'Decade' aimed at ending discrimination against the Romany population in Europe, The Advocacy Project has received disturbing reports from its Roma partners of a rash of forced evictions of Roma families throughout the Continent.

In one recent incident in the United Kingdom, a sick and elderly woman was among a group of Traveler (Roma) families who were woken at 4 a.m. and ordered to leave their homes in the Twin Oaks caravan park in Herefordshire. According to the International Roma Women's Network (IRWN), an AP partner, the woman's mobile home was demolished while she was still inside and her two wheelchairs were deliberately destroyed. The bailiffs also jumped on an elderly man who refused to leave, and broke his ribs.

Elsewhere in Europe, the pace of evictions is increasing in Lithuania and Albania, according to the Dzeno Roma news agency in Prague, another AP partner. Adding to the concern, the Center on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) recently detailed evictions in Greece, Ireland, Kosovo and Italy.

These reports come as eight European governments are preparing to launch the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion' in Sofia, Bulgaria on Wednesday (February 2, 2005). The Initiative has been sponsored by the World Bank and Open Society Institute. The eight governments - Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and the Slovak Republic - have all pledged to present national action plans in Sofia aimed at ending discrimination against Roma within their borders.

Dzeno and other Roma advocates hope that the Decade will put some pressure on European governments to respect the rights of Roma. But the rising pace of evictions in Britain - supposedly one of the more advanced European nations - raises serious doubts about government commitment.

Catherine Beard, a British Gypsy activist and the Campaign Coordinator for the IRWN, said that the Twin Oaks evictions are merely the latest in a series of increasingly violent actions against British Gypsies and Travelers by local councils in the UK. According to COHRE, over 150 individually-owned plots in gypsy caravan parks in the UK have been 'cleared' by local councils in the last 18 months.

In the case of Twin Oaks, the families had offered to move to a different site and were waiting for a reply from the local authorities when they were awoken early in the morning. They refused

to leave, and after an eight-hour standoff, their caravans and mobile homes were forcefully broken apart and destroyed by a contractor hired by the local district council.

Ms. Beard said that the Travelers owned the land, but had been refused planning permission to build or park their mobile homes. This, she said, is commonly used by local councils to justify the expulsion of Gypsies and Travelers. Ms. Beard's own family purchased almost two acres of land in 1986, at a cost of \$18,000, but was forced to move after the local council refused to allow them to refurbish a barn on the property. "It's racial discrimination," she said. "They do not want Gypsies in their area."

Ms. Beard said that evictions are typically conducted by bailiffs and by scores of police in full riot gear, who cordon off the area to prevent any reports getting out. At the same time, she said, the press in Britain is fanning hatred of Gypsies by portraying them as thieves and vagabonds.

Such evictions are a clear breach of the U.N. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and also of European human rights standards. Ms. Beard said that Gypsies and Travelers in the UK hope to draw on the Europe-wide membership of the IRWN to appeal to the Council of Europe and other European bodies.

- Read the personal account of Margaret Quilligan, one of the Travelers evicted at [Twin Oaks](#).
- Read more about the work of [IRWN](#).
- Read the blogs of [Stacy Kosko](#), who interned with Dzeno for AP in the summer of 2004.
- Read [COHRE's December 2004 newsletter](#) on evictions.