

## SHOWDOWN LOOMS AS ADVOCATES SEEK TO AVERT VIOLENT EVICTION OF 600 TRAVELERS IN THE UK

\*\*\*\*\*

AdvocacyNet  
News Bulletin 43, July 13, 2005

\*\*\*\*\*

Washington, D.C., July 13, 2005: English Gypsies and Irish Travelers will make a last-ditch effort tomorrow to avert what could be the largest and most violent eviction of Traveler families ever to take place in the United Kingdom.

The attempt will be made at a meeting of the Basildon local council, which decided on June 21 to evict 86 Traveler families from the Dale Farm settlement in the County of Essex. Temporary planning permission for the 86 families- roughly 600 Travelers- was granted by the British Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott two years ago, but expired on 13 May 2005.

If the evictions go ahead, the 600 Travelers will be forced out on the road, where they will be liable for arrest under British vagrancy laws. Advocates for Gypsies and Travelers warned of serious violence if the evictions go ahead. Over the past 18 months, a number of Travelers have been assaulted and even injured by bailiffs as they tried to resist expulsion from encampments at Hovefields, Twin Oaks and Bulkington.

Catherine Beard, Project Coordinator for the UK Association of Gypsy Women, told the Advocacy Project that the eviction would create enormous hardship for those affected. Children will be forced to leave schools, and the sick and elderly will lose their medical treatment. "It is just beyond belief," she said.

As well as being a leading member of the UK Association, Ms. Beard is also Campaign Coordinator for the International Roma Women's Network (IRWN), a group of 18 Roma women activists from East and West Europe which receives support from the Advocacy Project.

The Dale Farm confrontation stems from the fact that the 86 families have legally purchased the land, but have not been granted planning permission to settle on their plots. A 2003 survey of homelessness among Travelers in the UK found that 96% of those who apply for planning permission are turned down. More than 300 private plots owned by Gypsy-Travelers have been razed following the withholding of planning permission.

The Council has called the July 14 meeting to vote on release of four million euro (USD 4.8 million) that has been earmarked for the evictions. An additional 600,000 euro (\$725,000) has been set aside for legal fees to ensure that the Travelers do not settle elsewhere in the county. Some estimate that the Council could also face claims for damaged property of up to eight million euro (\$9.6 million).

Travelers argue that these large sums would be better spent finding them alternative housing. They have offered to abandon their homes in Dale Farm, which are valued at one million euro

(\$1.2 million) and purchase other land if the Council can guarantee that they will receive planning permission. The Council has refused this offer, saying that it has provided several legal sites and that responsibility for finding further sites rests with the central government in London.

The Gypsy-Traveler communities have mounted a sophisticated campaign to mobilize local and international support for their cause. Catherine Beard and her colleagues at the UK Association have lobbied members of the British and European parliaments. They have also appealed to the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, and Alvaro Gil-Robles, the European Human Rights Commissioner. After meeting with Ms. Beard in London, Mr. Gil-Robles criticized Britain's policy on evictions, in a November 12, 2004 report.

The UK Association has also prepared a detailed question-and-answer document in advance of the Basildon meeting which has been sent out to all members of the IRWN. Ms. Beard said that she hopes that the IRWN will make multiple protests to British embassies around Europe.

As a testament to the effectiveness of this campaign, twenty individuals, including a British MP Nick Harvey, have agreed to monitor for human rights abuses during the planned evictions.

There has also been a groundswell of support for the Travelers among the Basildon community. Over 400 residents have signed a petition against the evictions.

In spite of their impressive advocacy, Britain's Gypsies and Travelers remain painfully vulnerable and disempowered. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, has yet to respond to the Association's April 8 appeal.

- Read a background summary on the [Dale Farm eviction](#).
- Read a first-hand description of the [Twin Oaks eviction](#).
- Read more about the work of [IRWN](#).
- For more information about the IRWN association, contact [Catherine Beard and Rachel Francis](#).
- Contact the [Basildon authority](#) about the Dale Farm council session on July 14.