

## TRAVELERS FACE EVICTION DESPITE INTERVENTION

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Washington D.C., July 29, 2005: Scores of Irish Travelers could be evicted from the Dale Farm settlement in southeast England on Monday, in spite of a last-minute intervention by the British High Court.

Earlier this week, Justice Bertram Richards halted the eviction of 36 Traveler families at Dale Farm. But according to reports, as many as 20 more families are not covered by his injunction order and could face eviction starting midnight on Sunday.

Malcolm Buckley, the leader of the Basildon local Council, which has jurisdiction over the case, told the Advocacy Project by phone on Friday that the evictions would go ahead but that the precise timing will not be disclosed to prevent disruption by protesters.

Several previous evictions in England have resulted in injuries to Travelers, and advocates fear that enforcement action at Dale Farm could lead to serious violence. There is particular concern for women, children and the elderly.

120 individuals, including a Labor Party Member of Parliament and two Basildon councilors, have volunteered to serve as human rights monitors and form a human chain around the targeted homes. But Mr. Buckley said that there would only be violence if the Travelers resisted. "Violence only occurs when it comes from the protesters," he said.

Meanwhile, Gypsy and Traveler advocates warn that a forcible eviction could severely damage Britain's reputation abroad, and pressed the UK government to intervene. Rachel Francis, from the UK Association of Gypsy Women, a partner of the Advocacy Project, pointed out the contradiction of tolerating evictions at Dale Farm, but criticizing evictions in Zimbabwe.

"Tony Blair is calling Robert Mugabe on the Harare evictions, while he is pursuing the same policy in Britain. It's totally hypocritical," she said.

Mr. Buckley said the Basildon Council is determined to push ahead with the evictions even if the courts decide in favor of the Travelers. "Judicial review can only ask the Council to reconsider, not change its decision," he said.

Dale Farm has attracted international attention, partly because it could be the largest-ever eviction of Travelers in England, and partly because it symbolizes the legal limbo that faces many Travelers in Britain. The Dale Farm families purchased land and then settled on it, but were refused planning permission by the Council.

Over 90% of all Traveler applications are rejected, and advocates say this is due to discrimination. But Mr. Buckley argued that many local district councils, like Basildon, are under pressure not to build on the area of countryside surrounding London.

Mr. Buckley said that Travelers have been permitted to settle on 105 plots of land in Basildon, which makes it the fourth most "generous" district in England. The real problem, he said, is that neighboring districts have offered nothing. As a result, Travelers have flocked to Basildon and set up 205 unauthorized plots, including Dale Farm.

"We've more than met our responsibilities," he said. "When other districts accept their responsibilities, there will be no more unauthorized sites in the country."

The confrontation between the Council and Travelers came to a head at a stormy Council meeting on July 14, which voted by 21 to 18 to put aside 1.9 million pounds (\$3.3 million) to evict the Dale Farm families if they did not leave voluntarily. The decision was opposed by councilors from the Labour and Liberal Democratic parties, one of whom used a recent press release from the Advocacy Project to show that there is international interest in the case.

Tensions escalated further on July 20 when 40 police officers and bailiffs moved into a small site at Hoverfield, near Dale Farm, and evicted two Traveler families that were not covered by an injunction order among a larger protected group. According to members of the Dale Farm Association, a bulldozer caused damage to protected property. To advocates, this represents an intimidating shift in the council's tactics.

The publicity surrounding Dale Farm represents a success for the advocacy of the UK Association of Gypsy Women, which has appealed for solidarity to the 18 members of the International Roma Women's Network (IRWN). The Dzeno Association in the Czech Republic, another AP partner, is compiling a report on evictions across the continent for submission to the UN.

Advocates hope that this international pressure will force the British government to put more pressure on local authorities. Under two new laws, regional authorities will be obligated to assess the housing needs of gypsies and travelers and put aside land if needed. In addition, a new unit in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister will start deploying officials around the country to implement the new laws. But advocates say this will require more political will than is currently in evidence.

- Read more on the [Dale Farm eviction](#).
- Contact the UK Association of Gypsy Women email [Rachel Francis](#).
- Contact the [Dzeno Association](#) in Prague, with information on European evictions.
- Contact the [Basildon authority](#).
- Contact the Deputy Prime Minister, [John Prescott](#).