

Verona, 28th July 2004

To the attention of:

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In the city of Verona, Italy, in April 2003, the *Assessore*¹ *alle Politiche Sociali* Tito Brunelli provided a municipal area on which nine Romanian Romani and three Bosnian Romani families could reside. The area is located in *Strada la Rizza* n.65 (also called *Forte Azzano*), adjacent to a seven-lot residential area assigned to seven Italian Romani families since 1989.

Not all of the Romanian Roma had regular residence permits for the Italian territory, but the *Assessore* believed it correct to offer the families in need a housing solution.

When the decision was made to set up the area for the Romanian and Bosnian Romani families, we opposed it, considering the area inappropriate and believing that the residential area for the Roma would be transformed into a “nomad” camp” which would cause problems within the ward which has always been against the presence of Romani families.

The *Assessore* gave Mr. Roberto Lizziero an informal assignment to follow the settlement and the supply of basic services. Furthermore, Mr. Lizziero was in charge of control over the number of people in the area and reported regularly to the Social Services and Municipal Police.

Following a letter by the *Assessore* (20th October 2003), the hosted families were connected to the electric system with regular contracts and the Municipality provided 10 numbered caravans to

¹ The *Assessore* is the responsible person for one or more Municipal departments (i.e. the Alderman in Great Britain)

control the identity and number of inhabitants in the area. In June 2003, two water taps were set up in the area and a regular contract with AGSM Company, a water supplier, in the name of the Municipal Councillor Giorgio Bertani was made. In November 2003, four toilets were installed.

In August of the same year, the responsibility for “Romani issues” was moved from the *Assessore alle Politiche Sociali*, Tito Brunelli, to the *Assessore all’Immigrazione e Pari Opportunità*, Stefania Sartori.

Following a number of reports on the deteriorated state of the area (presence of garbage, waste materials, rats, self made shacks with waste materials, precarious electric connections and the presence of several gas cylinders), on March 15, 2004, the Mayor issued an order, which was executed on March 18th 2004, for the removal of elements of risk. In that occasion, all electrical hook-ups were disconnected leaving the families with no light.

Just prior to this, a letter signed by the representatives of 11 companies and dated March 3, 2004, containing general accusations and explicit threats towards the Romani community was sent to the Mayor of Verona, the Difensore Civico and the Prefect of Verona. In the letter, the signatories declared themselves to be “in the right of taking the law into their own hands” and that “exasperation can lead to inconsiderate and unseemly acts”, feeling “teased by ‘four’ gypsies that live on their wits behind our backs”. The Prefect of Verona and the Difensore Civico did not recognise the clear racist elements and arbitrary elements of threat and accusation punishable by law in the letter: Instead, they urged the intervention of the Mayor in letters dated March 30 and April 6, 2004, respectively.

On June 30, 2004, in the middle of the nights, a fire, most probably intentional, in the area put the lives of the families at risk and destroyed their homes. Saved by a miracle, the Civil Protection offered some tents to host those families left without shelter.

Following this last episode, in a swift action, the Mayor signed an urgent order to evict the 12 families from their temporary shelter. The eviction order was issued without any consideration for the past decisions of municipal authorities to host the families. The execution of the eviction was assigned to the state police and rather than the municipal police which should have executed the order. In executing the eviction, the state police would have to take everyone in the area to the police headquarters for verification of their documents. The Romanian Roma risked immediate deportation to Romania. Many of the Roma without residence permits worked and their employers were willing employ them regularly. Women and children in precarious health conditions and in need of continuous care were part of this group.

On July 8, 2004, at 5:45 a.m., the state police executed the eviction order. Only three men with regular residence permits, their wives and minor children and a two-months pregnant woman [under the Italian immigration law, pregnant women and women with children less than 6 months old (until the child reaches 6-months of age) have the right to a health permit that permits her to reside in Italy] were present. The rest of the residents had left the area and hid, hoping for the opening of negotiations with the Municipality. They considered arbitrary the decision of the Municipality to evict them after having offered them the area in the first place and having never assisted them in improving the hygienic and security situation in the area. The Roma believed that the sole purpose of the eviction was, in fact, their subsequent expulsion from Italy.

After 7 hours at the police headquarters to verify their documents, the families with residence permits were housed temporarily in apartments owned by the municipality. After an analysis to verify the pregnancy of the Romani women revealed that the baby had died four days earlier, the

woman was not offered any support as it was not deemed necessary by the Social Services. Facing the obligation of trying to regularise her situation at the police headquarters without any assistance from social service workers and risking a deportation order, the Romani woman left the apartment to join her hidden husband. It should be noted that the woman lost her child in the days after the fire and the issuance of the eviction order, before the eviction was executed, in an atmosphere of high tension due to the circumstances.

The nine families (38 people) without permits are, as of the date of this letter, hiding and without hope for a solution. Those persons with employment experience more difficulties each day in going to work, having to leave their families unsure whether they will be there when they return from work.

With the agreement of the *European Roma Right Center (ERRC)*, we request that this complaint be included in the ambit of the Collective Complaint submitted by the *ERRC* on June 21, 2004, concerning Italy's compliance with Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter.

We ask that the Committee inform the Mayor and the Municipal Administration of Verona of the violation perpetrated by the above described actions, with respect to Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter, and urge that they take all possible steps to facilitate the assignment of adequate housing for the Romanian and Bosnian Romani families who have been deprived of even a minimal housing solution.

We are available to offer further information and all of the materials and documents needed to confirm the above statements.

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