

Europe and Central Asia

Summary of Amnesty International's Concerns in the Region July – December 2006

CZECH REPUBLIC

Forced Sterilization of women (update to AI Index: EUR 01/017/2006)

In May the government criticized a recommendation in the last Ombudsman's report in 2005 that a law be introduced to provide compensation for women who were sterilized without their consent. The recommendation was not implemented.

In August the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) issued its Concluding Comments on the Czech Republic's compliance with international law in the area of banning discrimination against women. CEDAW commended the adoption of its national action plan entitled "Priorities and procedures of the Government in promoting equality of women and men" and the new provisions since the last periodic report was submitted in the Employment Act, the Labour Code and the Act on Labour Inspection which prohibit direct and indirect discrimination and sexual harassment. However, it urged stronger efforts to overcome persistent and deep-rooted discriminatory stereotypes of women and expressed concern at the lack of a general anti-discrimination law. CEDAW urged the Czech government to implement the recommendations of the 2005 Ombudsman's report and called for a legal definition of informed, free and qualified consent; mandatory training of medical professionals and social workers on patients' rights; and measures to enable victims of involuntary or coercive sterilization to obtain compensation.

The European Roma Rights Centre and two local human rights groups, the League of Human Rights (Liga lidských práv) and Life Together (Vzájemné soužití) issued their own report in August in connection with the CEDAW review. They concluded that legal protection against discrimination was insufficient and that women remained vulnerable to serious human rights abuses. With regard to domestic violence, the report found that the following were lacking: sufficient training of professionals, therapeutic programmes for victims and perpetrators, victim services in various regions, comprehensive services, investigation into allegations of domestic violence, and protection from "stalking".

Discrimination against Roma

The Romani minority continued to face discrimination at the hands of public officials and private individuals.

· Access to housing

In August the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs issued the results of a study showing that the number of Roma in low-standard housing had risen over the last 10 years. The study found no comprehensive government programme combating social deprivation.

In October, the Chief of Police Vladislav Husák apologised for the misuse of police powers in the town of Bohumín on 4-6 October 2005. Private security guards hired by the municipality had prevented independent observers from entering a hostel where several hundred residents, many of them Roma, were being targeted for expulsion by the municipality. In June 2005 the municipality had issued eviction orders to the residents of the hostel which it had decided to convert into flats (see AI Index: POL 10/001/2006).

· Evictions

In October the Mayor of Vsetín, Jiří Ěunek, ordered the removal from the city into other localities of 50 Roma families, alleging that the current accommodation was substandard and that most of the families "had debts in paying the rent". The move was criticized by many, including regional politicians and the Roma themselves, who considered that the mayor had not solved a problem but only postponed it through creating a new "ghetto". Mayors of the localities where the evicted families were sent described the removal as "brutal" and "like a deportation". The houses where the families were relocated did not provide access to basic housing needs such as water and electricity.

In November, Roma families from Vsetín who have been moved to three small municipalities in the Jeseník vicinity lodged a complaint against the leadership of the Vsetín town hall, and representatives of the Romani association Roma Vidnava alleged that the Roma had signed contracts for the dilapidated properties under duress.

Police ill treatment

On 10 July, the Czech Republic ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, whose objective is to establish a system of regular visits undertaken by independent international and national bodies to places where people are deprived of their liberty, in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Reports of ill-treatment by the police continued, particularly of Roma. On 30 June, for example, two municipal policemen from Brno were alleged to have detained a young Romani man in Brno, driven him to the outskirts of the city, beaten him, put an unloaded gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. They reportedly suspected him of attacking and robbing the son of one of the officers and other schoolchildren. In November, they were convicted of beating and torturing the man, and given a suspended two-year prison sentence and banned from serving as police officers for five years. Both lodged appeals which were pending at the end of the period under review.

Update on the CzechTek case (see AI Index: POL 10/001/2006)

The League of Human Rights decided on 30 June to submit a formal complaint to the authorities in response to actions taken by a senior police officer to disperse those attending a music festival in 2005. The complaint related to injuries sustained by one of the festival goers, and was lodged after the Ministry of the Interior closed the case on the grounds that the alleged perpetrators could not be identified. The League of Human Rights believed that the investigation had not been thorough and comprehensive, and therefore should be reopened.

In October, the Minister of Interior Ivan Langer criticised the work of the Interior Minister's Inspection when investigating the police crackdown at the CzechTek festival in 2005. The Inspection has the task of detecting and verifying facts indicating that a criminal act has been committed by a police officer and establishing whether the offender shall be carried out, under the Code of Criminal Procedure. The Minister said that in future if suspicions emerge that policemen acted at variance with the law, the Inspection should use operative devices more frequently and process citizens' complaint in a systematic way, investigating allegations against police officers deployed in such operations more thoroughly.

On 30 July 2005 police had intervened to disperse some 5,000 people gathered in a field near the village of Mlýnec, West Bohemia, for a music festival known as CzechTek, which was allegedly unauthorized and causing damage to private property. Police in riot gear reportedly shot tear gas grenades and used water cannons to end the festival. More than 80 people were injured, and around 20 members of the public and five police officers sought medical attention. In November that year the Ombudsperson's office stated that the intervention was legal but that police failed to take adequate preventative measures that might have helped to avoid the later use of force.

Racially motivated attacks on Roma

Roma were often the target of racially motivated attacks, and penalties handed down by the courts did not reflect the seriousness of the crimes or the racist motives of the assailants.

On 31 August, three young men had their sentences for an attack on a Romani couple in Jeseník increased by the regional appeals court in Olomouc. Two were given prison terms of three years and three months and three years respectively, and the third received a suspended three-year prison sentence. A public outcry had greeted the original suspended sentences on all three, passed by the district court in Jeseník in January 2004.

On 18 September, an alliance of five Romani organizations in the Czech Republic (Info Roma Kontakt Plzeň, Romani Alliance Rokycany, ROS Karlovy Vary, Roma Realia Dobruška and Futurum Roma Beroun) protested against a two-year suspended sentence imposed by the Regional Court in Plzeň on a soldier convicted of beating a Romani man, which was not appealed by the state attorney. The Romani organizations lodged an appeal against this sentence. A decision was pending by the end of the year.