

**MAY 2000 ACTIVITY REPORT
OF THE GHM ROMA OFFICE**

Contents

- 1. Update of a report submitted to the OSCE Implementation Meeting in Vienna, on September 6, 1999.**
 - 2. Municipal council decision of immediate expulsion of Roma in N. Kios (Argolida, Peloponese), eviction protocols serviced to three Roma families in Phoenikas (Thessaloniki), racism against Roma in Velo and Tarsina (Corinthia, Peloponese). Relevant press release by GHM, MRG-G and DROM Network for the Roma Social Rights.**
 - 3. Progress in the infrastructure works in the former military barrack of Gonou for the first self-managed settlement.**
 - 4. Allocation of prefabricated houses to Roma settlements all over Greece.**
 - 5. Latest developments in the Chalandri camp as well as in Nea Zoe of Aspropyrgos.**
 - 6. GHM participation at the EUROROM conference in Athens (29-31 May 2000).**
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**GREEK HELSINKI MONITOR
MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP-GREECE***

**PERSECUTED AND MARGINALIZED ROMA OF GREECE:
FOUR YEARS OF BROKEN PROMISES AND INEFFECTIVE PROGRAMS
(1996 - 2000)**

May 29, 2000

Overview

* Update of a report submitted to the OSCE Review Conference in Vienna, on September 22, 1999, by the Cooperating Organizations: Drom Network for Roma Social Rights, European Roma Rights Center, Greek Delegation of Doctors of the World, Greek Helsinki Monitor, Minority Rights Group-Greece.

In September 1999, during the **OSCE Implementation Review Meeting** in Vienna, the official Greek delegation, responding once again to a related presentation by NGOs, described and explained the Roma situation in Greece with remarkable candor and accuracy:

«Last year, when I spoke on the subject of Roma and Sinti at the Warsaw Human-Dimension Implementation Review Meeting, I made two main points: (a) that the situation of the Roma in Greece is, in the eyes of the Greek Government, unsatisfactory and indeed unacceptable, and (b) that the Greek Government is determined to do everything in its power to remedy the situation.

I wish to assure this forum, and in particular those with more direct interest in the matter, that the determination of the Government of Greece has not changed. As for the first point mentioned above, namely, the real situation of the Roma in Greece, I wish I were in a position to say that it has changed dramatically for the better (...).

As I said earlier, the Government's efforts proceed at a slower pace than we would have liked and encounter various impediments. I have already mentioned bureaucratic sluggishness as one of the latter. Another important, but not unexpected, reason for the slow progress achieved is the fact that the Government programs must, at all stages, be inclusive of those concerned, i.e., the Roma themselves, and not be carried out in their absence. Consensus is therefore vital; and building it --a time consuming exercise under all circumstances-- is particularly arduous when dealing with a social group composed of smaller groups, scattered around the country, which do not easily speak in one voice.

Another serious obstacle to the Government efforts is prejudice toward the Gypsies, which, bred over many long years, is still widespread among large segments of the population and is hard to eradicate. Such prejudice, which finds expression in everyday life, takes on more alarming and dangerous character when it is displayed by police officers or by elected officials at the local administration level. We regret --and condemn-- the incidents of racist remarks by elected officials and violent acts by police officers mentioned earlier by the representatives of two Greek NGOs.»

Unfortunately, the above text only reflects the sincere will of the leading staff from the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** and the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life**. On the other hand, the competent Ministries, first and foremost, the **Ministry of Interior and Public Administration**, have not yet shown the necessary will for the implementation of the declared policy as well as the respect for Roma rights. As the effort of the Ministry was solely confined to the unscrutinized commissioning of programs and the giving away of subsidies of a total worth of several billion drachmas, it is not surprising that since 1996, all attempts made as part of the government's Policy Framework for Roma have been abandoned half-way through. According to a lengthy «Review for the years 1996-1999» provided by the Ministry of Interior to the Progressive Left Coalition MP Maria Damanaki in February 2000, as an answer to the latter's parliamentary question, it seems that the only part of the program that had been completed in the past three years was only a survey of the housing needs of the Roma. The Ministry's double standard to the homeless and destitute Roma becomes even more evident when considering its immediate mobilization in September 1999 for the victims of the Athens earthquake. Free spaces were found instantaneously to locate temporary housing. Ironically, there was an abundance of land for earthquake victims in municipalities where the scarcity of land had been the primary excuse for not accepting the Roma. Infrastructure works were completed almost overnight and pre-fabricated houses were allocated to all homeless victims.

On the contrary, when Roma are in question, works are progressing at an extremely slow pace. The former military barrack of Gonou is selected to be the first Roma self-managed settlement in Greece. The infrastructure works for the settlement, which is supposed to accommodate over 2,500 Roma tent-dwellers evicted from Evosmos (Thessaloniki) in August 1998, have not yet been completed. The government had announced that the army would clean up the barracks by November 1998 and the infrastructure works would be completed within three months i.e. by February 1999. In 24 May 1999, the government expressed to the **OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities** that the work will be completed by September 1999 (OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area, p. 115). Today, more than one year later, work is still in progress, and the government announced a new deadline of 30 July 2000. For almost two years, the Roma of Evosmos have been living in the bed of the river Gallikos, in makeshift homes made of wood and plastic, under the threat of floods.

In theory «government efforts in housing concentrate on finding permanent solutions, through the construction of houses, the allocation of land, and the granting of housing loans, and on creating settlements of a transitional nature until permanent solutions are found.» (**Permanent Mission of Greece to the OSCE, Statement made by the Greek Delegation on Roma and Sinti, Vienna, 22 September 1999**) Yet, up to now there is no example of a destitute Roma settlement that has been relocated satisfactorily. On the contrary, numerous communities of Roma tent-dwellers were evicted or threatened with eviction, or, worse still, relocated in allegedly «model settlements» which are merely the «models of deception of the government» created by local authorities in collaboration with other public agencies. It is also characteristic that even shabby Roma camps that had been included in university research programs worth billions of drachmas were similarly unwelcome by local authorities. There is a lack of response from the part of the government and the academic community on the poor living conditions of the Roma. There is rarely any exception.

It is also worth mentioning that a great number of evictions has taken place in Greater Athens, the location that will host the **2004 Olympic Games**. The local authorities almost always decide to evict Roma from a site or to refuse their transferring to another area when there is the real or alleged need to build sports facilities. Will the international community and the **International Olympic Committee** tolerate a «cleansing» of Athens similar to that of Mexico in 1968? Even more, as far as housing is concerned, Roma in Athens --especially those living in the western periphery-- have been abandoned completely by the state. Athens has the largest Roma population in Greece outside Thessaloniki. Yet, in the Minister of Interior's «1996-1999 Review», no housing projects are mentioned for Roma residents in the capital. The capital is hosting the Olympic Games and undertaking all the massive construction efforts necessary for the event; but to date it has not provided adequate housing for the approximately 3000 Romani tent-dwellers of the Aspropyrgos and Ano Liosia in the suburbs of Athens. These people live without any infrastructure in the wider area close to a garbage dump.

What exemplifies the absence of will of the competent authorities to deal with the Roma tent-dwellers in question and the non-governmental organizations promoting

solutions to the Roma's problems, is the arbitrary decision of the **Ministry of Interior** to call off --in an anti-democratic fashion-- the formation of a **Committee for the Problems of the Roma Tent-Dwellers**. The creation of the committee was decided in mid-June 1999 after a meeting in this very Ministry, with the parties concerned; it would have been made up of government officials, non-governmental organizations and Roma organizations. Following NGO reactions and pressure, in January 2000 an inter-ministerial body was set up by the government with a will to better coordinate its action for Roma. This body was put under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior. The ministry was cooperating closely with the inter-municipal Network Rom and the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations (both directly or indirectly highlighted by the Greek delegations to the OSCE in 1998 and 1999 to account for Greece's poor achievements regarding Romas' resettlement), whereas ignoring Roma Associations and NGOs active in promoting the tent-dwellers' rights. Greece's Roma tent-dwelling population is lacking representation in this body.

In spring 1999, NGOs in collaboration with the **Coalition** party submitted a draft bill at the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life** --the end product of their long experience with settlements-- for the creation of self-managed Roma settlements that meet all requirements, in order to improve the living conditions of the Roma and their smooth integration into the society. This proposal is already being implemented, after a lot of pressure and with considerable delay, in the former military barrack of Gonou in Thessaloniki. Passing this bill through the Parliament would have been first in the Committee for the Problems of the Roma Tent-Dwellers' agenda. The dissolution of the committee has been a blight upon Roma tent-dwellers' hopes for the future. The Ministry of the Interior, besides having the task to control the legality of the local authorities' actions, has the responsibility to introduce a legal framework binding for the local authorities. The provision of shelter to homeless Greek citizens is a constitution provision (article 21, paragraph 4): the state ought to have --but has not had for 25 years-- relevant laws that ensure the implementation of this article as well as the implementation of Article 11(1) of the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. «The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in interpreting Article 11(1) of the ICESCR regarding the right to housing has emphasized in particular that 'instances of forced eviction are prima facie incompatible with the requirements of the Covenant and can only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with the relevant principles of international law.' While not all involuntary evictions violate the ICESCR, they generally are incompatible with the right to adequate housing when individuals are removed against their will from the homes they occupy 'without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal and other protection.' The Committee has also admonished that evictions 'should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights. Where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the State Party must take all appropriate measures, to the maximum of its available resources, to ensure that adequate alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, as the case may be, is available.'» (OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area, p. 114-115)

At the same time, abuse of violence on Roma by police officers continues: even in cases when policemen have been indicted for homicide or torture, they have not been

suspended or even transferred, let alone disciplined by their department. Sworn Administrative Investigations and legal proceedings against them advance at a snail's pace. As far as education is concerned, few Roma of compulsory schooling age (between 6 to 15) attend school owing to indifference, if not racist attitude of state officials. Moreover, international and national surveys by the **Doctors of the World** and the **Doctors of the World-Greece** show that the health problems of Roma tent-dwellers in Greece are among the worst in Europe. According to the aforementioned organizations, the living conditions in many of the settlements that will be mentioned hereafter are worse than refugee camps in different areas of Asia and Africa where they have visited.

Abandoned or Often Persecuted Destitute Roma Settlements

A. Settlements that were evicted (5)

Evosmos (Thessaloniki)

By a court decision, after an appeal by the local authorities and the owners of the land, in 1997, 3,500 tent-dwellers were ordered to leave an area with zero infrastructure where they had been living for 30 years. After the intervention of non-governmental organizations, the state undertook to transfer them to a properly arranged area at the former military barracks of Gonou and the eviction was postponed. One year later, construction had not begun, while the adjoining municipalities issued a resolution that they would prevent such relocation even if they had to resort to violence; no authority punished them for this illegal and certainly racist action. At the same time, following action taken by the municipality of Evosmos, Roma were threatened with imprisonment, fines, as well as police violence unless they leave. When neighboring municipalities turned them away also, they ended up in the dried-up bed of the Gallikos River after a month's wandering, in August 1998.

After continuous pressure by NGOs --putting charges against competent authorities, publicity in Greek and international media, repeated parliamentary questions by the **Coalition--** and after the Roma had found themselves in serious danger because of the river floods, the Prefecture of Thessaloniki in cooperation with competent ministries started the works at the Gonou barracks. Nevertheless, the work has been proceeding at a very slow pace and with considerable delay. By May 2000, the barrack was connected to the electricity and water supply but had no sewage system yet. In March and April, because of the upcoming elections, 69 prefabricated houses --originally used for the earthquake victims in Athens-- were transferred to the settlement, while the rest of the 190 reportedly were on the way. After the parliamentary elections of April 9th, construction work was halted. Apparently, the camp had served its function in the pre-election campaign. The new date for the transfer of Roma to the settlement has been further delayed to 30 July 2000. As a reminder, the first date ever given officially for this transfer was February 1999.

This relocation is the first one ever carried out by a Prefecture in accordance with the draft bill for the creation of self-managed settlements of the **Cooperating Organizations**, and is implemented under the supervision of the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life** in collaboration with the **Cooperating Organizations**.

Ano Liosia (Attica)

In October 1996, under the pretext of a search for drugs, police burst into the Roma camp. Rumors about drug trafficking paved the way for the local authorities to evict the Roma in April 1997. Twenty-five out of 70 families --registered residents in that municipality-- were transferred to metal prefabricated houses in a near-by area. The rest of the tent-dwellers were given an ultimatum to leave. The new site was quite isolated, lacked infrastructure (the houses were never connected with a water supply or a sewage system) and was fenced with barbed wire. The new camp had been one of the misleading «models» till December 1999 when it ceased to exist. History repeated itself, local authorities once more split the population in two, transferring the municipal citizens (10 out of the 20 families) to prefabricated houses for earthquake victims and «velvety» evicting the rest. Most of them found resort at the garbage dump.

Ioannina (Epiros)

In August 1999, the local authorities evicted 30 Roma families (both Greek and Albanian) from an area lacking infrastructure, which they had been renting for 7 years. Roma were not serviced with protocols of eviction. The first threats of eviction started in May 1999. After an intervention of the researchers from the University of Ioannina Program on Roma, in which the camp had been included in the research project, the authorities withdrew the eviction order and undertook to look into the possibility of relocation. That promise was not kept.

Phoenikas (Thessaloniki)

In May 1997 the shanties of a Roma family consisting of 30 members were knocked down by local authorities, the reasoning for this action being that they were illegal, while equally illegal luxurious non-Roma residences in the same area were left untouched. In May 2000, there was an attempt to evict three Roma families and demolish their houses. The latter were accused of trespassing private land and building illegally. Protocols of eviction were serviced to them by a legal functionary at the presence of the police and municipal employees. Following Romas' strong reactions, the eviction was postponed to three days later. The families in question have been living in the constantly developing region for more than 30 years. The attempted eviction took place even though the case from the legal point of view is still pending. Roma families claim to have rights on the land too and their applications have so far not been examined.

Trikala - Pyrgos or Agroviz area (Thessaly)

On 29/5/1997 local authorities, in the presence of police, evicted 20 Roma families from the area of Pyrgos or Agroviz after they had been pressed upon by owners of near-by night clubs. These Roma had been evicted from another area in Trikala 8 years ago and were being evicted again

B. Settlements threatened with eviction (9)

Rio (Patras, border between Continental Greece and the Peloponese)

In October 1999, the municipal council of Rio voted in favor of the eviction of the Roma on the basis of their criminal activities, poor hygiene standard, and their trespassing into public property. Most of them have settled in the region for five years now, in an area belonging to the University of Patras after being evicted from other

parts of the county. The local university showed no real interest in finding a solution to the problem. Other families, living in municipal land in Rio, in autumn 1999 were also threatened with eviction. A traffic policeman had asked them to leave the place but they refused to obey. In December 1999, **GHM** and a representative from the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life**, visited the camps and had meetings with representatives from the local and prefect authorities and the dean of the university. The result of the visit led to a commitment on behalf of the Prefect authorities -but not the municipal authorities- that they would not allow an eviction to take place unless the Roma were provided with alternative housing solutions.

Chalandri (Attica)

13 out of 30 families of the settlement received court-ordered evictions in a case judged in absentia in an area lacking infrastructure where they have been living for about 20 years. They were charged with trespassing. After strenuous negotiations with the District Attorney and the police that would enforce the decision, they were granted an extension until the end of April 1999. As a result of repeated negotiations of the **Cooperating Organizations**, the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life** and the **Coalition** with the local authorities, it was agreed to propose to the owners that Roma would lease the site for a period of 6-12 months until a permanent site for relocation was found. During a parliamentary debate over the matter initiated by the Coalition, the government promised to subsidize the lease. This idea was never put into practice and the eviction remained pending. In addition, the owners of the site resorted to the Ombudsman claiming their property. The **Cooperating Organizations** initiated a housing scheme with the **Office for Quality of Life** and the **Ombudsman's** support. Plots of land in the wider area were to be purchased and allocated to the local Roma population. Nevertheless, the eviction exists as a possibility.

Aspropyrgos (Attica)

In February 1999, local authorities, escorted by the police, set fire to 5 Roma lodgings of the Nea Zoe settlement in Aspropyrgos, where 100 families have been living since 1990. The operation took place in the absence of a District Attorney and without protocols of eviction; it was based only on a discriminatory decision of the Service of Town Planning to pull down Roma shacks because the whole residential area -- inhabited by both Roma and non-Roma-- lacks town planning. **The Cooperating Organizations** and the **Coalition M.P. Ms. Stella Alfieri** pressed charges against the local authorities, while international organizations protested to the Greek government for violation of international treaties and agreements binding for Greece. This, however, did not prevent the **Deputy Minister of Interior Mr. Florides**, in an answer to a relevant parliamentary question, from trying to justify the use of violence by the municipality, arguing that Roma had taken possession of the area illegally. A few days later, there were threats that the operation would be resumed. Pre-election promises of the municipality that living conditions in the settlement would be improved remained empty words. In the meantime, the **Cooperating Organizations** and the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life** proposed a site for the creation of a self-managed Roma settlement of the whole precinct; it is a forest area within the limits of the adjoining municipality of Ano Liosia. **The mayor of Ano Liosia, Mr. Papademas**, rejected this solution while his superior, the elected **Prefect Mr. Papapetros**, has shown no interest whatsoever. The excuse in this case is the alleged construction of Olympic sports facilities both in Nea Zoe and in the forest area. The

arson of Roma shacks has been the second traumatic experience for the Roma of Aspropyrgos after the violent police raid of 1996 --with machine guns and knives in front of TV cameras which sent out the images of Roma being held at gun-point by policemen. It was these scenes that triggered the announcement of the **1996 Framework Policy on Roma**. Reportedly, a third traumatic experience seems to be on the way: in May 2000, local residents started collecting signatures in favor of the expulsion of Roma from their region.

Agia Paraskevi (Attica)

In July 1997 the municipality of Agia Paraskevi tore down 10 out of 28 shanties belonging to local Roma who had been living in the area for up to 30 years. The latter were charged with trespassing private property and building without a license. A few days later, the mayor attempted to destroy the rest of the shanties with the presence of the police, but failed to do so owing to the intervention of non-governmental organizations. For a long time, the matter had been pending as there were protocols of eviction serviced to the Roma. The municipality persistently claims that there is no available land for relocation, while the adjacent 35 acres of land are intended for the building of sport facilities. In November 1999, the mayor of Agia Paraskevi agreed to provide each Roma family with 3 million drachmas for the purchase of land in the greater district of Geraka and Agia Paraskevi. The municipality, in cooperation with the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life** and the **Cooperating Organizations** got underway a housing scheme aiming at enabling local Roma to acquire land and by means of loans to purchase houses. The scheme has not yet been implemented and, in this light, the eviction exists as a possibility.

Trikala - Kokinos Pyrgos area (Thessaly)

Roma tent-dwellers, who camped near a Rudar settlement (Romanian-speaking people sometimes considered as Roma) on a site lacking infrastructure were threatened with expulsion twice by the local authorities in May 1998. However, the local authority was not serviced with protocols of eviction. For the first time, workers from the municipality, accompanied by numerous police officers, tore down Roma tents which were put up again later.

Larissa - Neapoli area (Thessaly)

In May 1998, Roma (about 50 nomad families) were threatened with eviction by the police in the orders of the mayor. The majority of these Roma are citizens registered in the municipality and have been living in the area for 30 years.

Tyrnavos (Thessaly)

Four hundred Roma families, owners of the land they live on, dwell in tents because of the authorities' refusal to include the area in the city planning scheme, in hope to discourage their permanent settlement. There is no water or electricity supply, nor a sewage system. Roma have attempted to build lavatories or rooms in order to improve their living conditions themselves, but in vain. Local authorities pulled them down and imposed high fines on the Roma.

Tarsina Corinthias (Peloponese)

There has been a similar attempt to coerce Roma as in Tyrnavos. Even though the 60 Roma are legitimate owners of the land, they have been living with zero infrastructure.

Nea Kios (Argolida, Peloponese)

The local authority claimed that the presence of the Roma had contributed to the high crime rate in the area although the allegation was groundless. The municipal council issued a decision in May 2000 to evict all Roma from the region. Police was asked to take action and implement the decision within 48 hours. Roma's presence, even in transit, in that municipality was publicly characterized as undesirable. No disciplinary procedure against the municipal authorities was initiated by the state.

C. Settlements having to date narrowly escaped eviction (3)

Nea Alikarnassos (Crete)

Making use of a town council resolution dating from 1997 and arguing that the area was going to be reconstructed, in March 1999 the municipality issued the eviction procedure of the Roma. Protocols of eviction were serviced to 102 families living for months with the threat of an expulsion. In the meantime, older requests for basic infrastructure at the settlement remained unanswered. In addition, Roma relocation was very difficult to proceed as none of the neighboring municipalities wanted tent-dwellers at their precincts. Their transfer to a former military barrack and the creation of a self-managed settlement, according to the proposal of the **Cooperating Organizations** with the collaboration of the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life**, faced the stubborn opposition of the mayor who had declared his intention to evict the Roma from his town. It was only due to much of NGO pressure that this relocation scheme could get under way. The **Heraklion County Court's** ruling had decided that the municipal eviction order was abusive. This has facilitated the progress of the scheme. The scheme was put under the responsibility of the Regional Governor of Crete. In November 1997, a violent police raid had taken place in the settlement after persistent rumors of Roma involving in drug trafficking activities.

Spata (Attica)

In November 1997, there was an attempt to evict 100 Roma from an area where they had been living since 1992. The reasoning behind the attempt was illegal building and was based on a court verdict in absentia. The attempt was carried out in the presence of police and was supported by the local residents who did not want the settlement to be near a newly-built nursery school. Following NGO reactions, the eviction was suspended. The local authorities promised to look into the possibility of relocation in another area. Currently, in cooperation with the **Prime Minister's Office**, the municipal authorities have initiated a relocation scheme. Land was allocated to Roma by the municipality while the **Office for Quality of Life** will secure prefabricated houses for all 20 families. Infrastructure works will be conducted by the municipality.

Kalamata (Peloponese)

In 1997 the municipality of Kalamata filed a suit case against 70 Roma families in the industrial quarter of Kalamata where they had been living for about 5 years. The reasoning for the eviction was that the area was going to be reconstructed. Roma won the case only after strenuous pressure from local non-governmental organizations. In the end, a proposal for the purchase of building plots in another area was adopted. Following a public bidding, the land was to be bought by the **Prefecture** and subsidized by the **Ministry of Environment**. The dossier of the case was delivered to

the **Secretary General for the region** and by November 1999 the committee to realize the bidding was formed. The bidding took place but did not yield any results as no proprietors of land offered to sell their plots to the Prefecture. The idea to proceed with compulsory expropriations of land has been thrown at the table. Yet, it is certain that compulsory expropriations will provoke reactions on the part of the local residents concerned. The scheme is in its secondary phase, the construction of the houses is taken over by the state-run Organization of Workers' Houses. According to the existing plan, Roma would be temporarily transferred to the public areas of the future settlement --with full infrastructure-- till the construction of houses is over.

D. Destitute Settlements (6)

Aetoliko (Continental Greece)

Six hundred people live in three settlements in the area. Only two of the settlements have water. The prefecture promised a settlement with all necessary infrastructure, but progress has been slow. In spring 2000, prefabricated houses were allocated to local Roma residents, following initiatives of the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life**.

Patras - Kato Souli or Riganocampos area (Peloponese)

Near the rubbish dump, 30 families have been living for more than 20 years without any infrastructure. The municipality refused to clear up the area for a fee and supply the camp with water. Right next to it, part of the dump that has been planted with saplings and is watered by an automatic irrigation system. By December 1999, the population in the camp had dramatically increased, reaching 70 families.

Lamia - Damaria area (Continental Greece)

At the old quarry of the town, near a stream, about 100 families --60 members of which are locally registered citizens-- live in huts, surrounded by rubbish, with hardly enough water and no other infrastructure.

Komotini - Teneke Mahala (Thrace)

Three hundred and fifty Muslim Roma families have lived in tin huts for more than 70 years. The scant public lavatories are in bad shape. The decision for their relocation in another area with the help of the Organization of Workers' Houses has been pending for many years. So does the improvement in Romas' destitute living conditions.

Halastra (Thessaloniki)

Thirty-eight Muslim Roma families have camped since 1989 on a stretch of land belonging to the municipality. These Roma have lived in the area for 35 to 40 years. Their living conditions are squalid, as there is no infrastructure except for one water pump.

Sagaiika (Peloponese)

Roma tent-dwellers have been living for more than 30 years, without any infrastructure, in an area neighboring a Roma settlement. Since 1998, there has been no improvement to their squalid living conditions despite the fact that their problems were reported to the competent municipal and prefecture authorities.

D. Settlements which are minimally supported by the local authorities (3)

Argostoli Kefalonia (Ionian Islands)

After they had been turned away from the beach, 11 families --about 100 people-- were moved to the slaughterhouse grounds, under the initiative of the local authorities. The stink of the slaughterhouse and the sandy soil that absorbed the sun's heat in the summer made life in the tin huts insufferable. When the municipality took over the slaughterhouse, the stink had considerably reduced. Meanwhile, minor efforts were made to improve other aspects of their living conditions. There are lavatories, two main water pumps and electricity. Nevertheless, the situation remains unpleasant. The mayor never responded to the **Cooperating Organizations'** call for a meeting with representatives from the **Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life** to discuss the viable future of the settlement. Since 1999, there has been no improvement to the Roma's living conditions.

Sofades, Karditsa (Thessaly)

500 families --2,500 people in total -- live in a built-up area where, apart from 100 detached houses, there are huts and tents. The roads have been paved with asphalt; water, electricity, lavatories and rubbish bins are available. Provision has been made to let the tent-dwellers have the ground of the rubbish dump as soon as this area is closed down. The relocation scheme is already underway. The houses are to be built by the Organization of Workers' Houses.

Chios (Aegean Islands)

In early 1997, on the mayor's initiative, 10 Roma families were allotted land by the island's ecclesiastical authorities. The local people and the Police Commissioner reacted negatively to the settlement of these Roma in the area.

E. «Official Ghetto» Settlements (3)

Trikala - Raxa area (Thessaly)

Roma from various parts of Trikala were moved to the Raxa area with the promise that the site would function as an organized camp. In May 1998, the water was cut off without warning. Local authorities neglected to restore water supply which in all probability was cut off by local people who wanted to send the Roma away. There were neither lavatories nor sewage system.

Patras - Makriyanni area (Peloponese)

In November 1997, local authorities with the consent of 25 Roma families--registered citizens of Patras--pulled down 23 shanties and built up the settlement again after they had evicted all Roma who were not registered citizens of the area. Roma had to put up with a small plot of land which confined them considerably, even though there were lavatories and water supply. In May 1998 the settlement was full of rubbish and dead rats. A year before, 15 cases of meningitis had been reported in the settlement. By May 2000, the prefecture authorities had made efforts to provide Roma with alternative housing solutions. Eight out of the 15 families of the camp left the site by making use of the prefect's rent subsidies scheme.

Menemeni (Thessaloniki)

A «model» settlement was built in an area full of chemical plants and besides an oil pipeline. Twenty-four Roma families --about 120 people-- were moved with promises by the authorities that they would be offered the means for a decent living. Initially the settlement had two lavatories and water but no electricity, forcing Roma to steal power from a nearby pole. From 1996 until today there has been no improvement, despite the dramatic increase in the settlement's population.

Police Violence

(1) Police officers indicted by the prosecutor's office of ill-treating two Roma youths - -E. Kotropoulos and L. Bekos who were arrested for attempted ice-cream theft at the Mesolongi police station (5/1998)-- were not removed from their job. This was despite the unambiguous forensic report, the charges brought forward by the victims, the active involvement of Greek and international non-governmental organizations with letters of protest and memos to competent authorities, and even after the District Attorney's prosecution --«for tortures and other deeds that are offensive to human dignity». The Sworn Administrative Investigation was ordered, after much of NGO pressure, by the police and the Ministry for Public Order, but reaching a conclusion with considerable delay. **GHM** and **MRG-G** were orally informed that no action was to be taken against the officers in question. The latter were not suspended nor transferred from the police station. Moreover, they were freely exercising pressure to the victims to stop the proceedings against them. A trial date has not yet been set for the victims' complaint.

(2) A Rom, Angelos Celal, was killed by policemen in Partheni, Thessaloniki, on 1 April 1998. A Sworn Administrative Investigation was ordered by the competent Police Directorate and the Ministry for Public Order only after much of NGO pressure. The father of the victim pressed charges against the responsible police officers. The District Attorney's office announced in May 1998 that three policemen were being prosecuted for --among other offenses-- murder, attempted murder, illegal possession and use of firearms. However, on March 29, 2000, the Council of First Instance Judges of Thessaloniki issued an order to dismiss all charges against the police officers. The reasoning behind this decision was that they were acting in legitimate self-defense. Angelos Celal was unarmed --even according to the police- and was shot at the back as he drove away from the scene of a police ambush. According to police investigation, seventeen spent cartridges originating from firearms used by the police were found at the scene of the shooting, while an additional one, possibly originating from a non-police weapon, was recovered. Such evidence can hardly justify legitimate self-defense. A request to the Office of the Prosecutor of the Appeals Court of Thessaloniki to challenge the Court's ruling, launched on April 24, 2000, by **GHM** and **MRG-G** has been disregarded. The deadline for the Appeals Court to act has lapsed. The victim was 29 years old, married and is the father of one child.

(3) In November 1996 during a police round-up in Viotia, Rom A. Mouratis, father of 6 children, was murdered in cold blood. While he was lying on the ground at gun-point, Mouratis raised his head to take a look at his children who were also on the ground. This movement was considered as «threatening» by a policeman who shot and killed him. The officer was suspended while the Sworn Administrative Investigation

was in progress. He was also indicted by the District Attorney, but was released for pending trial.

(4) On 12 September 1999, Nikos Katsaris, a 23-year-old Rom living in the Chalandri camp, was in a car heading towards Nafplio with his father, his underage brother and a cousin. On this Sunday, they wanted to have a look at three open-air markets, without having to deal with the sellers immediately. All three open-air markets were surrounded by barbed wire. When leaving the third market, three police officers stopped the Roma and, at gunpoint, told them to get out of the car, and put their hand ups. The officer did a body search --swearing, kicking and beating them. The Roma claimed that they had only come to look at cars to buy, and not to steal, as the police suspected. To prove this, they even showed the officers the notes with names and mobile phone numbers of the owners of the cars to prove their intention to buy a car. Nevertheless, they were taken to the police station and kept in two separate cells with ten other people, mostly immigrants awaiting for deportation. They were detained because the police found court decisions against Nikos Katsaris and his father involved unpaid fines. The two underage youths were released the same day while Nikos Katsaris and his father were only released after their relatives paid the bail the next day. On 27 October, Nikos Katsaris, with the help of the **GHM** and **MRG-G**, pressed charges against the policemen involved and subsequently filed a complaint to the Ombudsman's office. The police did not even deem the case «worth of a sworn administrative investigation,» stating that an internal review in that police station showed that none of the allegations were well founded.

Bureaucratic harassment

(1) The case of a stateless Rom, Sezgin Durgut, presented by GHM and MRG-G in their September 1999 Report to the OSCE dealing with stateless people in Thrace, remains pending. Answering a relevant question of Progressive Left Coalition MP, Maria Damanaki, posed on July 17, 1999, the Minister of Public Order had replied the following:

«In general all cases regarding aliens are being examined thoroughly by the competent authorities. When it comes to the case of Durgut Sezgin, in particular, to his request to be provided with an identity card for stateless people, it should be stated clearly that issuing such a certificate presupposes giving him the status of a stateless person. Mr. Sezgin has no such status based on the documents that the competent authorities possess. He is a Bulgarian citizen, therefore an alien. It should also be stated that, indeed, the latter has received permission to stay in Greece as a person with undefined nationality. In order to be able to seek treatment as a stateless person, Mr. Sezgin was advised to provide the Greek authorities with a valid certificate stating that he is not a Bulgarian citizen. In case he was unable to do so, he was asked to submit a valid travel document from the Bulgarian authorities for his application, regarding permission to stay in Greece, to be considered under law 1975/1999.»

But as far back as in 1997, Sezgin Durgut had provided the Greek authorities with a certificate saying that he was not a Bulgarian citizen. Resubmitting the same document on February 2000, Sezgin Durgut applied to obtain a stateless person identity card for a second time, but has not received any answer. At the same time, his application to be granted Greek citizenship has been pending and unanswered since 1990. So does his complaint to the Greek Ombudsman. For the Greek administration, Sezgin Durgut

does not exist; he cannot travel abroad, to have his driving license extended for his work and get a family allowance.

(2) Durgut Songiul, wife of Durgut Sezgin, miscarried a pair of twins on March 11, 1999. She went to the public hospital of Komotini where she was told that she had to stay there for at least one day to allow for the necessary medical tests. Being afraid that the doctors in the public hospital would not take care of her, Durgut Songiul went to her private gynecologist. The latter told her that the embryos were dead, adding that she needed to undergo an operation, which required anesthesia. To her great surprise, Durgut Songiul woke up in the public hospital of Komotini. During the surgical intervention of the private doctor, some complications had occurred, so the doctor himself took his patient to the hospital in a state of shock. The doctors in the hospital explained to her that, since she had a perforated womb, they had to take out the vital organ. It took her a few seconds to realize the implications of this operation: she would never be able to give birth.

Songiul Durgut decided to investigate the matter and find out what the gynecologist's share of responsibility was. Once again, she addressed the hospital of Komotini asking for a certificate stating the reasons why her womb had been taken out. At first, she was told that for such a certificate to be issued, she would have to wait for at least one month, while the organ is being examined in the hospital's laboratory. The second time she was told to wait even longer. Yet, she discerned that it was an effort made by the personnel to discourage her from pursuing the case. After consulting with the **GHM**, Durgut Songiul addressed the hospital for the third time. She was told that the organ was never examined, nor was there any possibility for that to be done in the hospital. Songiul Durgut stated that it was her indisputable right to know what had really happened and that it was the hospital's responsibility to provide her with an explanation. Following this development, with the help of **GHM**, in February 2000, she filed a complaint to the Ombudsman asking for a proper investigation of the matter. She is still waiting for an answer.

(3) The Directorate of the Town Planning Service in the Prefect of Lesvos (Aegean Sea) fined the municipality of Mytilini for illegally constructing a Roma settlement two kilometers outside the main town of the island. In 1997 the municipal authorities took the initiative to resolve the housing problem of the Roma and provided them with some decent living conditions. The Association of Merchants in Mytilini, however, filed a complaint with the Directorate of the Town Planning Service accusing the municipality of Mytilini of illegal construction. The reason behind this complaint was due to the fear of the non-Roma merchants to their Roma business competitors. The buildings were pronounced illegal and the municipality got a 2 million drachmas fine. In the last few years, old buildings in Mytilini proclaimed as «national treasures» have been reconstructed without the necessary permits and without any intervention from the Town Planning Service.

Education

«In education, a 3-year project is now in progress, carried out by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the University of Ioannina, which aims at providing continuous education to teachers of Roma children, publication of teaching materials,

strengthening intercultural schools, helping high school students, etc. Also, in order to facilitate pupils who move frequently from one place to another, the system of the individual transit-pupil card has been introduced» (Permanent Mission of Greece to the OSCE, Statement made by the Greek Delegation on Roma and Sinti, Vienna, 22 September 1999).

In Greece, most Roma and almost all tent-dwelling Roma speak the Romanes language. Yet, the aforementioned Education Program on Roma provides for preparatory classes and teaching material solely in the Greek language. Unlike similar education programs in other European countries, the Greek one seems to undermine the Roma identity of the children. On various occasions, Professor A. Gotovos --the person in charge of the program-- and his associates have argued that, in the name of diversity, ghetto policies in education have many times been legitimized. In Mr. Gotovos' own words, the aim of this program is «to minimize the importance of cultural background as a contributing element to the organization of a class.» Despite the billions of drachmas allocated to the program, the percentage of illiteracy among Greek Roma --especially tent-dwellers-- remains at extremely high levels; 80%, reaching 90% occasionally. From comparative data of the **Doctors of the World** it becomes apparent that the percentage of Roma tent-dwellers who can write and read is 6% in Athens and 60% in Montpellier, France. On January 13, 2000, **Doctors of the World-Greece** gave a press conference at which they presented the scientific results from their research in four camps in Athens: Agia Paraskevi, Chalandri and Aspropyrgos (in Nea Zoe and the garbage dump). The overall population in the aforementioned settlements is estimated around 1,800. Based on this research, one in five children begs in the streets. Only 14% of the Roma have some sort of education. 91% of them have a primary school degree, 7% were registered at the high school level and only 2% at the college level. Literacy seems to be higher whenever there is a school near the settlement.

In addition, as a result of diffused prejudice among state officials (schoolteachers, directors, municipal and prefecture leaders) as well as common people against Roma, their children's education is seriously impeded. On May 22, 2000, the daily «Eleftherotypia» reported that Roma children in the municipality of Velo (Corinthia, Peloponese) were not allowed to attend classes in the local primary school following the reactions of non-Roma residents and teachers who locked the school. As a result, the children missed more than one year of preparatory classes under the Educational Program on Roma. The municipality's behavior towards the children's parents was not much different. In addition, the municipality helped the local residents to buy off the land where the camp was established in order to force Roma to leave. In one case, a resident even asked the exhumation of a Rom who was lying in peace (he thought...) next to a non-Rom... The Roma children mentioned above were victims of similar racist reactions in a near-by municipality in 1997. Under the pretext of lack of space, the school authorities in Tarsina refused to accept Roma children for morning preparatory classes under the Ministry's program. Evening classes were not allowed either; the school was used by non-Roma children as a playground in the afternoons and apparently football and classes could not coincide.

As a rule, non-Roma parents react negatively at the idea of their children's coexistence with Roma schoolmates under the same roof, arguing that the level of education will

be downgraded. Non Roma parents try to prevent Roma children's enrollment in schools. When they fail to do so, they take their own children out from the mixed schools. The third primary school of Zefyri (Western Attica) and the Christian school in Evlalo --an ethnically mixed village in Western Thrace populated by Muslim Turks and Christian Roma and Greek families-- are indicative examples of mixed schools turned into «Roma schools.»

Health

An international survey by the **Doctors of the World** (ROMEUROPE Program, Medecins du Monde, Juin 1999) directly associates the odious living conditions in the settlements with the poor health of Roma tent-dwellers. The results of hepatitis tests in Nea Liosia and Aspropyrgos are significant: 99% of the population has been exposed to hepatitis A. The same percentage for Hepatitis B is 50%: 18% are carriers while the healthy remainder of 32% are adolescents aged 10-18, most of which go to school. These percentages are high in comparison to the rest of the population. Comparative data from other European cities show that percentages of Roma tent-dwellers in Greece with health problems are higher (42% for the women, 32% for the men). Roma access to the health system is insignificant. The **Doctors of the World** have found the Roma were living completely lack of first aid, vaccination and medical information. Roma do not trust hospitals and First Aid Services, and they find it impossible to follow the pace and procedures in practice in these institutions (except for cases when the doctor has created an atmosphere of trust). Only 15% of them receive benefits. Out of the 40% of Roma who have social security, only 30% are fully covered. These percentages are less than half of the equivalent average for Roma in other European cities. Based on research conducted by the **Doctors of the World-Greece** in Athenian camps, the average age of the Roma woman who gives birth for the first time is 16 years while the average monthly income of a Roma family in these camps is estimated to be around 76,000 drachmas, approximately half of the minimum salary in Greece.

PROFILES OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), since 1993, is the Greek member of the **International Helsinki Federation**. In 1998, GHM became a member of the **International Freedom of Expression Exchange**. GHM monitors, publishes and lobbies on human rights issues in Greece and, occasionally, in the Balkans. It has participated and often coordinated the monitoring of Greek and Balkan media for stereotypes and hate speech. It has co-published «**Hate Speech**» in the Balkans (ETEPE, 1998) and **Greece Against its Macedonian Minority: the Rainbow Trial** (ETEPE, 1998). Since 1997, in cooperation with the **European Roma Rights Center**, it runs a **Roma Office** for Greece.

Minority Rights Group - Greece (MRG-G) was created as the Greek affiliate of **Minority Rights Group International** in 1992. MRG-G focused mostly on the studies of minorities, in Greece and in the Balkans. It has prepared detailed reports on ethnolinguistic, religious and immigrant communities, in Greece; and on the Greek minorities in Albania and Turkey. In 1998, MRG-G, along with GHM initiated the **Center of Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe – Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE)** with a web site covering human rights issues and comprehensive and comparable presentations of all minorities in the region.

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Internet Addresses:

Balkan Human Rights Web Pages: <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>
The Balkan Human Rights List: <http://www.egroups.com/group/balkanhr/fullinfo.htm>
The Greek Human Rights List: <http://www.egroups.com/group/greekhr/fullinfo.html>
Dikaiomatika! [Rightly! monthly human rights review in Greek]:
<http://www.egroups.com/group/dikaiomatika/fullinfo.html>

GHM and MRG-G, through CEDIME-SE, co-founded, in May 2000, the Consortium of Minority Resources (COMIR). Other founding members were Balkan Academic News (BAN), Constitutional and Legal Policy Institute (COLPI), European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), European Roma Rights Center, The Forum Institute, Human Rights Watch, International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, LGI Managing Multiethnic Communities Project, MINELRES Project, Minority Rights Group International. COMIR web site: <http://www.osi.hu/lgi/comir/> . COMIR email: comirnews@egroups.com.

2. Municipal council decision of immediate expulsion of Roma in N. Kios (Argolida, Peloponese), eviction protocols serviced to three Roma families in Phoenika (Thessaloniki), racism against Roma in Velo and Tarsina (Corinthia, Peloponese). Relevant common press release by GHM, MRG-G and DROM Network for the Roma Social Rights.

In **Nea Kios**, a rather awkwardly parked car driven by a Roma man, has been the pretext for a municipal council decision of immediate expulsion of 300 Roma from the region, on the grounds that Roma increase the criminality rate in the area. Allegedly, everything started with the persistent refusal of a Roma driver to remove his -illegally parked- car from a central street in Nea Kios and his verbal attack against the mayor of the city. For the local municipal council, this incident was one more example of Roma's antisocial and unlawful behavior added to the list. The Roma version of the story was that the driver -although he removed the car without any objection- he was publicly insulted by the mayor and the deputy mayor of Nea Kios who urged the local non-Roma citizens to abuse him. The driver and a relative of his were kept at the police station until 3 am the next day. Reportedly, the police officers who were called to interfere were very much afraid that the two Roma would be abused by the angry citizens of Nea Kios; the latter were outside the police station for hours waiting for the two Roma to get out.

The municipal council kept claiming that Roma have contributed to the high criminality rate in the region, an allegation denied by the competent Police Directorate which stated that, compared with other neighboring municipalities in the prefect, the crime rate in Nea Kios was not high. Moreover, on May 25 this year, the Police Directorate conducted investigations in Roma houses and tents. They found neither drugs nor illegal weapons. Officers discovered 1500 meters of wire used for stealing electricity from the suppliers and 8 legally registered carbines. Following the inspection -which took place at 7 am in the morning and at the presence of three judicial functionaries- 28 Roma were accused of stealing electricity. Police proceeded 16 arrests.

In addition, the municipal decision was criticizing all residents of N. Kios who sold land to the Roma and was going as far as to prohibit the Roma's presence, even in transit, in the municipality. Police was asked to take action and implement the decision within 48 hours. Roma were publicly characterized as undesirable. The municipal authorities closed down the town hall, protesting against the presence of the Roma, and asking the police to take extra measures to fight criminality. No disciplinary procedure against the municipal authorities was initiated by the state.

The daily «Eleftherotypia», on May 24, reported that the attitude of the local press towards the Roma was rather negative. Newspapers were calling Roma «Gypsies», presenting only the non-Roma side of the story. The Prefecture authorities had a meeting with Mr. Freddy Stamos from the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life, discussing ways to deal with the problem. Reportedly the meeting went well and measures were to be announced to precipitate the Roma's smooth integration into the local society. Meanwhile, the neighboring municipality of **Nea Tirynta** announced its unanimous decision to evict all Roma from the region. Following these events and the gravity of the situation, GHM decided to conduct in the beginning of June a field research in Argolida, predominantly in Nea Kios and Nea Tirynta.

Three Roma families in **Phoenikas** (Thessaloniki), accused of trespassing private land and building illegally, were serviced with protocols of eviction. Facing a judicial functionary, the employees of the Kalamaria municipality and police officers, the three families were asked to leave their houses that are to be demolished. The eviction procedure was initiated by local landowners, despite the fact that Roma, too, were claiming the land in question. Although the matter from the legal point of view is still pending, the protocols of eviction were serviced and the three Roma families were given three days' time to leave their houses. The region of Phoenikas is experiencing constant development and the price of the land has increased rapidly.

On May, 22, the daily «Eleftherotypia» reported that 70 Roma families, currently living in the municipality of **Velo** in Corinthia, experience the racism of the local authorities and residents who oppose the idea of Roma's stay in the region. With the support of the schoolteachers, local residents locked the town school, preventing Roma children from attending classes in the frame of the University of Ioannina Educational Program for Roma, taking place under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The very same children faced similar problems with the residents and municipal authorities in the neighboring town of **Tarsina**. They were not allowed to have morning preparatory classes for the lack of adequate space in the local primary school. The proposal of the associates with the Educational Program for Roma to organize afternoon classes for the Roma children was also rejected. The argument was that in the afternoons the school functions as a football playground for the non-Roma children and apparently there could be no room for both classes and sports. Since 1997, Roma children have lost almost three years of preparatory classes without any corresponding reactions from the competent authorities. Moreover, in the summer of 1999, the local residents of Tarsina -with the support of the local authorities- collected 12 million drachmas and bought off the land where Roma lived with a view to precipitate their eviction from the region. Following this, local leaders started asking Roma parents to sign a document stating that they had no intention to send their children at the local school, because their stay in the region was seasonal.

**DROM NETWORK FOR THE ROMA SOCIAL RIGHTS
GREEK HELSINKI MONITOR
MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP-GREECE**

**PRESS RELEASE
(24/5/00)**

**TOPIC: «MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAMS» ARE THE PROJECTS
FOR ROMAS' HOUSING AND SOCIAL REHABILITATION.
EVICTIONS AND RACIST PRACTICES CONTINUE.**

Our organizations, **DROM Network for the Roma Social Rights, Greek Helsinki Monitor** and **Minority Rights Group-Greece** denounce the evictions and racist practices against the Greek Roma which was brought into the limelight in the last few days. In addition, our organizations ask the Greek government to implement its expressed wish for immediate housing, social and economic rehabilitation for the Greek Roma, bringing itself and the local communities before their true responsibilities. The recent events in **Phoenikas** (Thessaloniki), **Velo** (Corinthia, Peloponese) and **Nea Kios** (Argolida, Peloponese) demonstrate that in today's Greece good intentions towards the Roma are the exceptions. Therefore, it led to the recent severe criticism from the **OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities** to Greece's leadership.

While state officials were discussing with the prefect authorities of Thessaloniki the unjustifiable delay in the transferring of the Roma of Evosmos to the first self-managed settlement in Gonou, in the same prefecture, in an area called Phoenikas, efforts were made to evict three Roma families. Accused of trespassing private land and building illegally, on May 19, 2000, the families in question found themselves confronting a judicial official, employees of the Kalamaria municipality and police officers, who were all asking them to leave their houses that are to be demolished. According to DROM Network for the Roma Social Rights, the attempted eviction took place following legal action initiated by the landowners of the region. The area is experiencing constant development and the price of the land has increased rapidly. However, the eviction proceeded despite the fact that Roma, too, were claiming ownership of the land in question. While from a legal point of view the case is still pending, the three families were asked to leave their homes in three days' time.

Even in the cases when Roma manage to house themselves in the most «legal» ways, evictions remain possible as demonstrated by the latest --certainly not unique-- events in **Velo** (daily «Eleftherotypia», 22/5/00). Roma in **Tyrnavos, Tripolis, Ano Liosia, Yanouli, Chios** have had similar experiences of racist treatment from the local authorities and communities, who were doing everything possible to impede the Roma's settling down in their vicinity. Buying off land from the local Roma and setting imaginative obstacles at their children's education were the ways chosen by the residents of **Velo** -not only tolerated but also supported by the local authorities- to make Roma leave. They locked the school and collected 12 million drachmas to buy off their land. In neighboring **Tarsina**, there was no space left for the very same children to attend morning preparatory classes in the framework of the University of Ioanina Educational Program for Roma, taking place under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. In the afternoon there was no space either because school was functioning as football playground for the non-Roma children. Some people's right to sports seems to be prevailing over the Roma's right to education.

In **Nea Kios**, a rather awkwardly parked car owned by the Roma, resulted in a municipal council decision of immediate expulsion of 300 Roma from the region, on the grounds that Roma increase the criminality rate in the area. The municipal council in **Rio** (Achaia, Peloponese) had taken a similar decision on similar grounds in October 1999. Apart from the fear of crime, site reconstruction of areas inhabited by Roma tent-dwellers has over the past inspired similar eviction orders in **Nea Alikarnasos** (Crete), **Kalamata** (Peloponese), **Spata, Agia Paraskevi** (Attica) and **Evosmos** (Thessaloniki). And, while up until today, it was thought that only living Roma had problems of

housing and neighboring with the «Gadje», it was found out that dead Roma are not wanted either... In **Velo**, residents collect signatures asking the exhumation of a dead Rom from the municipal cemetery (daily «Exousia», 23/5/00).

Greek Constitution's provision under Article 21, paragraph 4, stipulating the state's obligation to secure accommodation for everybody, is in accordance with Article 11, paragraph 1, of the **United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**. The latter provides not solely for a decent living for everybody but also constant efforts on behalf of the state for its improvement. (Greece acceded to the Covenant on May 16, 1985). In addition, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in interpreting Article 11(1) expressed the view that evictions without providing the evictees with alternatives are illegal and abusive. In this light, the state's obligation for immediate housing (and other kinds of) resettlement for the Roma appears even bigger and any collective responsibilities even graver. As stated by the **OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Van der Stoel** --following his study of the Greek situation and endorsed by our organizations-- «the responsibility for inadequate policy implementation cannot be laid solely at the doorstep of local authorities. In some countries that have undertaken initiatives to develop comprehensive Roma policies, national officials appointed to implement those policies operate without adequate support at the most senior levels of government. In order to be effective, public servants require the support of national leaders and local officials» (OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area, p: 116-117).

MUNICIPALITY OF NEA KIOS

EXCERPT

From the record of proceedings of the 6th/2000
Meeting of the Town Council of Nea Kios
(Resolution 55/2000).

(translated in English by Greek Helsinki Monitor)

The Town Council of Nea Kios held an urgent meeting today, Saturday 20th May, 2000 at 7.30 p.m., in the presence of the Mayor. The meeting was held in order to look into the acute problem caused by the unrestricted activities of the Tziganes and the related action being undertaken.

After the rally on 18th May, a meeting took place between the Prefect of Argolida, the Police Commissioner of Argolida and the District Attorney of Nafplio. The meeting was held at the Cultural Center of N. Kios on 19th May 2000. It was concluded that the competent authorities are unable and unwilling to uphold their obvious responsibility, which is to enforce the Law on everyone in all possibilities.

Due to the above reason, and as it was also surmised that this issue affects the very future of N. Kios, it was decided unanimously that more drastic action must be taken until concrete results are achieved. More specifically:

1. We condemn the way the competent authorities handled the situation, their effort to avoid the problem and their way to evade responsibility.
2. We are asking for the immediate arrest of all the Tziganes who make public appearances on the media claiming their possession of firearms and their readiness to use them. . We are also asking for the arrest of all those who obstruct the free passage and movement of the people in N. Kios.
3. We are asking for the full protection and the security of the citizens living in the rural areas, of the farmers who cultivate their land and of the Municipality employees moving around in the area. We hold responsible the Police Commissioner of Argolida and the Prefect of Argolida, who also heads the Agrarian Police.
4. We are asking the police to evict the squatters from the respective properties within 48 hours, removing the tents and huts as well as all the other useless objects.

5. We are asking the Urban Planning Administration, the Prefecture and the Police to pull down immediately all the illegal buildings and structures.

6. We are condemning the Power Company of its inaction while power is being stolen from the users. Having power stolen could be dangerous for the farmers who are cultivating their land. As a protest against this situation, we are inviting the people of N. Kios to withhold payment of their electricity bills.

7. We are asking for a meeting with the Ministers of Public Order and Interior.

8. We are declaring that we do not want the Tziganes to be present, transit through or stay in our Municipality until the issue is settled in principle.

9. We condemn those who have sold land to Tziganes so far and we regard them as instigators of the situation. Anyone who does likewise is condemned by the entire Municipality of N. Kios as well as by society. There is no room for more Tziganes in our town.

10. We are asking the Tziganes who have bought land in the area to return their property to the municipality since they cannot abide by the law and they upset the order in the area. We declare that we are willing to play a decisive part in this procedure.

11. We are asking the shopkeepers in our Municipality to take up their individual responsibilities towards the future of this area.

12. We are putting together a team of vigilance to protect the residents of our Municipality.

13. We aim at cooperating with other Municipalities that are facing similar problems so as to coordinate our action.

14. As a protest, the Town Hall of N. Kios will be closed from Monday 22nd May 2000 onwards.

15. We have organized a protest at the waterfront of N. Kios (Inahos bridge).

16. In the same evening, at 9.00 p.m. there will be a People's Assembly at the square of N. Kios.

17. The Committee of action which up to now has consisted of the Town Council, is expanded to include the parish priest of N. Kios and representatives from all organizations in our Municipality.

Finally, we declare that we shall not allow anyone to undermine the future of our area and nullify the considerable efforts that have been made for the development of our municipality.

For the Town Council
The Chairman
G. Maninis

The Mayor
G. Katriliotis

3. Progress in the infrastructure works in the former military barrack of Gonou for the first self-managed settlement.

The DROM Network for the Roma Social Rights sent a questionnaire to the Prefect authorities of Thessaloniki regarding the remarkable delays in the progress of the infrastructure works for the first Roma self-managed settlement, in the former military

barrack of Gonou. The Prefect authorities were able to provide answers for only 4 out of the 35 questions, and the central government had the lion's share of responsibility for the delay. The Prefect of Thessaloniki sent a letter to the Ministry of Interior (in particular to Mr. Kyriakides, counselor to the Minister) asking for a meeting with all parties concerned to discuss the matter. The meeting took place on May 19, in Thessaloniki with the participation of the Prefect, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Environment and representatives from local NGOs active in promoting Romani rights. The new deadline set for the transferring of the Roma is July 30th. The Ministry of Environment committed itself to have all prefabricated houses sent by June 30th.

4. Allocation of prefabricated houses to Roma settlements all over Greece.

The Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life has send approximately 500-550 prefabricated houses to a number of camps in Greece. In particular, prefabricated houses -originally used for the September 1999 earthquake victims of Athens- were allocated to Roma tent-dwellers in **Zefyri, Aetoliko, Trikala, Theva** and **Mesolongi**. In addition, following contacts with the prefecture authorities of Achaia, GHM was informed about the latest developments in the **Makriyanni** camp. Eight in 14 families have so far accepted the rent subsidies scheme -initiated by the Prefect of Achaia- and left the site. With the money they got (approximately 500.000 drachmas), plus one year of rent subsidy, they were able to accommodate themselves in rented houses and plots of land.

5. Latest developments in the Chalandri camp as well as in Nea Zoe of Aspropyrgos.

A District Attorney, accompanied by police officers, visited the site of the camp, most probably to ascertain the Roma's trespassing of private land. Regarding Nea Zoe in Aspropyrgos, reportedly, non-Roma citizens of the municipality are gathering signatures supporting the eviction of the local Roma.

6. GHM participation at the EUROROM conference in Athens (29-31 May 2000).

GHM was called to participate at the EUROROM conference, which took place in Athens from May 29-31, and present the situation of the Roma in Greece. GHM referred to the problems of the Roma tent-dwellers in the country, the last years' governmental action and the obstacles set by the local authorities and communities. The decision of the municipal council in Nea Kios was also distributed to the panelists along with an update of the September 1999 Report to the OSCE on Roma in Greece.