



PORADŇA PRE OBČIANSKE A ĽUDSKÉ PRÁVA

CENTER FOR CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

KRIVÁ 23, 040 01 KOŠICE, SLOVENSKO

- » telefón/fax: 055 – 68 06 180 » mobil: 0908 69 55 31
- » www.poradna-prava.sk » poradna@poradna-prava.sk
- » IČO: 37 86 72 70 » bankove spojenie: 5519629/5200

The UN Committee criticises Slovakia for discrimination against Roma minority

In Košice, Slovakia, 14 December 2017

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (the Committee) calls on the Slovak Government to take effective measures to eliminate discrimination against Roma in various areas of public life. This follows from concluding observations the Committee released after the November session and constructive dialogue held with the Slovak government delegation in Geneva.

The Committee in its **concluding observations**, among others, gave considerable attention to the situation of disadvantaged members of Roma minority in health care. It urges the Slovak Government to **adopt all necessary measures to prevent all forms of discrimination against Roma in health care and ensure that Roma, and particularly Roma women and girls, are treated with respect**. It also calls for all documented cases of discrimination and violence in the health care system to be thoroughly investigated. The Committee again gave attention to the issue of **illegal sterilizations of Roma women** and expressed its concern that access to justice remains difficult for many Roma women survivors of this practice.

In this regard, The Committee particularly responded to the report **Vakeras Zorales – Speaking Out: Roma Women`s experiences in reproductive health care in Slovakia**, which was recently released by non-governmental organizations Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna) and Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR). The report describes personal stories of Roma women from marginalized communities who reported suffering, discrimination and abuse in reproductive and maternal health care facilities in eastern Slovakia.

"We are glad that the Committee in its concluding observations drew attention to the discrimination, humiliation and violence against disadvantaged Roma women in Slovak health care system. Many Roma women shared with us their negative experiences. We believe that the Slovak Government will not downplay the recommendations of the Committee in this area," said the field worker of Poradna and Roma activist Agáta Duchoňová.

The Committee also highlighted many other serious and unresolved issues in the area of human rights protection of Roma minority in Slovakia. In this regard, Poradna provided information to the Committee in its **alternative report**.

The Committee expressed serious concern at the numerous reports of police violence against ethnic minorities, in particular Roma and that the majority of these reports are not duly investigated. It also noted with deep regret that the Slovak government had ignored its **previous recommendation regarding the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism to investigate crimes involving police officers**. It should replace the current control and inspection body operating in the institutional framework of the Ministry of Interior. It recommends the Government to **speed up the process of creating a fully independent state body** in this area.

In its concluding observations the Committee also raised serious concern about the persistent **discrimination and segregation of Roma children in education**, which it considers to be

widespread and systematic. It recommends the Government to intensify its efforts **to ensure that Roma children enjoy equal opportunities in access to quality education.**

The Committee further calls on the Slovak Government to improve the living conditions of socially disadvantaged Roma, to adopt measures with a view to end their **residential segregation** and **improve the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation** by domestic courts in practice including addressing **court backlogs.**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) is a UN body composed of independent experts overseeing the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination by its State parties. The Committee considered compliance of Slovakia with the Convention at the meeting with the Slovak government delegation on 28-29 November 2017 in Geneva. The meeting took place again after more than four years. Before the meeting the Slovak Government submitted the Committee its periodic report describing measures taken to protect the rights of racial and ethnic minorities in previous years and the progress made in this area.

Poradna calls on the Slovak Government to acknowledge recommendations of the Committee and introduce concrete policies and measures accordingly.

"From the Committee's concluding observations it is clear that the Slovak Government has to step up with the protection of human rights of racial and ethnic minorities. A particularly vulnerable in this regard remain socially excluded Roma who face discrimination in various areas of public life. Despite various government action plans or implemented projects, the situation in this area has not significantly improved over the years. Is the situation of people in many socially excluded Roma communities different than ten years ago and do they have a real chance to get out of poverty? Are cases of police violence duly investigated? Do disadvantaged Roma children have a chance to learn with other children? Have the Slovak Government provided redress to illegally sterilized Roma women? The Committee obviously wants to see concrete and tangible positive changes and the Slovak Government has to intensively strive for it," said on the concluding observations Stefan Ivanco, Program Coordinator of Poradna.

— THE END —

Contacts:

Štefan Ivanco, Program Coordinator of the Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna): 0908 695 531, poradna@poradna-prava.sk

The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna) is a non-governmental organization based in Slovakia focused on the protection of human rights with particular emphasis on the rights of minorities and protection from discrimination. Poradňa has for a long time worked on the issue of discrimination against Roma ethnic minority in various areas of public life. It has also been active in the protection of reproductive rights and protection from police brutality. Poradňa employs strategic litigation to combat discrimination and human rights abuses against minorities. It also conducts monitoring in the field, advocacy, and educational activities on the protection from discrimination for lay and expert audiences. Visit us at <http://www.poradna-prava.sk>

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