



Ukraine: Act now to stop systematic persecution of Roma minority in “alarming” attacks, say UN experts

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GENEVA (18 July 2018) – Ukraine must take immediate action to stop what amounts to a “systematic persecution” of the country’s Roma minority, who have been targeted in a series of violent attacks, says a group of UN human rights experts*.

“We unequivocally condemn these heinous acts of intimidation and violence against members of the Roma minority in Ukraine. We are also seriously concerned at the growing hatred and racially-motivated violence against this community – and in particular against its most vulnerable members, women and children,” the UN experts said.

The attacks began in April 2018, and were allegedly perpetrated by members of extreme right-wing groups. The targets included women and children who were attacked in different regions of the country, including the capital Kyiv, as well as in Kharkiv, Ternopil and Lviv.

Roma settlements were set on fire and residents intimidated, assaulted, and forced to leave their homes. It’s reported that the perpetrators were members of extreme right-wing groups, such as the so-called “Sich-C14” and the “National Brigades”.

One person was stabbed to death and four others wounded in a separate attack on a settlement in Lviv. In the village of Velyka Berezovytsia in Ternopil, shots were fired at Roma residents who were also intimidated and assaulted. The majority of those present at the time were children.

Those targeted also included a lawyer who was working on a case which involved violence against Roma residents. A local prosecutor, along with three masked men, broke into his office, threatened and physically assaulted him to try to get him to stop working on the case.

“These attacks demonstrate a disturbing pattern of systematic persecution of Roma in Ukraine, compounded by rising hate speech and stigmatization, which appears to be nurtured by the current political and economic situation in the country,” the UN experts said.

“We deplore the absence of effective measures to protect members of the Roma minority against such actions by the Ukrainian authorities, and in particular by the national and local police. We are also concerned to hear allegations of a prevailing climate of impunity and lack of accountability with no prompt, thorough and impartial investigation of such criminal acts,” the experts stressed.

“It is important that such hate and racially-motivated crimes are effectively prosecuted, with the additional aggravated grounds of ‘racial, national or religious enmity or hostility’ taken into account, instead of being merely considered as ‘hooliganism’.

“Forced evictions triggered by the destruction and burning of homes are a gross violation of human rights and must be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted”, the experts added.

The UN experts note that the Minister of Interior, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Ukrainian Parliament and the Ombudsperson have publically denounced the attacks.

“We urge the Ukrainian authorities to take all appropriate measures to comply with their international human rights obligations, including with regard to the protection of the rights of individuals belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. They must investigate all attacks against the Roma minority, and provide remedies for all damages, including adequate compensation for victims. Those who lost their homes and property during the attacks need to be provided with safe and secure alternative housing by the authorities, until adequate compensation is provided.”

“In our view, coordinated and sustained actions are necessary to prevent such attacks, ensure justice, and end impunity.”

The UN experts have been in contact with the Government of Ukraine to seek further clarification and information on the cases.

ENDS

***The experts: Ms Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living; Mr. Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Ms E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.**

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