

Press Release

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A never ending "state of emergency"? The Italian Government and the Roma

On 28 May 2009, the Italian Government has issued a decree which extends to 31 December 2010 'the state of emergency in relation to the "nomad settlements" in the territories of Campania, Lombardy and Lazio' (decree no. 21 May 2008). Moreover, with the current decree the Italian Government has declared the "state of emergency" in two more regions, Veneto (Venice) and Piedmont (Turin). The reasons put forward by the Government to justify the reiteration of the decree are far from clear.

One of the official reasons for the previous decree was to promote integration and social inclusion of Roma and Sinti, but to date we witnessed only repression and deterrence.

One of the results of last year decree was the fingerprinting campaign in "nomad camps" which raised many well founded concerns over human rights violations and institutional racism.

However, another result of the so called "census" was the discovery that in Campania, Lazio and Lombardy there is no Roma "invasion". 12,000 people were counted, a much smaller figure compared to the tens of thousand right wing politicians anticipated and used to create moral panic in the public opinion. So why to keep the "state of emergency"?

Osservazione is concerned that one of the unspoken reasons for the current decree is to divert public opinion attention from the "affaire Noemi" involving the Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi. For Nando Sigona, researcher at Osservazione, "it is really concerning the lack of opposition to the decree by Italian civil society, local authorities and politicians alike. The latter in particular seem to be more concerned with the forthcoming European election and the risk of antagonising the electorate than to question the validity of the decree".

Osservazione invites European human rights activists and NGOs to continue to put pressure on the Italian government and monitor its policy and practice towards the Roma and Sinti.

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