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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Italy Systemically Frustrates Right to Adequate Housing of Roma

European Committee of Social Rights Finds Three Distinct Violations of Revised European Social Charter

"Campland" Policies Condemned by Europe's Premiere Social Rights Body

24 April 2006, Rome, Strasbourg, Budapest: In a decision made public today, the European Committee of Social Rights has ruled that, by policy and practice, Italy systemically violates the right to adequate housing where Roma are concerned. The decision is based on a Collective Complaint brought by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) with partner organizations against Italy under the Revised European Social Charter mechanism.

Housing arrangements for Roma in Italy aim at separating Roma from the mainstream of Italian society and holding them in artificial exclusion. As such, they block possibilities for integration and subject Roma to the very serious harm of segregation on racial grounds. In a number of Romani settlements in Italy, very extremely inadequate housing conditions prevail, threatening the health and even the lives of their Romani inhabitants.

In addition, Italian authorities regularly and systematically subject Roma to forced evictions from housing. During eviction raids, authorities arbitrarily destroy property belonging to Roma, use abusive language, and otherwise humiliate evictees. In many cases, persons expelled from housing have been rendered homeless as a result of actions by police and local authorities. In some instances, in the course of such evictions, Roma have been collectively expelled from Italy. A very significant part of Italy's Romani population lives under constant threat of forced eviction.

The ERRC Collective Complaint alleged breaches of the Revised European Social Charter's Article 31 read together with or independently of the Charter's Article E non-discrimination guarantees. Article 31 of the Revised Charter states:

"With a view to ensuring the effective access of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to take measures designed:

- (1) to promote access to housing of an adequate standard;
- (2) to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination;

(3) to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.”

Ruling on the ERRC Complaint, the Committee held:

- Unanimously that the insufficiency of camping sites for nomadic Roma constitutes a violation of Article 31(1) of the Revised Charter, taken together with Article E;
- Unanimously that forced eviction and other sanctions constitute a violation of Article 31(2) of the Revised Charter, taken together with Article E;
- Unanimously that the lack of permanent dwellings constitutes a violation of Articles 31(1) and 31(3) of the Revised Charter, taken together with Article E.

The Collective Complaint, lodged in June 2004 by the ERRC, working together with a number of local partners, is the result of six years of documentation work undertaken by the ERRC into the human rights situation of Roma in Italy.

On the occasion of the decision, Piero Colacicchici, Director of OsservAzione - Centre for Action Research Against Roma and Sinti Discrimination, said, "With this decision, our years of work to challenge the segregation of Roma in the field of housing in Italy is finally vindicated."

ERRC Programmes Director Claude Cahn said, "It now falls to the Italian government to make clear what measures it will undertake to finally begin to undue the damage caused by these racist policies."

The decision by the Committee is available by contacting the offices of the ERRC.

The ERRC Collective Complaint and other materials related to the complaint are available at:
<http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2117>

Further information on the ERRC Collective Complaint against Italy is available from the ERRC:
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Further information on the housing rights situation of Roma in Italy is available by contacting:
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The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) is an international public interest law organization engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma, in particular strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development, and training of Romani activists. For more information about the European Roma Rights Center, visit the ERRC website at <http://www.errc.org>.

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OsservAzione is a non governmental organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism human rights abuse of Roma and Sinti in Italy.

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