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Re: Respecting the human and housing rights of all residents at Edirnekapı Hatice Sultan and Neslişah Neighborhoods (Sulukule, Istanbul).

I am writing to you on behalf of the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI), the international network of social organizations (inhabitants' associations, tenants' unions, homeless and poorly sheltered people's committees, housing co-operatives and social centres, volunteers' and migrants' associations), which for many years has been committed to the defence of housing rights 'without frontiers'. Furthermore, I belong to the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE) of UN-Habitat.

Our organization received very disturbing information from the Sulukule Platform, the Popular Coordination for Housing Rights, the Human Rights Associations and the Turkish media, concerning the violent evictions of approximately dozen of families, hundreds people, which are carrying out beginning August 28th 2008 in the Sulukule area, the most ancient Roma neighborhood in the world.

The clearing out, started at 6.00 am without adequate warning despite the presence of children, women and older persons, showed discrimination mainly against the Roma people and through the following: on one hand, the homeowners were offered alternative solutions in Tasoluk; on the other hand, the tenants and the families who are owners which refused to sign a contract with the municipality, did not receive any relocation alternatives or compensation.

Besides, invited by the Roma Culture and Solidarity Association on 28th July 2008, I was able to directly verify that approximately hundreds persons, of which many are children, are living in the same area among the rubbles of the demolished houses for months, which pose major risks especially for children. How also mentioned in the Istanbul Governor's Human Rights Report, there is no water, no electricity and phone lines in some parts of the neighborhood are cut off. No sanitary precautions are taken. Rats and all kind of pests have infested the neighborhood threatening the public sanity.

The new academic year begins on September 1st for primary school students and next week also the secondary schools. Children and youth of Sulukule cannot attend schools neither in Sulukule nor in Tasoluk. They cannot do so in Sulukule, because their homes are either demolished or will be demolished soon. And they cannot go to school in Tasoluk, because they are not allowed to move to those houses yet. Thus, their right for education is being violated.

For these reasons, I would like first of all to remind you that this situation violates the following articles of national and international law:

- Article 57, Right to housing of the Turkish Constitution.
- Article 12, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III), 10 December 1948.
- Article 11, (Right to housing) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Turkey on 23 December 2003. In particular the General Comments n. 4 and 7.
- Article 27, Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Turkey on 4 May 1995.
- Article 8 (Right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, ratified by Turkey on 18 May 1954.
- Revised European Social Charter, ratified by Turkey on 27 September 2006 (alone or in combination with Article E (non-discrimination):
- Article 16 (Right of the family to social, legal and economic protection)
- Article 30 (Right to protection against poverty and social exclusion)
- Article 31 (Right to housing)

For these reasons we support the demands of the Sulukule Platform for all the violated rights to be respected immediately, or in other words:

1. An end to any attempt to evict or demolish by force, until an alternative project is produced on the basis of a participatory model and with the consent of the inhabitants, how is proposed also by the UNESCO.
2. The immediate provision of water and emergency sanitation and other public service in Sulukule must go on until the last inhabitant leaves.
3. The recognition and urgent fulfilment of the right of all families still living in Sulukule to be relocated with their consent to decent, affordable housing, including all those who were tenants in the year 2005 when the project was announced.

We are ready to work together on implementing these demands, but if they are ignored or not dealt with immediately, we are determined to launch a widespread international publicity and solidarity campaign.

Finally, we would not hesitate in appealing to the UN-Habitat AGFE, the UN Committee on Rights, the European Court of Human Rights and to the European Committee of Social Rights.

Respectfully yours.



Cesare Ottolini
IAI coordinator