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Slovakia, Košice, 24 November 2021

As the Slovak Government apologizes for forcible sterilizations of Romani women today, the next step must be compensating them

Today, the Slovak Government adopted [a resolution](#) in which it apologized to Romani women for forced sterilizations and condemned the practice. Illegal sterilizations without the informed consent of women were practiced in Slovak hospitals till 2004. The Center for Civil and Human Rights welcomes the Resolution but highlights that Slovakia must also compensate Romani women in order to meet the obligation under international human rights standards. The Center, a Slovak non-government organization, has been fighting for justice for forcibly sterilized Roma women for two decades.

In 2003, the Center for Civil and Human Rights (the Centre) together with the Center for Reproductive Rights, documented the practice of forced sterilization of Romany women in Slovakia in their report [Body and Soul: Forced Sterilizations and Other Assaults on the Reproductive Rights of the Roma in Slovakia](#). Many of the Romani women, supported and represented by the Centre, have won cases at the European Court of Human Rights and in the Slovak courts. The Centre has been also consistently advocating for systemic solutions to this problem, both at the level of law and practice on the part of the executive and the legislature. It has urged the Slovak Government to accept its full responsibility for this practice, to apologize to the aggrieved women, and to compensate them.

The Centre has been also long supporting a group of forcibly sterilized Romani women and other Romani women in their efforts to take the government and other responsible institutions to account.

Ms Jana - one of the forcibly sterilized Roma women - commented:

"It is good that the Government said 'we are sorry.' I had to adopt two children because I only had one and my husband wanted another child that I could not give to him after they forcibly sterilized me. But now, it is also important that we get compensation. But no money in the world will make it up to us, they ruined our lives."

Štefan Ivanco, program coordinator of the Centre said:

"We consider today's Resolution to be a significant step towards justice for forcibly sterilized women and their communities, with whom we have been working for almost 20 years. We also find this to be a significant shift towards Slovak society's full reckoning with this shameful practice. By adopting this Resolution, the Government shows that it wants to be a mature democratic state that can address systemic violations of the human rights of minorities from its past. It is evidence that the Government can admit its responsibility and publically apologize to those aggrieved by the practice."

Vanda Durbáková, an attorney working with the Center, who represented several Roma women in courts, responded:

"After today's apology, the Government must adopt the second crucial and much-needed step: to adopt legislation that will provide for compensations of all aggrieved women. Although no money can ever remedy the suffering caused by forced sterilizations to the aggrieved women, it can partially alleviate their suffering."

"Forced sterilizations of Romani women have been carried out in Slovakia with impunity for decades. The time is up for Slovakia to deal with this shameful and deplorable chapter of its history properly and once and for all," added Durbáková.

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The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna) is a non-governmental grassroots organization based in Slovakia focused on the protection of human rights with particular emphasis on the rights of minorities and protection from discrimination. Poradna 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. Poradna employs strategic litigation to combat discrimination and human rights abuses against minorities. Poradna offers free legal advice to victims of discrimination and in selected cases free legal representation to victims of discrimination before Slovak courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. It also conducts monitoring in the field, advocacy, and educational activities on the protection from discrimination for lay and expert audiences. Visit us at: www.poradna-prava.sk

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Information about the project under which this press release was issued: The project "Promoting the human rights of the Roma minority through the use of legal means of protection and in cooperation with local Roma activists" is supported by the program Active Citizen Fund - Slovakia, which is funded by the Financial Mechanism EHP 2014-2021. The program is managed by the Ekopolis Foundation in partnership with the Open Society Foundation Bratislava and the Carpathian Foundation.

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