



PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, 1 November 2016

Roma Rights Under Threat Across Europe

‘Alternative Nobel’ Laureates Put the Spotlight on Europe’s Most Numerous and Excluded Minority

As President François Hollande admits France’s ‘broad responsibility’ for sending thousands of Roma to their deaths during the Nazi Holocaust, ongoing Roma discrimination across Europe, especially in Hungary, remains largely unnoticed.

More than 20 Right Livelihood Award Laureates have called on the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to end ethnic segregation, which often begins at school, and to implement affirmative action to compensate for past discrimination against the Roma. The statement was made on the occasion of the first-ever regional conference of European Right Livelihood Award Laureates, which concludes today near Geneva.

András Bíró, who received the award in 1995 for defending Roma rights in his native Hungary, where Roma population is estimated at 700,000-800,000, said: “The Roma community in Hungary is treated as if they were migrants, although they have lived there for centuries and carry Hungarian passports. While Hungary’s anti-refugee policy has received wide condemnation from the international community, the government’s ongoing discrimination against its own citizens has largely been ignored.”

Since 2010, the Hungarian government has systematically neglected segregation in school, which was met with protests from teachers and civil society activists.

“Half of all Roma children in Hungary today attend ethnically segregated primary schools, leaving them semi-literate and with low employment prospects, thus reinforcing the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion. Only one in five Roma children is likely to receive a high school diploma, compared to four in five in the rest of the Hungarian population. Just 1.5% of Roma children go to university”, Bíró said.

Discrimination is practised against Roma within other areas such as employment, healthcare, housing, and access to social services. Life expectancy of Roma is 10-15 years less than average in Hungary.

The recent refugee crisis exacerbated social tensions and reinforced the feeling of distrust



towards the Roma population in Hungary. “‘We don’t want any migrants – we have our own gypsies to deal with,’ is a common statement heard from government representatives,” commented Bíró.

“Despite an overall bleak situation, there are signs of hope that the few well-educated Roma are beginning to be proud of their identity, taking inspiration from the ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement,” Bíró concluded.

The first-ever European conference of the Right Livelihood Award Laureates was held near Geneva, Switzerland from 28 October – 1 November. The conference brought together some 20 internationally renowned experts, scientists and activists in the fields of peace building, human rights, environment, health, consumer protection, nuclear security and social justice. This was the fourth in a series of regional conferences, following those held in Bogota, Colombia in 2013, Cairo, Egypt in 2014 and Mumbai, India in 2015.

To read the full statement:

http://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Letter-to-Prime-Minister_Final.pdf

For more information, please contact:

Xenya Cherny-Scanlon, Director of Communications, Right Livelihood Award Foundation, mobile: +41 76 690 8798, e-mail: xenya@rightlivelihood.org, www.rightlivelihoodaward.org

About the Right Livelihood Award

The Right Livelihood Award was established in 1980 to “honour and support courageous people and organisations offering visionary and exemplary solutions to the root causes of global problems”. It has become widely known as the ‘Alternative Nobel Prize’ and there are now 166 Laureates from 68 countries. In addition to presenting the annual awards, the Right Livelihood Award Foundation supports its Laureates, particularly those who may be in danger due to the nature of their work. Jakob von Uexkull, a Swedish-German professional philatelist, sold his business to provide the original funding. Since then, the awards have been financed by individual donors.