

AGFE MISSION

Advisory Group on Forced Evictions to the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT

City/ country	Minority Communities in South East England
Mission dates	21 – 25 April 2009
Head of mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yves Cabannes (AGFE Chairperson)
AGFE Members participating in the mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leticia Osorio (COHRE)
Other mission participants/ organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joseph G. Jones (Commissioner and General Secretary of The Gypsy Council Ltd, Southern England; Romani Gypsy & Irish Traveller Network (Vice Chair); Thames Valley Gypsy Association (Chairman) Maria Zoltan Floarea (Representative of Roma people) Candy Sheridan (Representative of Irish Travellers and Chair of the Planning Committee of Norfolk)
Request for mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Romani Union (IRU-UK) Gypsy Council (Thames Valley)
Local context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roma Travellers, more commonly known as Gypsies, are a group within Romani Travellers who choose to live a nomadic life in Central and Eastern Europe. Irish and Scottish Travellers are groups of nomadic people, of Irish and Scottish descent respectively, who predominantly reside in Great Britain; There are approximately 320 Gypsy and Traveller sites in England. This provision represents only two-thirds of what is needed. It has become increasingly difficult for Gypsies and Travellers to find authorised places in which to pitch their caravans due to the lack of any form of planning policy for Gypsy sites in the majority of Local Authorities' areas; The implementation of regional planning strategies has led to forced evictions of Gypsies and Travellers from sites without planning permission; Most Local Authorities carry out inadequate assessments on the demand for sites and accommodation for Gypsies. There is also evidence to prove that Local Authorities rarely consider the location, design and quality of the sites they provide for Gypsy and Traveller communities. Many are overcrowded, poorly located and in very bad condition. Regional planning offices are insisting that Local Authorities identify locations within their development plans where suitable caravan pitches can be allocated.
Dominant Driving Force	<p>This eviction case is motivated by one of the following or the combination of various driving forces (mark the ones that best depict the case):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> () Eviction driven by private and/or public sponsored real estate and property market-driven developments and commercial interests; (X) Eviction driven by legal conflict and litigation leading to land claims by original property/land owners; (X) Eviction driven by planning & development control decisions that penalise informal/illegal buildings and land occupation; () Eviction driven by transport, road and civil engineering investment projects claiming land for development, and clearing pathways for infrastructure networks; () Eviction driven by environmental protection legislation leading to clearance, demolition and land-use control; (X) Eviction driven by urban planning and land use ordinances leading to clearance & land-use transformation that are incompatible with present residential use; () Eviction driven by historic preservation and urban heritage conservation acts that transform the built-up space and building stock to other uses rather than residential; () Eviction driven by political, security, social and sanitary/health motivations that lead to clearance and relocation; () Eviction driven by safety measures against occupation of risk areas subject to land slide, flooding, industrial accidents.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • () Eviction driven by natural disasters; • () Eviction driven by conflicts and internal ethnic tensions that generate outburst of property destruction and human suffering.
Main findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the provision of policy frameworks and resources to enable permanent sites for Gypsies across the country, the availability of these sites remains poor and pressure is put on temporary accommodation to become permanent. • Government policy does not address the lack of permanent sites. For this reason, a high proportion of Travellers are homeless. • Roma and Travellers buy land in inappropriate places and struggle to obtain planning permission. They carry out unauthorised development on this land and then face conflict with their local authority. • Local authorities deal with unauthorised development by serving enforcement notices and seeking injunction orders which can lead to violent forced evictions, the destruction of assets and imprisonment orders. • The communities most affected by forced evictions are those living in unauthorised encampment and developments. Forced evictions of road-side Travellers result in repeated instances of displacement over short periods of time and very high financial costs to the tax payer. • Where Travellers are evicted, no effort has been made by local authorities for the provision of adequate resettlement. • Evidence of economic exclusion can be seen through disproportionate rent fees for pitches on local authority sites, increased costs when Gypsies openly attempt to purchase land for setting up a Gypsy site, high prices charged for access to basic services, destruction of personal assets during enforcement actions. • AGFE found evidence which suggests that most residential sites are now stable although public opposition to the idea of Gypsy/Traveller sites is mounting resulting in the depreciation of relations between the dominant resident communities and the Gypsy/Traveller communities. • There is an absence of a monitoring system for planning applications received for Gypsy sites and the rate of their success. • Travellers are not often consulted about the design of planning policies despite the disproportionate impact they will have on their lives.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN-HABITAT to conduct a detailed assessment of the status of the right to housing for Gypsies and Travellers, and work with representatives from these minorities to monitor, over a twelve month period, where progress is being achieved and where forced evictions remain prevalent. • UN-HABITAT to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing to send an appeal to the British Government for the clarification of the issues raised in this report. • UN-HABITAT to urge the British Government to halt all pending evictions until an adequate solution is achieved to meet housing rights. • UN-HABITAT to urge the British Government to refrain from criminalising communities living on unauthorised sites. • UN-HABITAT to urge the British Government to implement the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 to provide Gypsies and Travellers living on Local Authority sites with security of tenure as soon as possible. • UN-HABITAT to urge the British Government to provide all sites and basic services intended for Gypsies and Travellers by 2011. • UN-HABITAT to urge the British Government to adjust their planning policy to acknowledge Gypsies and Travellers as ethnic minorities and therefore eligible for protection of their housing rights. • UN-HABITAT to recommend to the British Government that Gypsies and Travellers should be granted the opportunity to challenge an authority's decision on the number of designated sites for their community. • UN-HABITAT to explore opportunities with Community Land Trust systems and Housing Associations to develop tools that avoid isolation. • UN-HABITAT to invite British local authorities to engage the Romani, Gypsy and Irish and Scottish Travellers in the process of designing new planning policies.

Outcomes and follow-up activities	No specific outcome has been reported.	
SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS		
Brent		
Tues, 21 April	19:00	Orientation to Mission
Wed, 22 April	08:00	Tour site and meet residents
	09:00	Meeting with Mayor and local Councillors, Zaffar Van Kalwala, Colum Moloney and Metropolitan Police Inspector.
	10:30	Meet with Member of Parliament for Brent Sarah Teather
	11:15	Meeting with Brent Council officials
Canterbury		
	14:00	Tour site and meet residents
	15:00	Canterbury City Council Representatives: John Gilbey and Janet Taylor
	16:30	Meet with Member of Parliament for Canterbury Julian Brazier MP
Essex		
Thurs, 23 April	08:00	Tour site where proposed forced evictions have been authorised and meet residents due for eviction
	09:00	Meet Race Equality Council and Church Representatives and supporters or sympathisers
	10:00	Basildon Council Planning Department Representatives: Malcolm Buckley and Bala Mahendran
		Meet with Member of Parliament for Basildon John Barron.
Buckinghamshire		
	14:30	Tour site and meet residents
	15:15	Meet with Aylesbury Vale Planning Department representative.
	19:00	District Council Planning Committee Session. Hearing of the Swan Edge Application
Hertfordshire		
Fri, 24 April	09:00	Tour site and meet residents
	10:00	Meet with Member of Parliament for Broxbourne Charles Walker
	11:00	Meet with Planning Department, local Councillors and Lea Valley Park representatives.
Cambridgeshire		
	14:30	Tour site and meet residents
	15:30	Meet with South Cambridgeshire District Council representative: Steve Hampson
Norfolk		
Sat, 25 April	09:00 18:00	Report Writing, Stock taking of documents/evidence and meetings held.