

KOSOVO ROMA REFUGEE FOUNDATION



MONITORING REPORT 3

from Roma Mahalla & the Toxic Camps in Mitrovica, Kosovo

DATE: 22 October 2010

On October 22nd, Miradija Jovanovic, a member of our monitoring team carried out the third visit to Mitrovica to ascertain the situation regarding the medical treatment of the camp Roma who have been relocated/resettled in the Roma Mahalla of south Mitrovica.

This is her report.



Members of the Roma community taking part in the demolition of the "Cesmin Lug" camp.

I got to north Mitrovica about 9 a.m. The first thing I did was to visit the former Cesmin Lug camp. Nothing has happened since our last visit. No changes. No fence. No warning signs about the dangerous material lying everywhere. Everything remains the same; nothing has been cleaned up. The hazardous yellow insulation material (the glass wool) is still scattered all over the place. There was a lot of mud and lots of puddles from the rain. Because I was so early, I didn't see anybody on the site, but I later heard from several Roma that children still visit the site every day although they are told not to do so.



Glass Fibre wool scattered among the debris of the unprotected Cesmin Lug Site

Next, I went to camp Osterode. The camp Roma are still stopping KAAD staff (the camp administrators and the implementing partners of Mercy Corps) from entering the camp to work because of the unpaid salaries to the Roma workers (toilet cleaners, laundry cleaners, etc). KAAD staff have not been able to enter their offices now for one week, so effectively there isn't any administration in camp Osterode. I was unable to find out if the other organizations who visit the camp from time to time are also banned such as Mercy Corps, Caritas and UNICEF. I did not see them there.

While at Osterode, I was approached by several camp Roma. They asked me when they are going to be resettled back to the Roma Mahalla. Some of them didn't know that I was no longer working for Mercy Corps, and so I could not answer their questions. They were all very upset that no one is telling them what is happening. These Roma don't know when they will be resettled or when their children will be medically treated. No one is keeping them informed.

I was also approached by a family who is living in camp Osterode who asked me to find information about what will happen to them, since they can't (for security reasons) return to the Roma Mahalla in south Mitrovica. There are 11 members in this family and no one has a job. The mother doesn't know what will happen to her children or if they will ever be able to leave camp Osterode. Nobody pays any attention to them except a foreign journalist who is helping to support the family. The mother told me that Mercy Corps doesn't inform them what will happen to them. This woman told me her family can't go back to the Roma Mahalla because her husband was once in the Serbian army.

After that, I went to see Ilija Elezovic who works for UAM (Office for Social and Health Care) in north Mitrovica. For several years he has been working with the Roma in the camps. I went to him to find out if the UN Administration of north Mitrovica had found land yet for the ten Osterode families that can't resettle to the Roma Mahalla in south Mitrovica. Ilija said he still doesn't have an answer from the UN officials regarding that request. He told me that negotiations are taking place and he will inform me once he hears about a solution. He also said that the UN administration office and the Serbian North Mitrovica Municipality are having internal discussions regarding the issue of the land allocation for these ten families.

After my meeting with Ilija, I went back to the families in Osterode and told them that it still has not been decided by the north Mitrovica authorities, the UN and Mercy Corps where or when these families that can't return to the south will be resettled. The families told me they are very concerned about their childrens' health, especially if they have to continue in Osterode for yet another year.

While I was in Osterode, I did hear from several Roma families who are scheduled to be resettled in the south that they are anxious to go back to Roma Mahalla, and that interest has increased a lot after they had a chance to see what the new houses looked like. But they are still worried about the security, and if or when their children will get medical treatment for lead poisoning.

I was then approached by a Romani father whose four-year-old daughter is falling in and out of coma almost every day. He begged me to find her proper medical treatment. The father took his daughter twice to a private clinic in Skopje, and several times to private clinics in Novi Pazar. The doctors said his daughter doesn't have enough oxygen for her brain. She also has a very high lead level in her blood. Her parents are doing everything to find proper treatment for their

daughter. Mercy Corps told him that they couldn't do anything until they move out of the camp. But since the little girl is very sick, she needs medical attention now. Supposedly the family has to wait for medical treatment until Mercy Corps builds them a house. To date MC doesn't have the land yet. The father has begged for medical treatment from KAAD, W.H.O. and Mercy Corps after all his children were diagnosed with high lead levels in their blood (every year since 2004). But no one is paying any attention to him. He also has results from a laboratory in Chicago, USA, showing many other toxic heavy metals in his children's blood, not only lead. Since the father can't go back to the Roma Mahalla because he was once in the Serb army, he is very concerned if there is going to be medical treatment for lead poisoning in the North for his children.

After this, I went to the Roma Mahalla to check on "Ergin's health" condition. It was 13:30 and Ergin was still at home. His school classes run from noon to 4 p.m. I asked him why he wasn't in school. He said that he is not going to school anymore. To make sure he was telling me the truth, I went inside and talked to his mother Safeta. Safeta was sick. She had a cold and was taking some medicines. She told me that Ergin actually fought in the school with other kids, and then his parents had a problem with the parents of the children he fought with. Several doctors have told us that nervousness and aggressive behavior are common symptoms of lead poisoning. I know from Ergin's medical reports that he does have a high level of lead poisoning in addition to his kidney disease. I believe the special diet prescribed for him by the head of the pediatric hospital in north Mitrovica was to help lower his lead levels in addition to helping his kidney disease.

Safeta has decided not to let Ergin go back to school until he gets less nervous. (Mercy Corps is providing the children with transport who are attending school in the North, as well as transporting some children in the North to school in the South). I asked Safeta if Ergin actually dropped out of school. She said he would go back after he gets less aggressive. She believes the pills he is taking also make him nervous and very aggressive. When he is not in school, he fights with his brothers and sisters. She is finding it very hard to cope with him.

Ergin's health appears not to have changed since I saw him one week ago. His face is still swollen. Safeta said that she was very concerned for Ergin and his six-year-old brother Robert because Mercy Corps does not want to continue their special diet ordered by the north Mitrovica doctor, although MC will continue to buy the special medicine Ergin needs for his kidney disease. Safeta has been told she can only get this special diet for a couple of days more, until 31 October. She said they have no money to buy Ergin and Robert their special food. The money that was sent from England and the United States from private donors has run out. Actually,



Ergin, aged 9 with brother Robert, aged 6

the food was for all the children in the family since they are all suffering from lead poisoning. But MC seems only concerned about Ergin's kidney disease, not about his lead poisoning.

Safeta said that Ergin needs to go to his regular checkup in Belgrade next week. She said that the doctors in north Mitrovica would take him by ambulance. I don't know why he can't be treated in south Mitrovica since that was the promise all the Roma were given if they moved back to the south. I will try to find out the answer for my next report.

The Albanian nurse from the clinic in the mahalla continues to visit Ergin every second day, except at the weekends.

I then asked Safeta how Robert was since she had informed us last week that he was sick as well. She said for the moment he is ok but not growing at all. She then asked me if Ergin has to take his pills for the rest of his life. I told her to ask the nurse who is coming every other day. It appears that no one is really informing the parents about their children's health and medical treatment.

To date no children and no pregnant women (the most vulnerable) resettled in the south Mitrovica Roma Mahalla have been tested for lead poisoning. However, several mothers told me they were informed by the Mercy Corps Health Team that the testing may start next week. Mercy Corps also informed them that the Romani mothers would have to take a training course to prepare their children for testing. But so far Mercy Corps has not told them what the training will be or when it will start.

Two years ago, a lawyer visited the camps from the legal firm Leigh Day & Co in London. That lawyer was accompanied by the American lawyer Dianne Post who filed a case in 2006 on behalf of many camp Roma seeking compensation from the UN for housing the Roma IDPs on toxic wasteland. The Roma asked me today what has happened to the lawsuits and if they will ever receive compensation for the deaths of their loved ones and compensation for the damaged health of their surviving children. I told them the London lawyer had sent a letter to them, which is now being translated for their camp leaders, informing them that after many years of procrastination Mr. Zannier the head of the UN Mission in Kosovo will be meeting the lawyers in London in a few weeks to discuss the case.

The Roma said that Mercy Corps staff had informed them that by the end of November another 38 families would be moved from Osterode to 33 new homes now being built in Roma Mahalla under the Mercy Corps/USAID/EU project. All Roma resettled or to be resettled under this project have signed a contract with Mercy Corps that Mercy Corps will monitor them for 18 months to see if they are actually living every day in their houses; that they are not abandoning them or renting them to others. Later, the Roma will be required to sign a contract with the Municipality of South Mitrovica for using the houses for 99 years. All families

who are resettled in the new houses will receive recommended food diet for six months by Mercy Corps.

However, there was no news when the last families would be removed from camp Osterode, but probably not until sometime next year. In the meantime, most Roman families resettled in the south continue to go back to Osterode and spend the day visiting their relatives who now feel abandoned.

Some Roma told me that they are concerned about security in the Roma Mahalla neighborhood. Most are afraid to go out after dark. They have informed the local Albanian police that young Albanians are coming in the Roma mahalla neighborhood at night, wandering around the houses. The Roma leaders have informed the local police (who established an office in the mahalla) to pay extra attention to the neighborhood during the night.

Medical Treatment: The Mercy Corps-ordered medical equipment and testing kits for lead poisoning have still not arrived. According to the medical team, testing will start the end of December for those who have returned.

Statistics on testing and medical treatment for lead poisoning:

Returned children tested to date: 0

Returned children receiving medical treatment: 0

Pregnant women being tested: 0

Pregnant women being medically treated: 0

Miradija Jovanovic

Reporting for JDC

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NOTE: Previous reports can be downloaded from <http://www.toxicwastekills.com/page28.html>