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CCME urges Italian Minister of the Interior to uphold European fundamental rights and take action against the violence against Roma people in Italy

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) expressed its concerns about the recent riots against Roma people in Italy and the increased level of intolerance and discrimination towards this specific ethnic group in a letter sent yesterday to Mr Roberto Maroni, Italian Minister of the Interior.

CCME observes an unfortunate mixture of negative migration and ethnic minority discourse around these incidents in the Italian media. Doris Peschke, General Secretary of CCME affirmed that “while we would not dispute the problems around integration of migrants and ethnic minorities, we maintain that every person deserves dignity and equality before the law. If a person is found a criminal – as may or may not be the case for the young Roma woman in Naples cited a week ago – this has to be determined by the competent courts in European countries, of course also in Italy. It cannot be tolerated”, she stated, “that a group of people takes the law into their hands and raids a whole settlement and destroys their homes.”

CCME would have expected a very clear position against the looting rather than a general discourse on “illegal migration”. Of course CCME is aware that Italy has received a high number of Romanian immigrants over the past years, among them also a number of Roma. There may be criminals among them. There may also be some who have entered illegally, and yet, they are persons with fundamental rights.

“We would also urge that the unfortunate and unhelpful mingling of crime and migration related to one ethnic group will be stopped as it may have severe consequences on all Italian Roma, Romanian Roma and other Romanian migrants”, she added.

For addressing the situation of Roma in Italy CCME advises that the Council of Europe Recommendations¹ are taken into consideration.

“We sincerely hope”, stated Doris Peschke, “that those responsible for the violence against ethnic minority people last week will speedily be brought to justice and that the government of Italy responds with the vigour necessary to show that such acts are not tolerated”.

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The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies across Europe. CCME formally cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.

¹ Recommendation (2005)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe
• Recommendation (2004)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the movement and encampment of Travellers in Europe
• Recommendation (2001)17 on improving the economic and employment situation of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in Europe
• Recommendation (2000)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe