**From:** Carly Nyst [<mailto:info@srpoverty.org>]   
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**Hungary’s homeless need roofs, not handcuffs – UN experts on poverty and housing**   
  
GENEVA (15 February 2012) – Two UN human rights experts on extreme poverty and on housing called on Hungary to reconsider recent legislation which criminalizes homelessness, and threatens those living in the streets with prosecution that can lead heavy fines or to prison.   
  
“People who have no choice but to live on the street are now in danger of criminal sanctions,” said the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda. “This new legislation is being implemented in a context in which the economic and financial crises have resulted in a growing number of families living in the streets. Instead of using public funds to assist these families, Hungary is carrying out costly operations to penalize them for their life sustaining behaviour.”   
  
There are no official statistics on homelessness in Hungary, but it is estimated that 30,000 to 35,000 homeless persons live in various municipalities, including women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. “By a wave of the legislative pen, the Hungarian Parliament has labeled tens of thousands of homeless people in Hungary as potential criminals Moreover, the law has a discriminatory impact on those living in poverty,” Ms. Sepúlveda said.   
  
“Incarceration is not a housing solution,” stressed the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik. She recalled that hundreds of homeless persons were evicted last year by the Budapest police from various underpasses in the inner city following a City Council decree, adopted in April 2011, which criminalizes habitual residence in public spaces. “Not only were they not provided with alternative shelter, but many were arrested,” she noted.   
    
“Particularly during harsh weather conditions, as Europe has been experiencing during the past weeks, States have an increased obligation to provide shelter to those in need, however this cannot serve as an excuse for the criminalization or forced detention of homeless persons,” warned the experts.   
  
Both experts noted that, given the extremely high costs of policing, detention, prosecution and incarceration, available resources would be better spent on devising housing solutions for the homeless community. There are approximately only 5,500 public shelter places available in Budapest, yet modest estimates indicate that there are more than 8,000 homeless people currently living in the city.   
  
There are reportedly no shelters suitable for families in Budapest and most employ a dormitory system with up to 50 people per room. These conditions severely undermine personal security and privacy, according to Ms. Sepúlveda and Ms. Rolnik.   
    
“Homeless persons should not be deprived of their basic rights to liberty, or to privacy, personal security and protection of the family, only because they are poor and need shelter,” added the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.   
  
The UN rights experts urged Hungary to revise recent anti-homeless legislation and to adopt a national housing strategy, which will take into account the needs and views of the homeless and those inadequately housed, in conformity with international human rights obligations.   
    
ENDS   
  
*Magdalena Sepúlveda is the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights since May 2008. She is independent from any government or organization. Learn more, visit:* [*http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx*](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx) *In October 2011, Ms. Sepúlveda presented a report to the UN General Assembly on the penalization of people living in poverty:* [*http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx*](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx)   
  
*Raquel Rolnik was appointed as Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context by the UN Human Rights Council, in May 2008. As Special Rapporteur, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in her individual capacity. An architect and urban planner, Ms. Rolnik has extensive experience in the area of housing and urban policies. Learn more, log on to:* [*http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx*](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx)   
   
*OHCHR Country Page – Hungary:* [*http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/HUIndex.aspx*](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/HUIndex.aspx)   
  
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