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**UN-HABITAT ADVISORY GROUP ON FORCED EVICTIONS  
INFORMATION ON IMPORTANT CASES**

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***ETHNIC CLEANSING AT DALE FARM, BASILDON, UNITED KINGDOM***

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**Threat of Eviction**

♦ **Issues on the city, communities and families threatened with eviction**

**1. Name and location of community threatened with eviction**

Dale Farm, Crays Hill, Basildon, Essex, England.

**2. Background on the city (size, location, etc.)**

Basildon is a "new town" built after the 2nd World War and was usually run by a Labour Party administration.

**3. Estimated number of families affected**

Some 86 families at Dale Farm, plus more at two others her locations facing eviction by Basildon, making total of 120.

**4. Brief description of families background**

Dale Farm has about 1,000 residents, of whom 600 have been refused planning permission to live on the ground they own. Almost all are related within the Sheridan clan, which has traditionally dealt in second-hand furniture, as well as asphaltting and more recently bricking paths. But many people at Dale Farm are retired from work, elderly and unwell. There are about 150 children going to school and, currently, seven pregnant mothers.

♦ **The case**

**5. Background and history to the case**

It was the Labour Party council which gave planning permission for some 40 families to live at Dale Farm in the 1970s. About four years ago, because of evictions of travellers all over the UK. This was happening against a background of increasing harassment against all Travellers, that is members of the 350,000 Gypsies, Travellers and Roma still following the nomadic way of life. Since the 1994 Criminal Justice Act, part of which was aimed specifically at Travellers, nomadism has been rendered practically illegal. Police now have more powers to "move-on" those attempting to encamp on roadsides which local councils have increasingly used "direct action" to evict Travellers from council-owned land.

The Act withdrew the duty placed on local authorities by the 1968 Caravan Sites Act, under which some 400 caravan parks had been built. Now Travellers were advised to buy their own land but those that did faced a "Catch 22" situation; local authorities refused planning permission in almost every case. Instead, councils hired outfits like Constant & Co, private security firms "specialising in removal of Gypsies".

As a result, under the smokescreen of planning regulations, thousands of Travellers have been evicted from their own grounds and their homes bulldozed in what is being experienced as ethnic-cleansing.

The Dale Farm community, is one of the few left and the largest in the UK, with about 1,000 persons. About 50 small yards, comprising 120 homes (chalets, mobile-homes and caravans) are threatened with an eviction operation, which would involve Constant & Co., hired by Basildon at a cost of up to 3 million Euro (5 million Euro if legal and other costs are added).

**6. Minimum information on the legal grounds of the case**

Dates from about 2000, when extension of the old Dale Farm community started on the scrapyards area. Basildon council issued Enforced Notices to stop development. All Planning Applications were refused. On appeal, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott gave us two years temporary permission. This expired in May 2005. On second Appeal he has given 12 months to ten yards (about 15 families) and the other 40 yards (66 families) are making an Appeal on 21 February. They will ask for a minimum of two years saying we are waiting for the alternative land at Pitsea (proposed by the Government but refused by Basildon council which means it will take two or even three years at least to materialise).

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*INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF INHABITANTS*

*c/o Unione Inquilini - via Bettella, 2/ter - 35133 Padova - Italy*

*tel. ++39 049691771 - fax ++39 02 700415592 - mail: [info@habitants.org](mailto:info@habitants.org) - [www.habitants.org](http://www.habitants.org)*

The reason? Council says we cannot live in "greenbelt" zone. But they also oppose the Government proposal to provide land at Pisteas which is "brownbelt" (industrial). The Basildon Labour Party, in opposition against Conservative administration, says forced should not be used and that the eviction plan "could be tainted by racism". Meanwhile, the UK Commission for Racial Equality is supporting Dale Farm residents in a Judicial Review of the decision to evict (taking place around 14 March). There is also the Judicial Review in the High Court starting on 14 March. If we win, Basildon will have to hold a full council meeting and debate and vote again on the eviction proposal (but the Conservative head of the council Malcolm Buckley is confident of a majority voting for his eviction plan)

### **7. Reasons given for the eviction (official and other)**

Homes are on "greenbelt" (see above).

The reality: an anti-Gypsy campaign headed by MP John Baron (Conservative) supporting a Petition signed by 5,000 local people

### **8. The main events that have taken place so far (with dates)**

On 5 May 2005 we again faced eviction, as two years given by Mr Prescott ended.

In June 2005 the Basildon Council voted for the eviction and hired Constant & Co to draw up eviction plan. Eviction was expected on 1 August but only police showed up.

### **9. Names of authorities implementing the eviction**

Basildon District Council Led by Malcolm Buckley, leader of the Conservative Party in Basildon.

#### **♦ The answer to the eviction**

### **10. Level of organisation of the affected community (including names of organisations, their approach, strengths and weaknesses)**

Dale Farm has Dale Farm Committee, headed by Richard Sheridan and Kathleen McCathy, also Dale Farm Housing Association, with same leadership and Grattan Puxon as secretary.

### **11. Names of supporting agencies working in alliance with the affected community**

- Standing Conference of the UK Gypsies, Travellers and Roma Forum, chaired by Cliff Condon, delegate with Catherine Beard, to the European Rom and Travellers Forum.
- Peace & Progress Party, lead by Corin Redgrave and Vanessa Redgrave, UNICEF ambassador.
- Panjabi Human Rights Monitoring Team, Jewish Human Rights Monitoring Team and National
- Travellers Action Group Monitoring Team, formed to come to Dale Farm in the event of an attempted
- Eviction, together with individual monitors including Vanessa Redgrave and MP Nick Harvey (Lib Dem).
- International Alliance of Inhabitants, supporting the Zero Evictions Red Wheels Campaign

### **12. Actions taken so far by the community and/or supporting agencies to resist the eviction and / or to develop creative, alternative solutions**

- Have engaged solicitor Keith Lomax, who is representing us at the Judicial Review (with barrister) now expected to take place in May.
- Have engaged planner experts, Dr Donald Kenrick (now retired), Jeremy Brown and Sarah Green, to conduct Planning Appeals now expected in May 2006.
- Have engaged Commission for Racial Equality, supporting us at the Judicial Review
- Considering that this is a "racially tainted" decision, and therefore misuse of planning regulations (Labour Party says using all that money to "save" a small piece of greenbelt s out of all proportion) and feeling that the law has been used as a smokescreen for what is really ethnic-cleansing of 1,000 of our people from Basildon, preparing have been made to offer nonviolent, passive resistance to any eviction attempt. Simply, stated we will form a human shield in front of the bulldozers to save our homes.
- Launching the international campaign of solidarity Zero Evictions Red Wheels Campaign

### **13. Consultations held and alternative housing and/or compensation offered by the authorities to the affected community (if any)**

There have been "low level" consultation, with deputy executive etc, but no alternatives or compensation (though Sheridans own the land). However, the Government (Mr Prescott) have Stepped in with the proposal to give us land at Pisteas, which is also in Basildon. However, this land lies between a railway and

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a major highway, a dangerous and noisy environment.

♦ **Follow up**

**14. Strategies for future action discussed / developed / proposed to deal with the threatened eviction**

Rudko Kawczynski, chair of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, is meeting with the UK Permanent Representative in Strasbourg on the issue of Dale Farm and ethnic-cleansing of Travellers.

Catherine Beard, UK delegate to ERTF, is going to Strasbourg on 2 April.

Richard Sheridan, chair Dale Farm Residents Committee, is meeting with officials at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 6 April.

Their message will be:

We ask only "leave us alone".

We need, to persuade Mr Prescott to give permanent Planning Permission for Dale Farm.

Also, we need to persuade the Government to stop the hiring of Constant & Co and other private security firms by local council for the eviction of Gypsies from their own land when no alternative is being offered (ie other land houses are not wanted) to evict will cost much public money.

To provide a site at Pitsea will cost even more.

Stated simply, we badly need your solidarity to campaign for Zero Evictions in the UK, where there are 300,000 Gypsies, Travellers and Roma (up to 60,000 travelling or living on their own land without "planning permission" so facing eviction).

At Dale Farm we are making a stand for Gypsies everywhere in the UK, and in Europe.

**15. Important events anticipated (e.g. dates set for eviction, planned actions, court cases, development of alternatives, etc.)**

Next possible eviction attempt could come at the end of May 2006, after the Judicial Review.

Next possible date would be in the middle of December 2006, when 12 months for those 10 yards runs out.

We are holding the Red Wheels Against Racism Festival on 7 and 8 April 2006, in Basildon

**16. Reasons why this is a good focus case for the Advisory Group. Ideas on what the Advisory Group could do to contribute to the successful resolution of the case.**

We feel this is a good case for the Advisory Group because it is a clear case of a racially biased decision by a local council in the face of a "compromise" offered by the Government for land to be provided at Pisteas. The bulldozing of 120 homes, throwing some 1,000 people onto the road, is seen and experienced by us as ethnic-cleansing. This case is also "winnable" and we believe with your help we will win. Simply stated, our families want to stay where they are.

**17. Full address contact person**

Grattan Puxon, 1 John Harper Street, Colchester C01 1RP

Phone UK (0) 1206 523528

Email: [dale.farm@ntlworld.com](mailto:dale.farm@ntlworld.com)