

RACIAL INTOLERANCE IN THE
CZECH REPUBLIC

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 22, 1998

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my profound alarm at the future deterioration of the situation for minorities in the Czech Republic. Since the Velvet Revolution, that country has witnessed violent and sometimes deadly attacks against minorities—a pattern of violence which is not being addressed by the Czech Government.

Let me describe the most recent examples of this unchecked wave of brutality. On May 7, an Algerian in a Prague subway station was stabbed by skinheads; the next day, two Indians were also attacked by skinheads in a subway station in Prague. On the night of May 16–17, a Rom was beaten by skinheads and left on a road, where he was subsequently hit and killed by a truck. And last week, local officials in two different Czech cities—Pilsen and Usti nad Labem—announced plans to build ghettos. In Usti nad Labem, authorities stated outright that they plan to build a 15-foot-high wall around Roma apartment buildings. Pilsen officials described their walled-off area as a place for putting “undesirables,” using terminology reminiscent of that used by the Nazis. Former Czech Minister of Interior Jan Ruml has described these plans as “inadmissible in a democratic society.”

Unfortunately, these were not isolated events. Last November, Sudanese student Hassan Elamin Aldelradi was killed by a skinhead in Prague. In January, a Romani woman was seriously injured in Krnov when her home was fire bombed. In February, another Romani woman, Helena Bihariova was attacked, beaten, forced into the Elbe River and drowned. In early March, two Romani men in Decin were assaulted by a man with a pistol; a Congolese doctor was subsequently beaten in the town of Prostejov. In late March, skinheads in Trutnov attacked a Jewish couple. Each and every one of these has been widely described as a racially motivated attack.

Apparently, skinheads are not convinced they will be held accountable for their acts and the Czech Government has failed to persuade Roma that authorities will do all in their power to protect them. Roma have increasingly shown their unwillingness to simply stand aside while their family members are attacked or murdered, one by one. A number of recent attacks against Roma have been followed by revenge attacks by Roma. The rule of law appears to be degenerating into the rule of the mob. Official statements like that made March 17 by the current Minister of Interior, Cyril Svoboda, exacerbate the charged atmosphere. Mr. Svoboda minimized the significance of racially motivated violence, claimed it is not destabilizing and then blamed non-governmental organizations for distorting the Czech Republic's image through their reporting on this problem.

The most recent revenge attack by Roma occurred in the town of Novy Bor two weeks ago, when two Roma attacked Miroslav Sladek, a member of parliament campaigning for re-election. Sladek is the notorious head of the Czech “Republican Party” who has called for making one's ethnic identity as a Rom a criminal act.

A fair amount of media attention has been given to the fact that the two Roma arrested in that case were immediately pardoned by President Havel. Understandably, President Havel's decision has been controversial. What I think is most interesting is his reasoning: according to the President's spokesperson, the President did not believe that the local police could conduct an impartial investigation into the matter. She noted, in particular, that the police have given an account of events which match that of Mr. Sladek's, but which is contradicted by other eyewitnesses. She also observed that human rights groups have reported a consistent failure of the police in that area to investigate and prosecute successfully racially motivated attacks against Roma.

On May 14, the Czech Chamber of Deputies weighed in on this serious matter and expressed concern about the attack on Sladek. They even called for the Ministry of Interior to investigate the attack further to determine if it was a planned attack. Certainly, violence should not have been used against Sladek. As repugnant and disgusting as Sladek's views might be, he is entitled to them. What I do not understand is why the Czech Chamber of Deputies—which has remained silent when Roma have been attacked and even murdered—has chosen to express its concern in this manner. The bulk of the Czech cabinet has remained conspicuously silent regarding the most recent racially motivated skinhead attacks; certainly, the Prime Minister appears to have said nothing. Instead, Monika Horakova, a Romani representative on the recently created Inter-Ministerial Commission for Romani Affairs, has been dispatched to dissuade Roma from taking matters into their own hands. In the end, however, Ms. Horakova is unlikely to be successful unless she has the full backing of the full cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, the Czech Government should not wait until after the June elections to reach to racially motivated violence. With time, more innocent life could be lost. Every member of the Cabinet should condemn in decisive terms the acts of these repugnant skinheads; the Ministry of Interior, in particular, should unequivocally signal its commitment to ensure that the perpetrators of these acts are caught, prosecuted and convicted. And the discriminatory Czech citizenship law, which continues to telegraph the message that Roma are not wanted in that country, must be amended.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

HON. CONSTANCE A. MORELLA

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 22, 1998

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, what have we done to childhood? We live in a world where every year, 1 million teen become pregnant, 3 million teen contract STDs, and HIV/AIDS is spreading most rapidly among adolescents.

What will it take to convince teenagers—the “it-will-never-happen-to-me crowd”—that they can become pregnant and infected with STDs, including HIV infection?

What will it take to convince community leaders, religious leaders, local and national leaders, pop culture stars, and parents that education and prevention strategies are critical?

I am proud to join my colleague, EVA CLAYTON, with whom I have organized this special order, and other members of the Women's Caucus to shed light on the problem of teen pregnancy during National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month. Although we have been fighting this problem for a long time and the problem seems insurmountable, I am energized and encouraged by recent trends and the efforts of so many outstanding organizations to combat teen pregnancy.

I am proud to be a member of the Congressional Advisory Panel to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and so many other groups have moved our Nation's consciousness about teen pregnancy to a higher level, and we are seeing results. The teenage birth rate has declined steadily since 1991 when the rate was 6.2 percent, an overall decline of 12 percent.

Although it is encouraging that the teen birth rate is declining, we must celebrate cautiously. Out-of-wedlock births are increasing, and over 1 million teens become pregnant every year.

Seventy-Five percent of teen births are out of wedlock today. In 1960: 15 percent of teen births were out of wedlock. Today, teen mothers make up the largest group of all first births to unmarried women (48 percent). About 44 percent of all girls become pregnant at least once before age 20—more than one million girls per year—most of whom are unmarried and totally unprepared to take on the responsibilities of parenthood. One-third of these pregnancies end in abortion, and only 2 percent of teens who give birth choose to put their babies up for adoption.

We know the consequences of teen pregnancy. Teen parents are much more likely to be trapped in a cycle of poverty. The opportunities lost to teens who become pregnant are enormous, and costs associated with teenage pregnancy drain limited federal, state, local and family resources.

I want to highlight an important point about teen pregnancy: It is not enough to say we want to solve the problem of teen pregnancy; we must know how to fix it. We cannot solve the problem without sufficient information on what works in teen pregnancy prevention, and what works in different areas of the country. I commend my colleagues Nita Lowey and Mike Castle for their legislation, H.R. 1736, the Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Act of 1997, which will ensure that we have better information and provide for in-depth evaluation of teen pregnancy prevention programs.

Today's message is a call to action. Although we don't have all the answers to solve the problem; it's clear that we simply cannot wait.

As Members of Congress, we must do more. If figuring out what works, we must look at why teenage girls become pregnant.

What is it about our society that makes teenage girls think that to be loved, they must have a child of their own? Surely we can do better. Educational opportunities build self-esteem, as do girls' sports and community activities. Improving our education system, increasing access to girls' sports, building our communities, increasing job opportunities and giving young girls something to look forward to will all reduce teen pregnancy, and those are all areas where our decisions make a difference.

We also have jurisdiction over federal programs that deal with teenage pregnancy: the