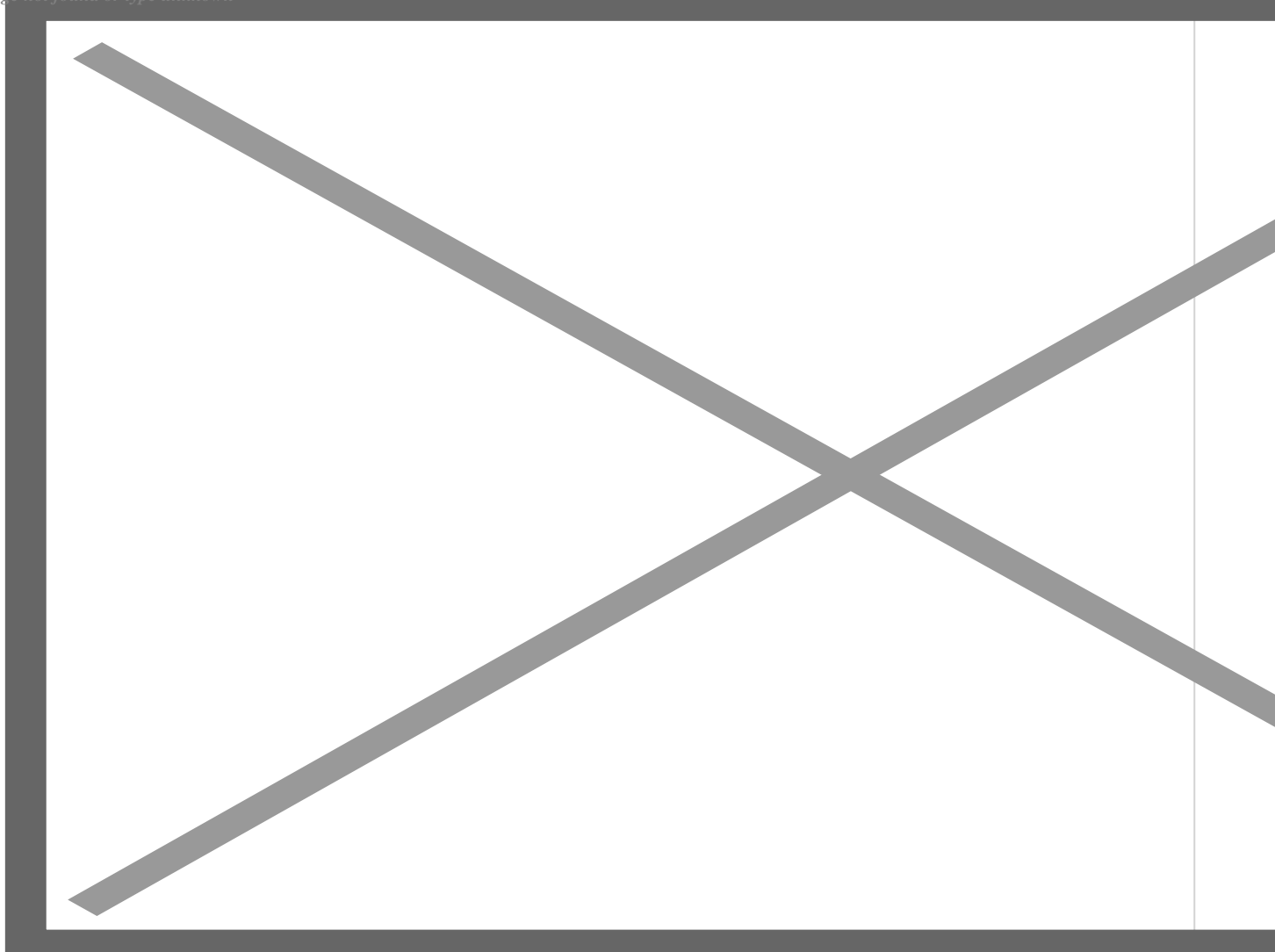


Attacks by racist mob force Spanish Gypsy people to flee homes

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Racist graffiti in a house in Peal de Becerro, saying: 'Gypsies out.'

Madrid, July 30 (RHC)-- Dozens of Gypsy people have been forced to abandon their homes in a small Andalusian town when a killing triggered a wave of racist violence. Groups representing Spain's Gypsy communities said on Thursday that more than 30 members of six families had fled Peal de Becerro in Jaén province, because they were afraid of further reprisals against their community. They include ill, older and vulnerable people.

The latest wave of violence erupted when a 29-year-old pub doorman was stabbed to death in the troubled region after an argument with four members of the local Gypsy community in early hours of Sunday. It was followed by a racist rampage in which some residents targeted houses belonging to Gypsies.

The properties were burned, looted and damaged. Some houses were also defaced with graffiti saying "killer Gypsies" and "death to Gypsies." Gypsy communities were quick to voice their sympathies over the killing, but said nothing could justify the racist crimes that followed.

"It's unacceptable for a group of people to take justice in their own hands, to call for the expulsion of Gypsy families from a town, and for them to burn these families' homes and flip over their cars," Spain's Fundación Secretariado Gitano said in a statement.

Kamira, a federation made up of associations of Gypsy women, said his death simply could not excuse the anti-Gypsy violence. Kamira was among the groups that have filed criminal complaints relating to the violence.

Public prosecutors in Andalucía recently said they had begun investigating the events that followed Álvaro Soto's death. This was not the first instance of violence against Gypsy communities in Spain and elsewhere across Europe. In July 1986, Gypsy families living in the Andalusian town of Martos were forced to flee after their homes were torched.

Gypsies also called Roma and other aboriginal communities continue to suffer marginalization across Western countries. Two years ago, the former UN poverty expert Philip Alston called on the Spanish authorities to carry out an independent review to ensure that Roma children were "not doomed to repeat the cycle of poverty and exclusion".

Human rights groups say Roma communities across Europe are facing widespread persecution and "shocking" discrimination. Several surveys of Roma communities across Europe found they tend to be poorer than the rest of the population, with worse health and lower literacy levels.

It is estimated up to 12 million Roma, Travelers and Gypsies live in Europe. They score lower on all key social measures of as unemployment, earnings and access to healthcare. They had been subjected to racially motivated crime across Europe over the past decades.

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