



NAGA
Associazione Volontaria
di Assistenza Socio-Sanitaria e per i Diritti
di Cittadini Stranieri, Rom e Sinti

Via Zamenhof, 7/A - 20136 Milano
Tel: 0258102599 - Fax: 028392927
www.naga.it - naga@naga.it

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To the attention of National Geographic Society
1145 17th Street NW
Washington DC 20036-4688

Dear Editor,

We write with reference to the text mentioned on page 240 of the Italian edition of your 2007 guide to the city of Rome. In the "practical advice" section, "crime" subsection, we read: "Fate particolare attenzione ai nomadi, spesso identificabili per gli abiti trasandati ma oggi sempre meglio vestiti. I bambini e, soprattutto, le giovani madri con i neonati al collo, si coprono le mani con cartoni o giornali mentre frugano nelle tasche" (translation: "Pay particular attention to nomads, often identifiable by their scruffy clothes but today tending to be better and better dressed. Children, and especially young mothers carrying babies, use cardboard or newspapers to cover their hands while rummaging through your pockets"). We also consulted the latest edition of the guide to the city of Rome, edited in 2011. Reading the box "Thwarting pickpockets and other thieves" on page 105, we realised that the situation is, if anything, worse. The guide, as a matter of fact, says that: "Al pari di molte metropoli, Roma ha la sua parte di borsaioli e scippatori molto abili. Pullulano inoltre gli zingari, alcuni dei quali, bambini inclusi, sopravvivono grazie a furtarelli spesso messi in atto ai danni degli stranieri e dei turisti" (translation: "Like many cities, Rome has its share of very skilled pickpockets and bag snatchers. Moreover, the town teems with gypsies, some of whom, including children, survive on petty theft, often carried out against foreigners and tourists.").

The terms "nomade" and "zingaro" ("nomad" and "gypsy"), that you used in the two editions of the guide, have taken on a derogatory meaning in every day language. They refer to the Roma or Sinti populations that historically have been forced to become nomadic people. To clarify the derogatory sense of these terms, an effective contribution comes from Treccani Encyclopedia, which reads: "Zingari -> Insieme di gruppi migranti e nomadi diffusi in tutto il continente europeo e nelle Americhe, oggi a causa della connotazione negativa che la parola ha assunto preferibilmente designati come Rom" (translation: "Gypsies -> Set of migrant groups and nomads spread throughout the continent of Europe and the Americas. Today, because of the negative connotation that the word has taken, preferably designated as Roma").

Therefore, adhering to such a negative connotation, in your guide "gypsies", whom the city of Rome "teems with", "survive" on theft, and "nomads" are identified by the way they dress and by the fact that they usually rummage in peoples pockets, covering their hands to conceal their actions. Furthermore, your guides warn the reader not to watch out for generic individuals who may be pickpockets, but specifically warn against "nomads", easily identifiable, according to your careful description. The explicit meaning of your words, then, is to put the reader on guard against a particular group of people, "nomads" or "gypsies", in fact encouraging discrimination on grounds of race or ethnicity.

As stated in Article 2, Paragraph 3, of Legislative Decree no. 215/2003 (Implementation of Directive 2000/43/EC, on the principle of equal treatment of persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin), "also harassment or behaviour put in place for reasons of race or ethnic origin, having the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, are considered discrimination".

The undersigned Naga Association, Associazione Volontaria di Assistenza Socio-Sanitaria e per i Diritti di Cittadini Stranieri, Rom e Sinti (=Association of Voluntary Social and Health Service, promoting Rights of Foreign, Roma and Sinti Citizens), is responsible for the support and defence of immigrants, Roma and Sinti people. It was founded in 1987 and, as clearly shown by its mission statement, its aim is to promote and defend the rights of foreign citizens and Roma and Sinti minorities.

Naga is also included in the register of associations, charities, NGOs and bodies that carry out activities in the field of fighting discrimination, managed by the Office for the Promotion of equal treatment and the removal of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, UNAR, a body set up by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Equal Opportunities, in accordance with the provisions of article 6 Legislative Decree no. 215/2003.

Naga is therefore entitled to intervene if there are, as in this case, collective and / or widespread discrimination. Discrimination is collective when, as in this case, "the injured parties, which can be theoretically determined in the light of the content of the discriminatory conduct, are not specifically identified, which justifies the recognition of the right to act independently and in its own name in the hands of these organisations" (Court of Milan, Civilian Section I, order of 21/04/2011).

We would like to remind you that the freedom of expression is limited by the infringement or endangerment of other values, guaranteed by the Constitution (as for example, human dignity).

It does not matter that the conduct is not aimed at discriminating against specifically identified individuals, but, in an undifferentiated way, is aimed at all the members of a community (in this case the "nomadi" and "zingari" - "nomads" or "gypsies"), and it has no relevance whether the discriminatory action has produced any effect, namely that the incitement or provocation has been accepted by the readers of the guide or by the recipients of the incitement (the "nomadi" and "zingari" - "nomads", "Gypsies").

Tribunals which in the past have been asked to comment on situations like this have stated that, to talk about discrimination, it is enough that a certain offensive word is perceived as such by another person, no matter how or through whatever means it has been expressed.

The racial-ethnic prejudice is no less detrimental when it is expressed and used to incite others to discriminatory conduct, turning it from a personal inner thought to a criminal act.

In conclusion we ask you to delete from your guides the statements described above, and any discriminatory sentence against the so-called "nomadi" and "zingari" - "nomads" or "gypsies", and to correct the editions which still bear these statements and which have already been printed and distributed in bookstores, warning you in advance that, in the absence of the above actions, we will evaluate whether to seek legal action against you.

Waiting for Your kind reply,

Sincerely,

Cinzia Colombo (President of NAGA Onlus)