

## Italian football fans threaten pogrom against ethnic Roma

Police in the Adriatic port city of Pescara are fighting to prevent a potential pogrom after rising tensions between football fans and the local Roma community – the ethnic minority, rather than the football club of the same name.

The conflict has seen a murder and petrol-bomb attacks in the past few days – with the threat of worse to come.

Roma, often regarded as the most discriminated-against ethnic group in Europe, have already been the target of vicious attacks in other Italian cities, most notably in Naples where the local Camorra mafia have torched gypsy camps.

Now violent elements among Pescara's football fans have told Roma that they have five days to leave the city or face the consequences.

The simmering ill feeling between the violent fans and local gypsies exploded on Tuesday evening when one supporter, Domenico Rigante, 24, was shot and later died in hospital after a group of six Roma broke into a house and attacked him.

The suspected Roma killer, Massimo Ciarelli, 29, had, according to local press reports, threatened to kill the victim a week earlier following an argument involving Mr Rigante and his twin brother Antonio. It has also emerged that Mr Ciarelli was arrested in 2005 following a shooting incident involving other Roma. Even before Mr Rigante died in hospital, extremist Pescara supporters, who are said to have links with the neo-fascist Forza Nuova political party, retaliated with petrol bomb attacks on Mr Ciarelli's house.

On Thursday evening, a group of Pescara supporters, who call themselves the Rangers, held up a banner outside the town hall which read: "You have five days to drive them from the city".

Pescara supporters plan a provocative demonstration on Sunday in the Fontanelle district, the heart of the city's Roma enclave. This will be followed by a meeting in front of the town hall to press home their demands for the group to be cleared from Pescara.

One message that has sprung up on walls around the city reads: "If they don't leave, we'll expel them. This won't be racism but a general clean up, whether they're Roma or not." Similar threats have appeared on Facebook.

Pescara's mayor, Luigi Albore Mascia, has already held an emergency meeting with police chiefs in the hope of preventing further violence; extra police have already been put on duty.

Mr Mascia said: "There is concern in the city but we're hoping that things don't get out of control. Pescara is not the 'wild west' that many make it out to be. I for one am not signing up to intolerance and racism, and I'm launching an appeal for reasonableness."

A police spokesman said the murder of Mr Rigante was the culmination of violence and confrontations between football fans and Roma "that had nothing to do with football".

Alessandro Baldati, a spokesman for the local Right of Pescara political group, told La Stampa newspaper that the city needed policies to ensure that Roma "respect the rules, show public spirit and a life marked by work and non-violence and the proper education of children".

Even one leading consumer group, Codici, the Centre for the Rights of the Citizen, issued a thinly veiled attack on the criminal elements in the Roma community: "Criminality has upped the battle against those of us it considers enemies, and it shows it has no compunction about killing on a whim."

But Nazareno Guarnieri, the president of the National Roma Foundation, said it was wrong to use the killing as an excuse to slur all Roma. "The person responsible must be caught and put in prison like any other criminal," he said.

"The Roma community is not delinquent. If anything, the responsibility lies with local authorities and the institutions in the sense that there are insufficient opportunities for them to avoid marginalisation and social exclusion."

