



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on International Roma Day

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 2, 2009

Madam Chairwoman,

On April 8, we will celebrate International Roma Day, an opportunity to call attention to the history, experiences, and human rights of Europe's largest ethnic minority. The United States is committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of Roma. Despite important progress that has been made in the last decade, too many Roma still live on the margins of society. Roma continue to experience racial profiling, violence, discrimination, and other human rights abuses. Too often, they lack identity documents or citizenship papers, which exclude them from voting, social services, education, and employment opportunities.

During the last year, the participating States and the OSCE have given much-needed attention to the situation of Roma, including through the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting last July, the visits by the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the ODIHR to Italy, and in our Ministerial Decision 6/08 adopted in Helsinki. We look forward to the discussion of early education for Romani children during the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw later this year.

The United States also welcomes efforts by governments and nongovernmental organizations to ensure that the genocide of European Roma is never forgotten. We encourage all participating States to consider ways to better incorporate the genocide of European Roma into educational curricula, including the publication this month of a book in Romania on the deportation of Roma to Transnistria. We note that a monument to Romani victims of the "Porajmos," the term some Roma use to describe Nazi attempts to exterminate Romani people of Europe during the Holocaust, will be unveiled in Berlin later this year, and also welcome plans to establish an educational and documentation center on the site of a former Romani concentration camp in South Moravia.

Unfortunately, as Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg observed at the 2007 HDIM, even after the genocide of Roma, "there was no genuine change of attitude among the majority population towards the Roma." Today, in some of OSCE participating States, local officials continue to describe Roma as "unadaptable," routinely using a Nazi-era term.

Governments have a special responsibility to ensure that minority communities have the tools of opportunity that they need to succeed as productive and responsible members of society. The United States is deeply concerned about the escalation of anti-Roma hate crimes in some OSCE participating States. In this regard, we would welcome information from the Italian delegation regarding efforts to prosecute individuals for participating in mob attacks on Romani camps in 2007 and 2008, when Italian police provided protection to camp residents. We also support efforts by the Hungarian government to prosecute those responsible for recent violent attacks against Roma, including the February murder of Robert Csorba and his five-year-old son.

In closing, the United States urges OSCE participating States to honor their commitment—first made a decade ago at the 1999 Istanbul Summit—to ensure that national laws and policies fully respect the rights of Roma. Furthermore, governments must commit to effectively enforcing these laws.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.