



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on International Roma Day

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 16, 2015

April 8 was International Roma Day. As we celebrate the history and culture of Romani communities and individuals, we must acknowledge that discrimination against Roma remains part of the unfinished business of advancing human rights in Europe. That is why the United States is working to end exclusion, discrimination and intolerance against Roma people everywhere. We seek to help improve opportunities for Roma to participate in the political, social, economic, and cultural lives of their communities. Romani individuals deserve the opportunity to have a better and brighter future, and we are committed to working with civil society groups and governments to make a real difference in the lives of Roma.

On April 2, I hosted a teleconference with 15 Romani journalists and journalists of other ethnic backgrounds who cover Romani issues. We discussed housing, segregated schools, and enhancing professional opportunities for young Romani students and graduates. These issues remain core concerns for Romani communities, and I encourage all around this table to discuss these issues in your home countries with the aim of finding solutions.

While progress toward ending discrimination against Roma is slow, it is being made. We welcome the Czech government's recent statement that it will work on new legislation to compensate forcibly sterilized Romani women.

We applaud the Ukrainian Romani organization Chiricli for assisting Roma facing hardships as a result of their dislocation from eastern Ukraine. This group has helped internally displaced Roma secure official documents, access social support, and obtain medical care, including vaccinations for over 1,000 Romani children.

In Sweden, we are inspired by Emir Selimi, a young Romani Muslim and an organizer of the "peace ring" formed around Stockholm's downtown synagogue in February. He was awarded the Raoul Wallenberg prize for this act of inter-religious solidarity. In accepting the award, Selimi reminded us that, "it's really important to show that even if we see a lot of hatred in the world, we are all just people."

The United States also thanks Mirjam Karoly, the Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues at ODIHR, and her team for their efforts to promote equal opportunities and the protection of the human rights of all Roma and Sinti individuals. Their work is a positive reminder that we must continue to forge new partnerships and discover new areas in which to focus our efforts to address the challenges many Romani individuals face. Doing so will help create a freer, more fair, and more inclusive Europe.

Ensuring the inherent dignity of all persons is a priority for the United States. As Secretary Kerry noted last week in marking International Roma Day, “that’s why every day we renew our commitment to ensuring that all people — regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or creed — are allowed to reach their full potential. Only then can we empower not just the Roma people, but all people.”

Thank you, Mr. Chair.