



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on International Roma Day 2010

As delivered by Political Counselor Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 15, 2010

Last week, while the OSCE was in recess, the world marked International Roma Day. Since 1990, April 8 has been a day to celebrate Romani culture and raise awareness of the issues facing Europe's ten million Roma. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton issued a statement on International Roma Day recalling her longstanding personal commitment to protecting and promoting the human rights of Roma everywhere and stated unequivocally that the Obama administration is committed to doing so.

Some progress has been made in the past decade. We note that there were fewer incidents of violence against Roma this year compared to the previous year. And more school programs are beginning to teach children about the Roma who died as a result of the Holocaust during World War II. Yet sadly, many of the underlying factors which contribute to violence and discrimination against Roma have not been adequately or fully addressed. Too many Roma throughout the OSCE area still live on the margins of society. Too often, Roma continue to experience racial profiling, violence, discrimination and other human rights abuses. Too often, Roma lack identity documents or citizenship papers – and as a result they are excluded from voting, social services, education, and the employment opportunities that would enable them to participate more fully in the countries in which they live.

The United States is committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of Roma through our bilateral relations and through our involvement in organizations such as the OSCE and the United Nations. The OSCE's cross-dimensional and comprehensive view of security makes this organization uniquely poised to address Roma and Sinti issues. The connection between desperate poverty and a particular vulnerability to abuses such as discrimination, trafficking in persons, forced prostitution, and inequitable labor practices illustrate the need to address these issues cooperatively, comprehensively, and across all three dimensions.

Today, experts on Roma issues support participating States promoting educational opportunities—and especially those in connection with early childhood education. A U.S.-funded education project in Macedonia provides preschool education to 250 Romani children each year and has provided tutoring and out-of-school support to 1,500 primary school students. So far, 95 percent of these students have remained in school. Last August, the United States welcomed 24 Romani high school students for a month-long exchange program emphasizing self-respect, community development and minority advocacy, and we will soon be embarking on a similar exchange for Romani political leaders. At the International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest, the United States provides training and assistance to police to help them more effectively investigate and prosecute crimes against Roma.

We would also like to acknowledge and express our appreciation for the important work performed by the OSCE's Contact Point on Roma and Sinti issues, as well as the engagement of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. As Secretary Clinton said, "working with governments, civil society groups, and individual citizens, we seek to help Roma chart their own destinies, with opportunity, dignity and prosperity."