



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 15: Promotion of Tolerance and Non-discrimination II Roma and Sinti

As prepared for delivery by Erika Schlager
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Mr. Moderator,

It is important that OSCE States take measures to ensure that ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities are not targeted because of who they are. The human rights problems and denial of dignity faced by Roma are so extensive, so pervasive, they must be of concern to the OSCE community.

There are some issues that stand out, both positive and negative.

The U.S. delegation wants to express concern about the housing crisis facing many Roma in numerous OSCE participating States. Groups of Romani families, sometimes numbering dozens or even hundreds of individuals and inevitably including children, are evicted from their homes onto the streets. The countries may vary, but the pattern is the same: local authorities decide, for some reason, that a group of Roma must be removed from their housing. Often, these evictions ignore or violate domestic laws and regulations governing housing rights. During these evictions, Roma homes are often destroyed, sometimes with whatever meager personal possessions these families have. As the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner recently noted, these forced evictions are often marked by racist public discourse. We are particularly concerned by the destruction of the Romani settlement in Dorozhny, a village just outside Kaliningrad in Russia, and by plans to evict dozens of Romani families, totaling hundreds of people, in the Yahya Kemal neighborhood of Istanbul. Similarly, the United States remains concerned over the pattern of forcible eviction of Roma from Patras and elsewhere in Greece.

The practice of arbitrary eviction, simply put, is a recipe for disaster and is inconsistent with the commitments that participating States here have undertaken to respect the rights of Roma, and to seek to end their marginalization. Moreover, when these evictions are undertaken on a large scale, they contribute to a combustible political environment. We urge governments to exercise appropriate oversight in this area, and to intervene when necessary to ensure that the rights of Roma are respected. Given the scope of this problem, the United States believes the OSCE participating States should consider giving greater attention to this subject, perhaps in the form of a specialized meeting.

Violence against Roma in Russia is also of concern. A series of anti-Roma attacks in the Siberian town of Iskitim in 2005 drove hundreds of Roma from their homes there. In November, in the same town, an arson attack left an 8 year-old girl dead. On April 13, 2006, two people were beaten to death at a Romani camp in the Volgograd region of southern

Russia, and two days later two Romani brothers were shot to death in a town in the Pskov region of northwest Russia. All five of these tragic deaths appear to be the direct result of anti-Roma prejudice.

The United States urges the Russian authorities to aggressively investigate and prosecute such violent crimes. Failure to investigate and prosecute such attacks creates a climate of fear among minority groups, and gives a sense of impunity to perpetrators.

On a positive note, my delegation welcomes the investigation of the Czech Public Defender of Rights into the matter of sterilization of Romani women without informed consent. His report represents a careful and courageous examination of a difficult and painful subject and stands as an example that other countries might find useful. We urge the Czech Government to implement the Public Defender's recommendations.

We welcome the constructive dialogue at last evening's side event between a Romanian Government police official and Romani non-governmental representatives.

We also welcome progress being made on the construction of a monument in Berlin to commemorate and remember the Romani victims of genocide, and we commend Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico for personally participating in the unveiling of a monument in Dunajska Streda also dedicated to Romani genocide victims.

Finally, the United States notes with a certain sadness that this is the last Human Dimension Implementation Meeting we will have with Nicolae Gheorghe in his capacity as the ODIHR Senior Advisor on Romani issues. There have been many positive changes in the years that Nicolae has been in Warsaw, and in the years since he first played an instrumental role in securing the OSCE's first reference to Romani human rights in the historic 1990 Copenhagen Document. Nicolae, it has been an honor and a privilege to work with you.