



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **International Roma Day**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
April 7, 2016

Tomorrow, April 8 is International Roma Day, when Romani history and culture will be celebrated across the OSCE region. Celebrations will include the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Herdeljezi festival in Oakland, California. The United States, like other OSCE participating States, is enriched by the contributions of generations of Roma.

While we celebrate the rich traditions of the Romani people, we must acknowledge that discrimination against Roma remains part of the unfinished business of advancing human rights in the OSCE region. That is why the United States is working to end exclusion, discrimination, and intolerance against Roma persons everywhere. As participating States agreed in the 1999 Istanbul Summit document, “We deplore violence and other manifestations of racism and discrimination against minorities, including the Roma and Sinti. We commit ourselves to ensure that laws and policies fully respect the rights of Roma and Sinti and, where necessary, to promote anti-discrimination legislation to this effect. We underline the importance of careful attention to the problems of the social exclusion of Roma and Sinti.” More recently, at the 2013 Kyiv Ministerial, participating States agreed to take action to enhance “the participation of Roma and Sinti in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the policies that affect them, including by fostering Roma and Sinti political participation and by supporting voter education among Roma and Sinti.”

We thank Germany for prioritizing tolerance and non-discrimination issues during their Chairmanship and encourage participating States to use this opportunity to confront these ongoing challenges that affect all of our societies.

Unfortunately, as long as physical walls separate Romani communities from their neighbors, as long as Romani families fear racially-motivated violence and arbitrary eviction from their homes without compensation, and as long as politicians exploit anti-Roma rhetoric to win votes, we have much work to do to achieve inclusion and improve our democratic societies.

With several important elections coming up this year in the OSCE region, we call upon participating States to ensure that Roma individuals are able to exercise their right to vote and participate in the political process without fear of intimidation or exploitation. During previous election assessments in numerous participating States, ODIHR found that Romani citizens were vulnerable to disenfranchisement and their votes to manipulation.

Across the OSCE region the need is greater than ever for inclusion of Roma in political processes and policy making. While there are few Romani members of parliament across the OSCE region, more and more Romani citizens are connecting to the political process at a local level, and helping to elect Romani mayors and local officials to represent their interests and effect change in their communities. We hope that this trend of participation will continue, and political parties will see the value of including Romani candidates on their lists and appealing to Romani voters, who are an increasingly important part of the electorate in many participating States.

The United States thanks ODIHR Director Michael Link and 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 and North America.

Ensuring respect for the inherent dignity of all persons is a priority for the United States. As Secretary Kerry noted one year ago in marking International Roma Day, “today and every day we renew our commitment to ensuring that all people — regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or creed — are allowed to reach their full potential.”

Thank you, Mr. Chair.