



THE HOLY SEE

Statement of Monsignor Anthony R. Frontiero
Official of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

Human Dimension Sessions of the 2010 Review Conference
30 September--8 October 2010, Warsaw, Poland

Working Session 7:

Wednesday, 6 October 2010

Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I including Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti

Mr. Chairman,

The OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti calls for enhanced access to quality education as a key to overcoming the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion that so often affect people on the move, including Roma and Sinti. The Delegation of the Holy See commends the ODIHR, particularly as it continues to “reinforce the efforts of participating States and relevant OSCE institutions and structures aimed at ensuring that Roma and Sinti people are able to play a full and equal part in our societies, and at eradicating discrimination against them.”¹ Such efforts have been met with a degree of success, including an increased awareness among Roma and Sinti themselves of their ability to influence their own circumstances through political participation and their own desire to attain literacy and professional formation.

Nevertheless, we have also witnessed some dark moments in the recent past with regard to immigrants, refugees, Roma and Sinti, and newcomers to our lands. The failure of comprehensive immigration reform legislation in some States has resulted in the pursuit of a punitive approach on the part of some governments and law enforcement officials. These various efforts have often led to the creation of a negative atmosphere which risks fanning the flames of discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia. These signs of unwelcome and rejection persist, often without eliciting any reaction or protest from those who witness them. Many Roma and Sinti populations continue to encounter dangerous and precarious living conditions, limited opportunities for work and education, and find themselves marginalized and victimized by inequality.

Recognizing the plight of Roma and Sinti and of all who are caught up in the phenomenon of human mobility, the Holy See, in 2005, published a set of *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies*. These guidelines call all people of good will, especially Christians, to assume their responsibilities, both at the service of society as well as in political commitments, in order to guarantee full respect of the dignity and rights of every human being. Often marked by persecution, exile, inhospitality, rejection, suffering and discrimination, Roma and Sinti populations are shaped by permanent wandering that distinguishes them from others. This has often given rise to an identity with its own languages, and a culture and religiosity with their own traditions, and a strong

¹ 2003 OSCE Plan of Action on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Region.

sense of belonging.² With these diverse cultures, customs and languages, humanity is enriched. Indeed, “their wisdom is not written down in books, but that does not make them any less eloquent.” We must remember that a human being’s worth is defined by their God-given dignity, not by what papers they carry.

Mr. Chairman, the Holy See never ceases to affirm that the human person is infinitely precious because of his creation in the image and likeness of God. Likewise, every person is called to fulfil his or her own potential, to develop himself or herself in exercising their rights and duties, and to earn a living from work. So that this may become an everyday reality, sustainable economic development necessarily plays a key role. Towards this end, Governments should pursue economic policies and practices that make the need for their citizens to cross borders less compelling and necessary. The task to be undertaken—so that Roma and Sinti, who are particularly vulnerable, may be considered and accepted as full members of the human family—is no doubt great and pressing. The dignity of Roma and Sinti populations must therefore be safeguarded, their families protected, their collective identity respected, initiatives for their development encouraged, and their rights defended.³

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

² *Guidelines*, n. 27.

³ *Ibid.*, nos. 47-48.