



United States Mission to the OSCE

Celebrating International Roma Day

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 11, 2013

Across Europe and the United States, events and celebrations on Monday, April 8th commemorated International Roma Day. Secretary Kerry reaffirmed the continuing commitment of the United States to the efforts of Roma activists, civil society, governments, and international organizations to ensure that members of Roma communities enjoy the same rights and opportunities as their fellow citizens.

The United States will continue to promote Roma inclusion through a range of engagement and we will continue to use the OSCE and other multilateral fora to raise our concerns about the deeply troubling trends we observe: anti-Roma rhetoric and violence and wide ranging human rights violations. In just the past several weeks, we have heard some senior European officials make misleading, prejudicial and inflammatory comments about Roma. Such statements often seem designed to offer citizens who are struggling in tough economic times a scapegoat – this phenomenon has been occurring with greater frequency in the run-up to elections. This is not only morally wrong, it is a dangerous tactic. We have witnessed anti-Roma protests turn violent, have seen Roma referred to as animals, and have heard calls for them to be “turned to soap.” Leaders have a solemn responsibility to promote tolerance, not to sow hatred and suspicion of “the other.”

Today we would like to make a plea to participating States: Given current trends, more must be done on an urgent basis to address the growing disparities between Roma and non-Roma, and to address the pervasive discrimination and exclusion that Roma experience. As the head of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency observed in the forward of a recent survey of Roma across 11 EU countries, “the results are shocking in many respects. Although governments and societies have been aware of Roma exclusion and deprivation, the magnitude and the similarity of exclusion patterns across EU member states are striking and leave no excuse for delaying swift effective action to improve the situation.”

The small but growing body of data makes clear the staggering costs not only to individuals, but to societies as a whole, of exclusion and discrimination on the scale that affects European Roma. Coupled with growing anti-Roma attitudes, the picture that emerges is cause for deep concern.

We must do more to address this challenge, we must do it much more effectively, and we must act now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.