



HOLY SEE

Statement by Monsignor Anthony R. Frontiero
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At the 2008 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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During Working Session 6: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination for Roma/Sinti

Mr. Moderator,

The Delegation of the Holy See expresses its gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion, which recalls the strong commitment of the ODIHR to promote and protect tolerance and non-discrimination for Roma, Sinti, travellers and other groups of persons often referred to as gypsies. In this regard, 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. There is evidence of a growing desire to attain literacy and professional formation. Social and political awareness are finding expression in the formation of associations and in participation in local and national management in some countries.

Yet, in spite of some improvements in the recognition and appreciation of the culture, ethnicity, and customs of Roma and Sinti populations, and particularly of their human rights, there still exists widespread indifference or opposition toward them. Many people and governments still demonstrate habitual prejudices in this regard. Signs of rejection persist, often without eliciting any reaction or protest from those who witness them. Precarious living conditions and limited opportunities for work and education continue to leave Roma and Sinti behind, often marginalized and victims of inequality, with a loss of confidence in themselves and in their families. While there remains a considerable openness and interest for Roma and Sinti on the part of international and national organizations, there is still a certain lack of flexibility and strong evidence of ambiguous attitudes on the part of governments.

For this reason, the Holy See, in 2005, published a set of *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies*, which calls all people, 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,

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

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 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.” Their way of life is essentially a living witness to inner freedom from the bonds of consumerism and false security based on people’s presumed self-sufficiency. Nevertheless—as it is affirmed in the *Guidelines*—we should not forget the familiar proverb that says, “God helps those who help themselves.”

The unity of the human family is shown in large part in the recognition of the dignity and freedom of each person, whatever may be their race, country of origin or religion, in a relationship of solidarity with everyone. The human person is infinitely precious because of his creation in the image and likeness of God. Every person, who is unique and irreplaceable, is therefore called, in mutual respect to fulfill his 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, any personal or collective decision should come from the person, in his relations with others, taking into account political and economic living conditions. 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 therefore great and pressing. Genuine and long-lasting peace, which should be characteristic of our human family, cannot come about without justice and development. The dignity of Roma and Sinti populations must therefore be safeguarded and 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.