

Joint statement on the occasion of International Roma Day, 8 April 2010

WARSAW/THE HAGUE, 8 April 2010 - The Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, and Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, released the following statement today to mark International Roma Day.

"We remain deeply concerned that, despite the existence in many countries of stronger anti-discrimination legislation and policies to promote inclusion for Roma and Sinti and to combat their social segregation, only limited progress has been made in eliminating the disadvantages and marginalization these communities face. Roma and Sinti often have only limited access to education, employment, health care, suitable housing and public services. Roma women and children are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and social exclusion, and therefore require special support.

"We are particularly concerned by instances of hate-motivated crime and racist rhetoric targeting Roma in a number of states. Manifestations of intolerance against Roma and Sinti not only increase the exclusion and marginalization of these communities, but also pose a threat to social cohesion and peaceful coexistence within broader society. Recognizing that prejudice and violent manifestations of intolerance against Roma and Sinti have been on the rise, foreign ministers of the OSCE participating States in December adopted a decision urging governments to step up their efforts to promote tolerance and combat prejudice against Roma and Sinti. The decision, taken in Athens, also called on governments to unequivocally and publicly condemn any violence targeting Roma and Sinti, and to take all necessary measures to ensure that victims of discrimination and violence have proper access to effective remedies.

"International Roma Day will be marked this year by the Second European Summit on Roma Inclusion, organized by the Spanish Presidency of the European Union, today and tomorrow in Cordoba. This and similar high-level events are a positive development in efforts to raise awareness of issues directly affecting Roma and Sinti communities and put them on the main political agenda. They also provide an excellent opportunity for the sharing and strengthening of positive measures, in the form of commitments and action plans, already in place to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti. In addition, they serve to send a powerful message that it is time to translate commitments into concrete, effective policies to increase inclusion and combat discrimination. Members of the Roma and Sinti communities have to play an active role in all of these efforts.

"Demographics in much of Europe are such that Roma and Sinti communities are significantly younger than national averages, and these communities should be seen as assets for these societies. This should guide governments to increase their attention to and investment in policies to improve education, and early education in particular, to help Roma and Sinti communities break out of the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion they

face. Young, educated Roma and Sinti should be encouraged to play a more visible role so as to be both role models and agents of change in their own communities.

"On this International Roma Day, we confirm our and our OSCE institutions' commitment to assisting states in combating discrimination and violence against Roma and Sinti and in meeting the challenges linked to their sustainable integration. We will continue to help countries implement OSCE commitments and we will continue to partner with Roma and Sinti communities in the design of policies and programmes to achieve this goal."