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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on ECHR Ruling in the Case of V.C. vs. Slovakia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a. i. Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 15, 2011

The Slovak Republic is a close and valued ally of the United States. It has a strong history of human rights advocacy and as a tireless proponent of democracy. In that spirit of alliance and mutual concern for human rights, we would like to address the November 8, 2011 decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of V.C. v. Slovakia. The decision of the court touches directly on the work of this organization in many ways, including, among others, ODHIR, the contact point on Roma and Sinti Issues, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Special Representative on Gender Issues.

The V.C. case addressed an instance of sterilizing a Romani woman without her informed consent in August 2000 at a hospital under the management of the Slovak Ministry of Health. In its November 8 judgment, the European Court concluded that the sterilization without informed consent constituted inhuman or degrading treatment, and was a violation of Articles 3 and 8 of the Convention. The Court did not reach a decision as to whether the sterilization in this particular case constituted racial discrimination. There are additional cases of a similar nature still pending in Slovak national courts and before the ECHR. We believe that this case offers a compelling basis for the Slovak Government to confront the history of sterilization of Roma women, aimed at controlling the Roma population. This practice (which is substantiated by strong evidence that it resulted in the sterilization of significant numbers of Romani women) originated under the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in the early 1970s and continued past the first decade of the establishment of a new democratic government.

We welcome the decision of the ECHR in this case. We take note of the Government of Slovakia's statement acknowledging the ECHR ruling and expressing regret about the plaintiff's treatment. We note also that the Government of Slovakia stressed that it now has a legal framework in place to prevent the occurrence of similar practices in the future. We urge the Government of Slovakia to enter into a dialogue with those affected by sterilizations, and to express a willingness to acknowledge wrongs done and take steps to address them fully.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.