



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Increasing Number of Attacks on Roma

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 14, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Rising intolerance and extremism characterized by incidents of discrimination and violence against ethnic and religious minorities in the OSCE region continue to come to our attention. OSCE governments have the responsibility to protect the rights of all their citizens and residents, whatever their ethnic or religious background, and fully investigate and prosecute all crimes against them. Recent incidents targeting Roma are particularly worrying. On the eve of International Roma Day, we drew attention to the increasing number of violent attacks on the Roma within the OSCE region in a statement to the Permanent Council on April 2. However, we feel compelled by events over the past month to once again bring these concerns to the attention of participating States.

The plight of Roma in several OSCE states remains precarious. In one country, local police arrested and physically abused six Romani boys. While we are pleased to note that those responsible are being punished, this incident demonstrates the need for increased training of law enforcement officials on anti-discrimination and other basic human rights principles. In another OSCE participating State, the murder of an elderly Romani man raises the number of Roma murdered in that one country to seven over the past year. Arsonists also recently set fire to the home of a local Romani official – the latest in a series of 50 violent attacks on Roma recorded in the last twelve months in what appears to be a pattern of ethnically-motivated violence. In yet another OSCE participating State, a Romani home was firebombed, leading to critical injuries to a young child and her parents.

Madam Chairwoman, last week's SHDM meeting on hate crimes was extremely useful in helping raise awareness about this problem. Participants expressed concern about an increase in openly-expressed hostility toward minorities, and increasing numbers of hate crimes. There are no simple answers, nor should we remain silent or simply shrug our shoulders. Action requires political leadership: condemning these attacks in clear and unequivocal terms and ensuring that the perpetrators of violent acts are prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Governments have a special responsibility to ensure minority populations enjoy full rights as citizens and residents. Public officials need to speak out against ignorance, discrimination, and stereotyping. We must ensure that Roma and other minority groups are not treated as scapegoats for the economic challenges all our countries face. And we need to properly train police and investigators to identify, investigate and register hate crimes.

We agree with the sentiments expressed by our Chairperson-in-Office and others during that session: we cannot afford to be complacent, and we need to act vigorously against this phenomenon. Many proposals were made in the SHDM meeting that deserve further consideration, and perhaps also endorsement at the intergovernmental level. A valuable first step by the Permanent Council might be an agreed political statement by all 56 nations in

this hall indicating our concern, and calling on all countries to take specific steps to address this issue. We are ready to work closely with all interested delegations on a declaration to this effect, with the goal of adopting it by the next Permanent Council session. Over the course of the coming weeks, it might also be timely to review in detail the various proposals emerging from the SHDM with the intention of developing a formal decision for adoption by the PC or at the Athens Ministerial.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.