

**Working Session 9: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including Roma and Sinti issues, including implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti**

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**No. of statements: 24**

**Delegations: 7**

**Civil Society: 15**

**OSCE Institutions: 1**

**International Organizations: 1**

**Media:-**

**Rights of Reply: 7**

The implementation of 2003 Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area (OSCE Action Plan) was a central theme of the Working Session 8.

The first introducer Ms. Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, Member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), presented the progress of the implementation of the Action Plan throughout the last 15 years. In this regard, a number of achievements were highlighted among them: mainstreaming Roma and Sinti issues into the multilateral political agendas and human rights monitoring mechanisms, increasing ownership of Roma and Sinti including women in protecting their rights through casting votes, campaigning, and involvement of Roma and Sinti professionals in the Office of the OSCE/ODIHR.

Additionally, Ms. Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, identified areas wherein progress was limited and slow. Divisive public discourse, populist propaganda and simplistic stereotypes were raised as contextual challenges in safeguarding pluralism and rights of protecting Roma and Sinti, as an ethnic minority group. It was stressed that the low number of Roma and Sinti professionals in the Government structures, particularly in the senior positions, impeded participation and integration of Roma and Sinti. The need of open and systematic channels between decision makers and Roma and Sinti groups was recognized as important including in the realm of taking prompt action in case of early warning signs of violence and atrocities. The introducer paid particular attention to the necessity of encouraging Roma and Sinti women to get into the world of politics by overcoming societal prejudices and personal barriers.

The second introducer, Mr. Ciprian Necula, Political Analyst and Human Rights Activist, valued the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti (CPRSI), as an institution that has contributed to the Roma and Sinti representation and political participation. In this regard, the work and legacy of the Roma intellectual and leader, first CPRSI Senior Advisor, Nicolae Gheorghe was acknowledged with a subsequent proposal to rename CPRSI into CPRSI – Nicolae Gheorghe.

Mr. Ciprian Necula highlighted that there is no significant improvement in participation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area, as Roma remain underrepresented, while vote buying, the

lack of legal housing and ID cards created obstacles for Roma and Sinti participation into the electoral processes. In this regard, the introducer recommended to legalize Roma and Sinti settlements, improve legislation, which will allow Roma and Sinti to get official registration and ID cards.

The speaker recalled several instances of inflammatory and racist rhetoric as well as violent hate crimes committed against Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area and stressed that Roma and Sinti civil movements protested these discriminatory practices.

Many delegations from participating States and representatives of civil society referred to the Action Plan as important tool in protecting rights of Roma and Sinti, particularly in the realm of political participation. They maintained that the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Action Plan provides an opportunity to enhance efforts at all levels for the inclusion of Roma and Sinti. They welcomed the persistent efforts of the CPRSI in enhancing effective participation of Roma and Sinti in public and political life.

Participating States, international organizations and civil society condemned anti-Roma hate crimes, including violent crimes and racist statements. Some delegations made a link between hate crimes, including incitement to violence and anti-Roma mob violence and pogroms. The violent events, which claimed human casualties in one participating state, were recalled by number of delegations. They also called on the Government concerned to punish all perpetrators and prevent any further anti-Roma hate crimes.

The representative of the Government concerned provided information on the state of investigation of some attacks and on measures taken to ensure full and impartial investigation of the crimes. The same delegation also reported on special measures taken, including devising a plan for countering conflict on ethnic grounds, creation of monitoring groups on preventing hate crimes by the police and increased patrolling in Roma settlements.

Several delegations referred to the suffering of Roma and Sinti people in the past, as one delegation underscored the importance of engaging with Roma youth groups involved in the commemoration of the upcoming 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the destruction of the Roma and Sinti camp in Auschwitz. One delegation linked anti-Semitism and anti-Roma discrimination and stressed the importance of education programme including raising awareness on combatting anti-discrimination.

Some delegations recognized anti-Roma discrimination as a contemporary form of racism and highlighted the need to tackle the issue in the overall framework of fighting all forms of contemporary racism.

A number of delegations presented good practices and challenges related to the implementation of the Action Plan. Better access to the education, health care, employment and political representation at local level were referred to by some delegations. The persistent obstacles towards meaningful participation of Roma and Sinti in public and political life was

highlighted, such as wide spread poverty, lack of education and identification documents. The underrepresentation of Roma and Sinti women was highlighted by some speakers.

Several delegations emphasized the need to improve data collection through national census.

Throughout the discussion the issue of ethnic profiling and biased motivation actions of law enforcement agencies was brought up by several delegations referring to this as discriminatory and racist practices.

The introducers wrapped up the session by making final remarks.

Ms. Rita Izsák-Ndiaye stressed the importance of overcoming existing skepticism towards multilateralism and ensuring mutual respect and equal dignity. In this regard, Rita Izsák-Ndiaye recalled the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of two international instruments: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Mr. Ciprian Necula emphasized the need to implement already existing commitments and called on Roma and Sinti politicians to run for elected office. He stressed that disparity between official data and unofficial estimations when it comes to the number of Roma and Sinti people living in participating States may indicate fear of self-identification as well as the existence of discriminative practices.

**Recommendations** made by participants during this session include (non-exhaustive list):

### **Participating States**

- Strengthen the co-operation with the ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti issues taking advantage of its expertise;
- Systematically and univocally condemn any acts of violence against Roma and Sinti and take effective and immediate measures to investigate crimes effectively and hold perpetrators accountable
- Take measures to combat any form of violence motivated by racism or xenophobia and ensure vigorous, effective and independent investigation of racially motivated acts, as well as equal access to remedies, and to bring perpetrators of violent acts on Roma and Sinti to justice
- Make use of ODIHR's role in conflict prevention and identification of areas of early intervention and draw on the expertise of the HCNM ;
- Additional emphasis on education and employment, promoting training of mediators and training of trainers and strengthening community-based approaches ;
- Take effective measures to enhance the participation of Roma and Sinti youth in public life
- Pay particular attention to Roma and Sinti women and girls who often face multiple forms of discrimination;

- Develop comprehensive policies that address the factors that contribute to the low school attendance of Roma and Sinti children, including ensuring necessary documents for registration
- Take effective measures to ensure respect for human rights, in particular improving access to education, employment, healthcare and housing;
- Enhance implementation of OSCE commitments on Roma and Sinti by local authorities
- Ensure periodical review mechanism of strategies, policies and measures related to Roma and Sinti for better adjustment to the situation on the ground;
- Improve collection of disaggregated data based on voluntary self-identification to address inequities;
- Adopt and implement comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, prosecute hate-motivated violence and build a climate of tolerance, with the OSCE partnership ;
- Develop preventive plans against pogroms and for the police to react rapidly and adequately to protect Roma and Sinti when they are in danger;
- Establish national truth and reconciliation commissions or expert commissions on antigypsyism;
- Endorse and respect the revised Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society;
- Establish a parliamentary coalition for combating antigypsyism;
- Strengthen diverse leadership by engaging in dialogue and networks between political parties and Roma and Sinti civil society, including by reaching out to Roma to be politically active and to become members and candidates of political parties;
- Establish a network of Roma and Sinti women from OSCE states to act as a hub for sharing best practices, experiences and lessons learnt;
- Enhance capacities of Roma women on various topics, including leadership, gender equality and sharing of success stories, to promote political participation of Roma and Sinti women at all levels of decision-making;
- Design and implement programmes to educate on voting and to raise awareness on political participation of Roma and Sinti women and youth;
- Regularly collect data on the socio-economic situation of communities and the rights of Roma, including women, by national and local government;
- Provide financing for and enhance monitoring and evaluation of the existing policies and mechanisms;
- Provide opportunities to involve Roma men and women in political party life;
- Adopt a Ministerial Council decision to expand the mandate of ODIHR to monitor and combat antigypsyism and to enhance the political participation of Roma and Sinti as key priorities;

### **OSCE and its Institutions**

- Consider elaboration of a new document combatting contemporary forms of racism;
- Recognize antigypsyism as a special form of racism, which is a root cause of the exclusion of Roma and Sinti and a key barrier to their participation of Roma;

- For OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to endorse and respect the revised Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society and to establish a parliamentary coalition for combating antigypsyism;
- Enhance capacities of Roma and Sinti women to increase their political participation, including through training on running for elections, to launch awareness raising campaigns in media on political and civil participation of Roma and Sinti women and to support Roma and Sinti women with tools to become financially independent;
- Extend observation mission to local elections in all OSCE participating States;
- Consult Roma and Sinti in election observation missions;
- Support education programmes for Roma and Sinti voters and candidates in elections;
- Proceed with technical assistance for effective implementation of the Odesa declaration focusing on access to personal documents by Roma and Sinti;
- Support political development programmes that enhance the participation of Roma and Sinti women and youth as voters and candidates in future elections;
- Monitor antigypsyism as part of OSCE election observation missions;
- Ensure better co-ordination between various OSCE institutions and intergovernmental organizations working in this area;