



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT ON THE ROMANI PEOPLE OF NORWAY

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council
Vienna, 4 June 2015

Mr Chairman,

Earlier this week, Ambassador Knut Vollebæk presented a report on the situation of the Norwegian Romani. He did so in his capacity as chair of a government commission set up in 2011 tasked with creating a common understanding of the content and consequences of the assimilation policies that started at the end of the 19th century and continued well into the 1960ies.

The Norwegian Romani people, also known as travellers, is one of Norway's five national minorities. They arrived in the 16th century. Today there are several thousand who identify themselves as Romani. They are distinct from Roma and Sinti.

Mr Chairman,

Upon presenting his report, Ambassador Vollebæk gave several examples of discriminatory policies towards the Romani people. These policies aimed at undermining their culture and traditional way of life in order to assimilate them.

During two generations from 1900 1500 children, or two thirds of all children born in Romani families, were taken away from their parents and placed in orphanages or foster homes. The objective was to ensure that the children did not continue the lifestyle of their parents by cutting off all contact.

Many Romani women were subjected to forced or coerced sterilisation. The Commission documented that this practise continued until approximately 1970.

One of the main findings of the Commission, is that among the Romani directly affected by the assimilation policies, the mortality rate was much higher, and the level of education much lower, than in the rest of the population.

Another finding is that the discriminatory policies of the past have created a deep mistrust among the Romani people to Norwegian authorities. This mistrust is handed down through generations and maintained by stories of the wrongdoings of the past and by continued stigmatisation and discrimination by the majority population today.

Mr Chairman,

The Norwegian authorities have given official apologies to the Romani on several occasions since 1998, when they were granted the status of national minority.

The Commission concludes that much remains to be done before the Romani people of Norway are treated with dignity and respect.

The commission makes several suggestions on how to compensate for the injustice suffered. It puts forward recommendations on how to contribute to reconciliation and avoid discrimination in the future. It underlines that confronting the past is necessary to create new trust and build a foundation for reconciliation. Upon receiving the report, the Minister of Local Government vowed to follow up these suggestions and recommendations.

Mr Chairman,

On a personal note I would like to add that Norway is slowly but surely coming to terms with its past policy of discrimination and assimilation of the national minorities and the indigenous Sami people.

We must learn from our past wrongdoings when we now strive to build an inclusive society, where diversity is respected and valued, but where we all share a common and non-negotiable platform of human rights, rule of law and democracy.

Thank you, Mr Chairman