

Delegation of Italy

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF ITALY AT THE
OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Astana, 29 and 30 June 2010

**Plenary session 4: The role of legislation, law enforcement, data collection
and civil society in combating and preventing intolerance and
discrimination, including hate crimes**

**Activities carried out in Italy by the National Office against Racial Discrimination
(UNAR) in the field of protection of minorities and the combating of hate crimes**

1. The protection of minorities. Prevention and combating of discrimination against
Roma and Sinti

The National Office against Racial Discrimination established within the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers has, since its creation, paid particular attention to problems affecting Roma and Sinti, who together constitute the main ethno-linguistic minority in the European Union. The activities of this Office are conducted on a territorial basis and publicized on a network which is well developed at the local level.

A contribution towards guiding activities in this area has been made, in the first place, by the cases of racial discrimination reported by the Contact Centre of the National Office against Racial Discrimination. Such cases have multiplied in recent years and have mainly concerned the spheres of education and housing, particularly sensitive sectors for the social integration of Roma and Sinti. In some cases, the National Office against Racial Discrimination has contributed decisively to the elimination of inequalities in treatment; in other cases, in which the facts reported indicate that criminal offences have been committed, it has ensured that information of the criminal offence is transmitted to the competent judicial authorities. Of particular importance are complaints against local administrations for the purpose of removing discriminatory provisions or ending administrative practices that violate the principle of equal treatment.

Significant also is action to support the formation by Roma and Sinti of associations seeking to guarantee the right to schooling and implement the prohibition of segregation practices in schools, or to ensure free access to bars, restaurants and the like for Roma and Sinti.

Still on the question of action to promote the integration of Roma and Sinti populations into Italian society, a specific project was adopted under the “Plan for the European Year of Equal Opportunities (2007)” for the development of a model for interventions aimed at the rehabilitation of foreign and Roma street juveniles who have been used for or involved in illegal activities, on the basis of national and European best practices. This so-called “Street of Rights” project, being implemented by the association “Save the Children Italia”, to which the activity has been assigned, has, at the specific request of the Department for Equal Opportunities, directed particular attention to Roma juveniles; in our country, the latter are victims of severe discrimination and violations of such basic rights recognized both in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and under Italian legislation as the right to education, to health, to protection from sexual and labour exploitation, to protection from abuse and violence and to family unity.

It should also be noted that, under the “Strategic National Framework for Structural Funds for the Period 2007–2013”, the Department for Equal Opportunities has drawn up plans of action providing for major structural interventions in favour of the Roma community through the European Social Fund.

Lastly, it may be mentioned that Italy is participating in the work of “EUROMA – European Network for Social Inclusion of the Roma”, co-ordinated by the Spanish Managing Authority for the European Social Fund. The EUROMA network is financed by the European Commission and has the aim of increasing the use of the structural funds by local institutions for action to promote the social inclusion of the Roma communities.

With regard to initiatives for awareness-raising, an area of activity to which the National Office against Racial Discrimination gives priority in efforts to counter prejudices against Roma and Sinti, the Office has implemented a project of particular importance: the “Dosta Campaign” (“dosta” means “enough” in the Roma language), promoted by the Council of Europe and directed towards combating prejudices against Roma and Sinti through a global strategy involving dialogue and an endeavour to help communities to learn about each other.

This initiative has been successfully propagated in five countries of South-East Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The implementation of the campaign in Italy also has an important symbolic value, because Italy is one of the first countries of the European Union to introduce this awareness-raising tool, which has produced excellent results so far.

The purpose of this tool is to counter common misconceptions and prejudices concerning the Roma and Sinti communities through a global strategy of dialogue between these communities and the so-called “majority” community; the campaign will be aimed at journalists, primary and secondary school teachers, students, entrepreneurs, social inclusion decision makers and representatives of local institutions and service providers.

The Dosta Campaign, planned by the National Office against Racial Discrimination with a vital contribution from the main associations of Roma and Sinti, will entail various activities, some directed towards a wider public and of national scope, such as media campaigns, and others aimed at specific groups and organized in certain Italian cities.

The Campaign includes itinerant events, such as concerts and photographic exhibitions, with the aim of promoting the dissemination throughout Italy of knowledge about the world of the Roma and Sinti, including its cultural and artistic expressions, in order to raise awareness in the local institutions of the needs of this population: those needs include access to employment, social and health services and housing initiatives.

Other programme initiatives are seminars and sporting events, along with other important events planned in the areas of schools and the media.

2. Hate crimes

Italian legislation includes specific provisions for countering manifestations of racism and xenophobia, including all manifestations of a philosophy promoting ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, as well as incitement to acts of discrimination or violence with racial, ethnic or religious motives. In addition to all the types of offence mentioned above, the law punishes the constitution of organizations, associations, movements or groups having among their purposes incitement to discrimination or violence on racial, ethnic or religious grounds, as well as recognizing, in the case of all offences, special aggravating circumstances when the offences are an expression of racial discrimination or hatred.

In the area of political debate or the debate concerning institutions, recourse to argumentation of a racist or xenophobic character can, if it shows criminal characteristics, be evaluated by the judge to see whether it meets the criteria making it a punishable offence. The National Office against Racial Discrimination, when it detects elements constituting criminal conduct in the cases submitted to it for examination, always presents the relevant information to the judicial authorities.