



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Situation of Roma

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 6, 2012

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The international community has attempted to improve the situation of Roma through shared political commitments – starting with the seminal 1990 Copenhagen Document, the first international human rights agreement to recognize the particular problems faced by Roma. More recently, the Decade of Roma Inclusion, to which the United States is an official observer, has brought governments together to develop country-specific action plans to address the systemic exclusion of Roma communities across the OSCE region.

On July 26, the United States delivered a statement expressing growing concern about prejudice and violence against Romani persons in the OSCE region. Since then, events have occurred that illustrate the acute vulnerability of many Roma and compels us to revisit this subject today.

We were troubled to learn, for example, that in the past month more than 700 Roma were evicted from six unauthorized camp sites in Lille, Marseille, Lyon and Paris; of these, several hundred residents were repatriated to Romania and Bulgaria. While we understand the French Government's concerns about the impact of sub-standard health and sanitary conditions on both, residents and the environment, such evictions are not the solution. As a result of these recent actions, many families with young children were put out on the streets.

As Council of Europe President Jagland noted last month in response to these events: "Simply moving Roma families around within or between states merely worsens their conditions. Only comprehensive policies that ensure fair treatment and proper access to human rights will turn the situation around." We urge France – and other OSCE participating States – to refrain from such actions and to work toward sustainable solutions that address the broader problem of Roma exclusion, which as Secretary Clinton has stated on numerous occasions, creates tangible losses not only in terms of individual potential and well-being, but for societies and economies writ large.

I would also like to register our grave concern regarding the mob threats against Roma in Devescser and Cegled, Hungary on August 5th and August 19th. We also regret that, thus far, no one has been convicted or held accountable for the murders of half a dozen Roma (including five-year-old Robert Csorba), as well as dozens of other arson, Molotov

cocktail, and sniper attacks on Romani villages that took place between 2008 and 2009. We urge the Hungarian Government to demonstrate in meaningful ways that mob violence and vigilantism against Roma will not be met with impunity or silence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman