

United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 6: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I (cont.)



*Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti;
Follow-up to the 10-11 July 2008 Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on
Sustainable Policies of Roma and Sinti Integration*

As delivered by Mr. Nathan Mick
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
October 2, 2008

Mr. Moderator,

Many minority groups are plagued by the scourge of racial profiling. For Roma, racial profiling also carries a particularly painful echo of the Holocaust. The image of the Romani minority as a criminal race was pervasive in Nazi propaganda, and reflected in Nazi laws and genocidal actions targeting Roma. Unfortunately, as Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg said at this meeting last year, even after “the Nazi killing of at least half a million Roma – probably 700,000 or even more – there was no genuine change of attitude among the majority population towards the Roma.”

Not surprisingly, insufficient teaching about Romani experiences and achievements has contributed to the prevalence of negative stereotypes of Roma. And perhaps no Roma stereotype has been more resilient than the image of the “Gypsy thief.” Even in my own country, Roma must sometimes fight racial profiling by local law enforcement agents.

Persistent stereotypes and ignorance need to be actively resisted by education and government advocacy, lest they lead to discrimination and violence that can undermine human security in the OSCE region. The United States opposes singling out any ethnic, religious or racial group for deportation or fingerprinting or other identification purposes.

The United States is concerned by the vigilante actions against Roma in Italy, which began last October and escalated with the attacks against Romani camps in May. We urge the authorities to denounce the frequent characterization of Romani immigrants as criminals and to prosecute those responsible for these cowardly attacks. The United States welcomed the visit to Italy in July by representatives of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, and other representatives of international organizations.

Mr. Moderator, we note that in Hungary, the paramilitary organization “Hungarian Guard” has raised anti-Roma rhetoric to a new level. We are concerned at the possibility for escalating inter-ethnic tensions if Roma are pressed to the point that they feel they must act to defend themselves. Just last year, violent attacks on Roma, followed by rumors of further attacks, triggered rioting by Roma in a neighborhood in Sofia, Bulgaria. Governments have a responsibility to ensure the safety of all their citizens.

We would also like to recall the concern our delegation has previously expressed regarding the housing crisis facing many Romani communities throughout the OSCE region, a problem exacerbated by the manner in which forced evictions are sometimes carried out. We understand this has been of a particular concern to Slovakia's Plenipotentiary for Romani Affairs. The United States encourages Slovakia, Romania, and other participating States to improve the implementation of the Action Plan's recommendations regarding housing and living conditions of Roma. Additionally, we would like to note that Roma in the Czech Republic still face widespread discrimination and do not have the protection of anti-discrimination legislation.

In Greece, ECHR decisions have found that Roma face racial discrimination, multiple evictions, and segregation in schools, while Roma dwellings and encampments lack sewage facilities, running water, and electricity.

Finally, we would like to commend ODIHR for its on-going review of the Action Plan, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities for his attention to the situation of Roma in the OSCE region.