



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement Regarding the Relocation of Roma in Baia Mare

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 21, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

At Astana, OSCE participating States recommitted to a vision of a “security community . . . rooted in agreed principles . . . notably in the areas of human rights and fundamental freedoms,” and reiterated that the protection and promotion of these rights and freedoms are “our first responsibility.” It is also our to draw attention to events throughout the OSCE space that are in tension with these commitments. Today, in too many states across Europe—including ones with strong human rights records in other areas—the rights of Roma are violated in contravention of our shared commitments.

Several weeks ago, local authorities in Baia Mare in northwestern Romania relocated around 300 Roma residents of the Craica settlement to an administrative building previously occupied by Cuprom, an industrial manufacturer. On June 1, a number of additional families were relocated to a nearby building that had previously housed chemical laboratories. According to numerous reports in Romanian and international media, within hours of the move to this second building, many of the relocated families—and particularly their children—became ill and required medical attention. The building, never intended for residential use, was not made safe for human habitation. When the families moved in, toxic chemicals were unsecured and little provision had been made for proper sleeping quarters, sanitary facilities, or food preparation.

These residents were removed from their existing homes with the promise of safe and secure alternative housing, but it is clear that the Cuprom laboratory building was neither safe nor secure. Although authorities have since decontaminated the building and some families chose to remain there, the problem of their long-term housing remains. We urge city, county, and national authorities to take urgent action to guarantee the welfare of these families, as well as the other members of the predominantly Roma settlement of Craica who are still under threat of forcible relocation by the authorities of Baia Mare. The current situation constitutes a grave failure by the city to provide basic protections to its citizens. It also contributes to the strong perception of willful discrimination towards the Roma community.

Any relocation of citizens by their government must be handled with sensitivity and respect. This is all the more important when dealing with Roma or other marginalized communities that are faced with institutional and societal discrimination. Baia Mare in particular has a record of discriminatory actions against Roma, including building a wall around Roma-inhabited apartment buildings last summer and threatening to move inhabitants of Craica on short notice and demolishing their homes without making available suitable alternative housing. Ignoring

compelling evidence about the medical problems suffered by the Roma families following their move, the mayor of Baia Mare claimed that the entire episode was ‘a masquerade.’

We note that county and national authorities have taken steps to investigate the situation and hold accountable those responsible for the mistreatment. However, we urge the Government of Romania and responsible officials at all levels to also speak out against this specific incident as a symptom of the broader problem of discrimination against Roma and other marginalized groups so that such cases are not repeated. It is important that all governments ensure the welfare of their citizens consistent with national and international law, OSCE commitments, and their moral duty.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.