

**Statement of Dr Massimo Introvigne**  
**Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating**  
**Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and**  
**Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions**  
**HDIM, Warsaw, October 5, 2011 (WS 14)**

As a new Representative, coming from a scholarly rather than a political background, I found the part of the mandate on combating intolerance against Roma and Sinti one of the most challenging, and at the same time an area where I had an immediate feeling that OSCE and ODIHR can make and indeed are making a real difference. I was extremely impressed by the competence, integrity and passion with which ODIHR officers specialized on Roma and Sinti issues approach this very delicate area.

This was confirmed by the three country visits we three Representatives made to Italy, the Holy See, and France. The country visit to Italy was preceded to a visit to the City and Province of Rome, where a large portion of Italian Romas live, by the ODIHR Senior Adviser Andrzej Mirga and by myself, where a study by a local NGO, Geordie ONLUS, was introduced to the media, and by correspondence between myself and the Minister of Internal Affairs. The country visit evidenced that, although by no means are all problems solved, dialogue between national and local authorities and ODIHR is progressing and at least some recommendations of the OSCE Action Plan are being actively implemented. During the visit to the Holy See, we were assured that efforts will be made to spread the Vatican declarations condemning intolerance against Roma and Sinti so that they may reach the grassroots levels of the Catholic Church, particularly in problematic countries. We saw this effort in action when on June 11 Pope Benedict XVI in a solemn speech pronounced the strongest indictment of anti-Roma discrimination and prejudice in the story of the Catholic Church. In France, we heard complaints by several NGOs but we were also able to start a very fruitful interaction with Senator Pierre Hérisson, head of the National Consultative Commission on Gens du Voyage, and are pleased to see that real progress is now being made at the legislative level. I look forward to continue these conversations in the forthcoming country visits to Ukraine and Switzerland.

Three problems need special attention. The first is housing, which is chain-connected to education. It is not enough to convert unauthorized camps and reception centers into authorized ones, although this may be a fruitful first step. The practice of camps should be ultimately discontinued, particularly for the sake of children, who are made particularly vulnerable, including to exploitation, by the camp context.

The second is anti-Roma rhetoric that is proliferated unfortunately not only by extremist groups but also by prominent politicians and institutional authorities. Words have consequences, and avoiding inflammatory rhetoric, particularly during elections, is particularly important.

The third is the importance of properly remembering the Roma genocide during World War II in school curricula in all participating States. Commitments on this point have not been fully implemented everywhere. The global economic crisis makes resources for the full integration of Romas scarcer than ever. However, discrimination and intolerance show that these programs should maintain a priority. And numerous initiatives may promote tolerance without involving significant costs.

I look forward to see the OSCE and ODIHR effort on behalf of Roma and Sinti continue during the Irish Chairmanship. Ireland has an extensive experience with its own population of Travellers. Irish official institutions are well-known to scholars throughout the world for their excellent work on gathering data about Travellers, including about problems in the area of possible local intolerance against them. Of particular note are the 2007 cross-border study of the Department of Health and Children on travellers welfare economic, and the works of the Social Research Institute in 2007-2008. Problems exist everywhere, but as scholars know gathering reliable data is the first sign of a serious commitment to solve them.

Thank you.