

**DECLARATION OF  
ROMANI WOMEN NETWORKS  
“I AM A EUROPEAN ROMA WOMAN” CONFERENCE  
Athens, January 11-12 2010**

Following the international conferences on Romani women in Bucharest 2006 and Stockholm 2007, Romani women and their supporters gathered in Athens at the “I am a European Roma Woman” Conference on 11-12 January 2010 to take stock of the increased and alarming human rights violations occurring against Romani women and to agree on taking joint action to achieving the full enjoyment of Romani women’s human rights.

Romani women in Europe face multiple discrimination, based on their ethnicity and their gender. This negatively impacts all areas of their daily life, including housing, healthcare, employment, education, political or civic participation and family relationships. Furthermore, they have often been victims of atrocious human rights violations: trafficking, racially-motivated violence, hate crimes and coercive sterilisation.

While the situation of Romani women has been brought to the attention of international organisations, this has not initiated a functional political process able to effect a concrete, measurable improvement on the lives of Romani women.

To the contrary, the occurrences of discrimination, violence and abuse often go unpunished and the motivations behind them remain unchallenged. This climate of impunity often has a lasting and a dehumanizing impact on the Romani women who are victims.

After reviewing the human rights situation of Romani women, participants in this conference underline the following findings:

- The continuous failure of states to afford human dignity to Romani women and acknowledge them as full citizens. Serious concerns remain about the climate of impunity and states’ failure to bring justice and provide remedies to Romani women victims.
- The failure of the governments of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to adequately acknowledge and compensate the victims of coercive sterilisation.
- The ongoing school segregation and systematic placement of Romani children in schools for the mentally disabled throughout Europe.
- The high rate of school drop outs among Romani girls and boys during compulsory educational, compounded by the failure of the Ministries of Education to adequately address this and to promote a diverse school environment.

- The failure of state and non-state actors to seriously discuss and address the practice of early marriages in the context of patriarchal dominance and poverty, with a view towards prioritizing the rights of Romani children.
- The lack of action and involvement of local authorities and local actors to address problems and concerns of Romani women.
- The media's negative and stereotypical portrayal of Romani women by the media and the failure to objectively present situations involving Romani women and Romani communities. Their approach often heightens ethnic division and further stigmatizes Roma communities.
- The lack of specific policies and programmes aimed at improving the situation of Romani women.
- The lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender and other grounds across Europe, which allows the plight of Romani women to remain hidden.

In light of these findings, the participants propose the following recommendations:

- Governments should uphold their obligations under international and European treaties and ensure that Romani women can enjoy and exercise their fundamental rights. Governments must take unequivocal measures with respect to rights violations of Romani women, by convicting and punishing perpetrators and compensating victims.
- While limited compensation and recognition has been awarded in Hungary and the Czech Republic to victims of coercive sterilisation, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia must acknowledge the past and ongoing occurrences of coercive sterilisation and take active measures to compensate the victims, sanction perpetrators and initiate medical reform in the area of patients' rights.
- The government of the Czech Republic is obliged to take active measures to end segregation and placement of Romani children in special schooling, in accordance with the 2007 ECHR decision, *D.H. and Others vs. the Czech Republic*.
- All European countries should take measures to prevent all forms of segregation in housing and education, while promoting the principles of equality and integration.
- School personnel and Ministries of Education should facilitate the completion of mandatory education for Romani children, take active measures to encourage their participation in higher education and

- combat discrimination in education. Governments should develop a specific approach to the education of Romani girls with the participation of the Roma community, based on national examples such as the Romanian model of Roma teaching assistants and school mediators.
- Roma activists should work with Romani communities to raise awareness of their children's rights and their parental responsibilities.
  - Local authorities should engage in developing local action plans and allocate budgets to address issues concerning Romani women and girls.
  - Roma activists and human rights organisations should actively engage with Roma communities to raise awareness about their human rights and facilitate access to public services and law enforcement mechanisms.
  - International organisations should support Roma journalism in order to facilitate a learning process with mainstream journalists about the situation of Romani women and to promote objective journalism.
  - Governments should organise hearings in the national parliament about the situation of Romani women. This would help to prioritise issues facing Roma women on the national agenda, raise awareness about the reality of their situation and change the tone of the national debate about Romani women among politicians, the general public and representatives of the media.
  - Governments should take steps to monitor and evaluate the situation of Romani women at the national level through the development and use of methodologies for data collection, disaggregated by ethnicity, gender and other grounds, as a basis for targeted and comprehensive measures which impact all areas of life.
  - Governments should encourage economic empowerment through supporting small scale business programmes for Romani women.

Romani women activists and networks participating in this conference stand ready to support and advise international organisations, national governments and local authorities in the development and implementation of these recommendations, or other efforts to improve the situation of Romani women in Europe. Participants look forward to efforts to improve the situation of Romani women and facilitate further dialogue on the situation of Romani women, particularly welcoming the follow up conferences proposed by the governments of Finland and Spain.