



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



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**MESSAGE OF SUPPORT FROM
THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER THOMAS HAMMARBERG**

Roma Youth Conference "Voicing the aspirations and projects of Roma Youth in the Council of Europe", Strasbourg, 26-30 September 2011

Dear participants,

I am sad that I could not be with you in person during this conference - when you hear or read this message I will be on a visit to Slovakia, where the situation of the local Roma communities will be very much in focus.

The need to break the vicious circle of prejudice and marginalisation of the Roma in Europe is of utmost urgency. You are all aware of this, and I am sure that the slow progress makes you as deeply impatient as I am.

Roma inclusion has been the subject of numerous national and international discussions with very little effect so far. However, there is one important result that I want to share with you today: Roma inclusion has never been higher on the European agenda. After two decades of efforts, the improvement of the situation of Roma has finally gone from the margins to the centre of European social policy.

This fact provides you with a unique opportunity to make your voice heard and help steering national and European policies in the right direction. There is growing awareness throughout Europe that it is not possible to improve the situation of the Roma without the Roma; and that this participation must not be symbolic, but genuine and meaningful.

Today, more Roma young people are in university than ever before. In a number of countries, Roma professionals now staff ministries or police or work in local or regional administrations. Roma are also contributors to private sector development. These are important steps forward – but they pale by comparison with the depth of exclusion in many Roma communities. The progress is also perpetually at risk, and has constantly to be protected and defended. You, as young, educated Roma persons, are in an ideal position to make a difference. You have the necessary skills, energy and time ahead of you to ensure that the right issues are firmly on the table and that the necessary work on these issues is carried out.

You can help protect the advances made, and make sure that they continue forward. By coming to this conference, you show that you have commitment, passion and strength. This makes you important role models – especially for those who are younger than you. You can show them how much you can achieve if you get an education and make your voice heard. You can show them that a better world is possible and that the Roma want to be part of it.

I wish you all success for the Conference.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Hammarberg