



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



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JOINT STATEMENT

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY

8 APRIL 2009

Today, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) issue the following joint call to governments, intergovernmental organisations and civil society to step up their efforts in tackling the human rights violations that the Roma continue to face in Europe.

As we celebrate the International Roma Day, our organisations are deeply concerned by the continuing discriminatory treatment and exclusion of the Roma, and particularly by the recent escalation in hate motivated incidents and racist rhetoric reported in a number of States. In times of economic crisis, communities such as the Roma, along with migrants and other vulnerable groups, tend to become easy 'scapegoats' for extremist movements and populist politicians. Such 'scapegoating' has already resulted in damaging inter-ethnic relations and an increase in the number of violent hate crimes in some countries. As the economic crisis deepens, political leaders in any State need to unequivocally and publicly condemn all forms of violence targeting the Roma. In order to avoid inciting ethnic tensions, politicians and other public figures must carefully consider their statements, and journalists must apply ethical reporting rules in their articles or radio/TV programmes. Together, we strongly condemn all forms of discrimination and violence against the Roma and call for concerted action from the responsible authorities at all levels in this regard.

In spite of the existence of strong anti-discrimination legislation and policies to promote the inclusion of the Roma in many countries, evidence shows that discrimination against the Roma persists, notably in education, employment, health care, housing, and access to justice and public services. Roma women and children are particularly vulnerable. Segregation in education, a particularly egregious type of discrimination violating the right of Roma children to access quality education and diminishing their employment prospects, endures in several states.

The continuing marginalisation and exclusion of the Roma represents a push-factor for recent migration movements, which have become one of the key challenges in Europe today. The biased portrayal of Roma migrants in the media and political misuse of the image of the Roma have contributed to discrimination and ill-treatment of the Roma in some countries. Roma with citizenship in an EU country have the right to move and reside freely within the EU, but nevertheless often face discriminatory treatment. We are particularly concerned about racial profiling of Roma in some States and the potential violation of their freedom of movement and human rights. The FRA, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE HCNM will therefore pay increased attention to migration-related challenges and assist States in addressing migration while ensuring the effective protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Roma.

Our institutions, based on their specific mandates, will continue to review Roma-related policies, measure their impact, identify good practices and assist States in developing and implementing sustainable integration policies. Partnership with the Roma communities must be one of the guiding principles for the design and implementation of such policies and programmes.

The designation of 8 April as International Roma Day dates back to the fourth congress of the International Romani Union in Warsaw in 1990. The International Roma Day serves as tribute to the first meeting of international Roma representatives on 8 April 1971, near London.
