



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



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High Level Meeting on Roma

**Council of Europe,
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Statement by

**Mr Thomas Hammarberg,
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights**

The human rights of the Roma and the Travellers are a priority for my office. When in member states I regularly meet their representatives and visit areas where they live. I report on the violations of their rights.

My conclusions have been generally critical. Though there are some positive examples, the conditions for the Roma and the Travellers are not satisfactory in any country.

They are behind on all social indicators – not least those relating to education, employment, housing or health care. One could talk about *institutionalised discrimination* affecting the full life cycle. A new generation is now growing up in social exclusion. Also today, too many Roma children do not get even basic schooling.

There is a tendency now to blame the Roma themselves for their social misery. They are accused of not trying to assimilate. Sweeping and stigmatising statements have been made linking Roma with criminality.

I have analysed a number of these statements – they have in many cases been ill-based on facts and dangerous on consequences. Above all, they have ignored the desperate poverty and the marginalisation which largely is the product of the many, many years of discrimination.

My main message is that *Anti-Gypsyism* must stop. Equality bodies and ombudsmen should be encouraged and resourced to take action against anti-Roma hate speech and cases of discrimination on the labour market and in social services.

There is a need to spread information on *the history of the Roma*. The Council of Europe fact sheets should be translated into national languages and widely disseminated.

There is a need *to include the Roma themselves* in the planning and management of the support projects. The fact that the Roma communities are divided is no excuse for taking decisions about them above their heads.

There is a need to make it possible for Roma to take part in the central and local administrations; to *recruit Roma* as police officers, teachers and social and health personnel and to create jobs as “mediators” between the services and the Roma communities.

There is a need to put an end to the *statelessness* of the tens of thousands who still suffer this injustice. Many do not even have an *ID card* or any documentation to prove who they are, and when and where they were born. This is an inexcusable failure and should now be addressed promptly.

Dosta!