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Speech on International Romani Day event at the Council of Europe

by **Michael O'Flaherty**
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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“Excellencies, esteemed representatives of the city of Strasbourg, distinguished chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues, honoured participants of the 2024 Roma Youth Together seminar, and dear friends,

I am delighted to join you in commemorating International Romani Day this 8th of April. Celebrating this day is always a highlight of my year. Whether in Rome, Vienna, or Dublin in past years, each celebration has been memorable.

However, this is my first experience at the flower casting ceremony—a tradition both beautiful and meaningful, initiated in 1990. This day is fundamentally for the Romani people to come together, to remember, honour, celebrate, and acknowledge their sense of community. As someone who is not of Romani heritage, I am deeply honoured to participate in this ceremony, recognizing it as a privilege of great significance.

On this occasion, I am compelled to express my unwavering solidarity with the Romani people in their quest for human rights respect and recognition of their invaluable cultural contributions to our societies across Europe.

In demonstration of my solidarity, I pledge four commitments:

First, advocating for the human rights of Romani people will be an enduring priority for me. As I mentioned earlier to the youth seminar, it is imperative to champion the rights of our continent's largest minority—a commitment we must uphold without fail.

Second, I intend to initiate and maintain an ongoing dialogue with Romani people across Europe throughout my six-year term.

Third, my efforts will pay special attention to engaging with young people, many of whom are present today. The vibrancy, energy and perspective of youth are invaluable. By working alongside young individuals—including Romani youth—we maintain our focus, efficacy, and authenticity in our human rights endeavours. It is essential to collaborate 'with' rather than 'for' young people, recognising the intergenerational effort required to secure the respect for human rights of the Romani people.

Fourth, I commit to a targeted approach in supporting women and girls. My experiences visiting Romani communities, especially during my tenure with the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, have shown me that women are often the primary vector of change. The role of women and girls is pivotal in advancing human rights for all within the Romani community.

Moreover, I will pay close attention to the implementation of [Recommendation 2024/1](#) of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to member States on equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls. This initiative, commendable in its foresight, offers a roadmap for our journey ahead. In adhering to such comprehensive recommendations, we must be strategic, recognising that trying to accomplish everything simultaneously can hinder progress.

In collaboration with Romani people, we must prioritise our initial steps, build on our achievements, and continue to progress from there.

A significant measure of achievement will be our collective ability, Romani and non-Romani alike, to deliver an enhanced respect for the dignity of Romani in our societies. Achieving this would mean that Europe has gone that bit further towards the realisation of all human rights for all.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak today and I wish you a very happy International Romani Day.”