



Press release

OSCE's human rights chief urges governments to step up efforts to eradicate discrimination against Roma

WARSAW, 7 April 2008 - On the occasion of International Roma Day on 8 April, the Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) called on governments and local authorities to step up efforts to eradicate discrimination of Roma and ensure their full participation in society.

The ODIHR acts as the OSCE's focal point on Roma and Sinti issues.

"Five years after the adoption of an OSCE Action Plan, Roma and Sinti communities across Europe continue to face enormous challenges in realizing their rights as equal citizens," said Ambassador Christian Strohal, the ODIHR Director.

"The gap dividing Roma from mainstream society is not diminishing in a tangible way. Many Roma still face discrimination in education, employment, housing, health care and other public services."

In 2003, OSCE participating States adopted an Action Plan to fight discrimination and racism encountered by Roma and Sinti. Five years later, OSCE governments, experts and Roma representatives will come together in Vienna on 10 and 11 July to review progress made in implementing the Action Plan. The conference reflects one of the priorities of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship.

"We have yet to see sustained efforts by governments and local authorities to make headway in addressing long-standing concerns such as lack of civil registration, inadequate housing conditions, forced evictions, and police violence against Roma," said Strohal.

Century-old prejudices and hostile attitudes towards Roma have resurfaced in some countries as a result of recent migration movements within the European Union. Some media, as well as politicians and other public figures, have actively contributed to the rise of intolerance against Roma and Sinti by using stereotypes and derogatory language.

The ODIHR recognizes and commends the efforts of participating States, the Council of Europe, the European Union and Roma and Sinti organizations to promote the rights of Roma, but calls for more vigorous steps to implement existing commitments.

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