

**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Vienna, 10-11 July 2008**

**Opening remarks by Ms Sarita Friman-Korpela, Secretary-Genral of the Finnish Advisory Board
on Romani issues, Representative of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship**

Mr. Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address this OSCE human dimension meeting on behalf of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship of 2008. I would like to start with a word of thanks to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for the strenuous efforts and good co-operation in organising this meeting.

The title of this SHDM meeting "Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration" is broad in a way. At the same time, such sustainable policies for integration need to be seen, first and foremost, from the human rights perspective. That is, we all have the right to be treated equally. Regrettably, this is not the case when we look at the realization of social, cultural and economic rights of the Roma in the OSCE area. The scale and depth of the problems may vary but widespread discrimination remains at the core. Therefore, let's face the challenge that we all need to improve: nobody is perfect in human rights.

Approximately five years have passed since the adoption of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti. Given that it is very timely that we gather together with the objective of assessing what has been achieved so far. Many of us remember the drafting process behind the Action Plan. The Plan itself was a milestone but obviously still needs much more implementation work in order to become an instrument that brings true benefits up to the local level, where most needed, for example, in education, housing and health sectors. It is at the local level where building a broad concept of security and measures of conflict prevention start- through implementation of human rights and strengthening of social cohesion.

In addition, we all acknowledge that the Action Plan aims to involve multiple players, including from within the OSCE, as the objective of improving the situation of Roma and Sinti is a very cross-dimensional one in nature. The Roma are a human dimension and a human rights issue at great extent, but also encompass elements of economic and security dimensions. Therefore, a truly comprehensive approach is needed. At the same time, we should not allow ourselves to think that the involvement of multiple actors would somehow decrease the role of the national and local level authorities. All the contrary, the ultimate responsibility towards the Roma and their citizens in general lies always within the Participating states.

With reference to a recent meeting of the OSCE National Focal Points on Hate Crimes in Helsinki, I find it important to reiterate that no grounds can be interpreted acceptable for justifying discrimination or intolerance, but all grounds are equally condemnable. A Roma person may be discriminated against

both because of ethnic origin and because of her gender. In addition, disability, sexual orientation or other grounds makes the burden even heavier. We also know that the education of Roma girls is a particular problem. Indeed, multiple discrimination is something we need to recognize and effectively target in order to reach the most vulnerable.

Given the honour to speak on behalf of the Finnish OSCE chairmanship I would like to use this opportunity to share with you the simple idea of the Roma and official authorities working together at all levels in society.

In Finland we have over 50 years long experience of making an impact on the lives of Roma from their own point of view in officially recognized advisory bodies. I am particularly proud of the work and the results of the four Regional Advisory Boards, which were included in the state budget in 2004. The Finnish method of chaining the Romani issues from the government through regional level to the municipalities is neither perfect nor omnipotent. However, it is vitally important to recognize the Romani issues officially as well as to provide a forum to work together.

In practice this chain works - just to provide an example - in the way that the national Advisory Board for example prepares a national Romani policy, which the government enforces. This is actually in process in Finland at the moment. Regional advisory boards and Romani working groups in municipalities play a decisive role when concretizing the aims in practice.

The point is that all countries must find the best method suited to their conditions and structures in order to promote all over well being of the Roma with the Roma.

This meeting offers an excellent opportunity to exchange best practices and challenges in implementing OSCE commitments set in the Action Plan on Roma and Sinti in 2003. While it certainly is time to shift from words to more action, I am convinced that the dialogue during these one and half days will contribute to actual implementation back home. The findings of the ODIHR's draft report on the implementation of the Action Plan gives us guidance on where improvements have been made and where challenges are yet to be met within the whole OSCE area. In order to have efficient responses to remaining challenges, it is important that the participating States and other actors involved in the implementation of the Action Plan carefully look into the findings of the draft report, provide further and updated information where necessary and consider and take action on the basis of the findings of the report.

I look forward to the presentations by our distinguished introducers. In addition, I eagerly look forward to the active participation by Roma and other non-governmental organisations participating in this meeting. The term successful integration will remain a hollow concept if not planned and carried out together with the Roma. We need each other in order to achieve tangible results and in order to transform shared commitments into practice.

Thank you.