



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
AND HEALTH OF FINLAND  
Advisory Board on Romany Affairs  
Sarita Friman  
Secretary General

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## OSCE CONFERENCE ON RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION

Hofburg Conference Centre, Vienna: 4-5 September 2003

Dear excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues;

- When discussing issues related to minorities, it is crucial to safeguard the participation by people belonging themselves to these groups. With regard to the Roma, Finland has very positive experience of working together within the Advisory Board for Romany Affairs for almost 5 decades. It is essential to provide a channel for participation in society for minority representatives and, at the same time, to build trust and confidence, and a culture of working together.
- However, the experience of the 47 years indicates that the importance of Romani participation and mutual cooperation with governmental officials is essential when finding the ways to eliminate discrimination.
- Indeed, I think that it is thanks to this co-operation that there have been major steps forward in the position of the Roma in Finland. However, the work needs to continue as inequality of the Roma still occurs in many fields.
- The problems concerning the living, employment and housing of the Roma must be given constant attention at local level. Neither must the prevention of discrimination and supporting the Romany culture be forgotten.
- Also at the international level, it is important to promote the participation of the Roma and other groups in the decision-making concerning them. It is in this context that the President of Finland, Mme Tarja Halonen, has made a proposal at the Council of Europe to set a European Forum for the Roma.
- Indeed, the Roma are a unique European minority. The Roma, of whom there are more than 10 million on this continent, are living in almost all European countries, and have in most cases already been living for a very long time. The Roma do not have a state of their own to speak on their behalf.
- It is thus the international organizations such as OSCE who can support Roma and be active in improving Romany people's means and ways of participation. Parliamentarians and governments can support the Roma by a good political will by adopting legislation that will ensure their rights and by encouraging them to use their rights and opportunities. In practice it means concrete support in cooperation with Roma community. The realization of the whole process of inclusion must be understood and supported at all levels of society.
- Thank you Mr Chairperson and thank you all for your attention. It has been a great pleasure attend to this important conference.

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