



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Session 7: Roma and Sinti**

As prepared for delivery by Nathan Mick  
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Warsaw, September 27, 2007

Mr. Moderator,

Increasing political participation by Roma means making simultaneous progress in addressing other issues, including combating pernicious prejudice against Roma that remains all too prevalent throughout the OSCE region.

In fact, it will be difficult to achieve meaningful political participation by Roma if the leaders of mainstream political parties continue to openly disparage Roma. Unfortunately, as we have seen this year, this phenomenon persists in several OSCE participating States. In this past year alone, we have seen public officials make statements that promote prejudice and bigotry against Roma. Public officials have failed to condemn acts of violence against Roma. Public officials have sought to manipulate prejudice against Roma for their own political ends. Moreover, when one examines the discourse of political leaders or public officials at the municipal level, the situation is even worse.

Frankly, I am most troubled by statements that associate Roma with criminal activity. This kind of racist scapegoating is not a substitute for serious and professional law enforcement.

On the other hand, the United States has been encouraged to see that some instances of “political anti-Romism” are now being met by a more critical analysis from the media and other sectors of the public.

Unfortunately, in some OSCE participating States, the inability of Roma to be registered by municipal authorities as residents of places where they live not only prevents them from voting, but directly feeds into an insidious cycle of exclusion from job opportunities, health care and housing.

Mr. Moderator,

I would like to recall the profound concern expressed by the United States at last year’s Human Dimension Implementation Meeting about the spreading practice of arbitrary eviction of Roma, often in violation of a participating State’s own national law. The United States welcomes the investigation and report by the Czech Ombudsman for Human Rights into the eviction of Roma in Vsetin. At the same time, we are alarmed that extremists in Italy and Slovakia have claimed credit for starting fires – in the case of Italy, a deadly fire which claimed the lives of four Romani

children – in an apparent effort to intimidate Roma and to prevent them from staying in certain localities or even the country. We hope both countries will make clear that violent acts of racism will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Threats of violence – even if not actually acted upon – constitute an effort to deprive the Romani of their most basic civil rights.

Mr. Moderator,

Enormous progress has been made in improving the situation of Roma over the past decade. The huge number of racially motivated murders that blighted the 1990s has decreased. There is a broad and significant consensus on the need to desegregate schools and integrate Roma. Knowledge about Romani experiences during the Holocaust is growing, as is understanding of the long legacy of that genocide. And, yes, there have been improvements in fostering the political participation of Roma.

A decade from now, let us not look back on this period as a time when the situation of Roma deteriorated in any way, as a time when gains were lost, as a time when opportunities were squandered, or as a time when long-settled Roma were forced onto the streets. The opportunity for positive change is now.

As the United States urged last year, in light of the magnitude and complexity of the emerging housing crisis faced by Roma, we believe the OSCE participating States should consider giving greater attention to this issues, perhaps in the form of a specialized meeting next year.

Thank you.