



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 876th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 JULY 2011

**RE: INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR: “THE ROMA AND SINTI
GENOCIDE: MEMORY, IDENTITY AND PRESENT DAY RACISM”**

Mister Chairperson,

1. The Holy See is following with great interest the initiative of the Presidency of the European Union and the ODIHR, together with representatives of the Roma, in organizing a commemorative event about the Roma and Sinti genocide, which will be held at the beginning of August in Krakow at the site of the former Nazi concentration and extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

2. In his Address on the occasion of a Meeting with Representatives of the Roma and Sinti from all over Europe (11 June 2011), Pope Benedict XVI said: *“Your history is complex and in some periods, painful. You are a people who in past centuries did not uphold nationalistic ideologies nor aspired to possess land or dominate other peoples. Being without a homeland, in spirit, you considered the entire continent your home. Nevertheless, serious and disturbing problems persist, such as the frequently difficult relations you have with the societies in which you live. Unfortunately through the centuries you have tasted the bitterness of inhospitality and at times, persecution, as occurred during the Second World War: thousands of women, men and children were barbarously killed in extermination camps. It was — as you say — the Porráimos, the “Great Devouring”, a tragedy still little known and whose proportions are difficult to gauge, but which your families bear impressed in their hearts. During my visit to the concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau*

on 28 May 2006, I prayed for the victims of persecution and bowed before the stone slab which commemorates your fallen, in the Romanes tongue. The European conscience cannot forget so much suffering! May your people never again be the object of harassment, rejection and contempt! On your part, always seek justice, legality and reconciliation and do your utmost never to be the cause of others' suffering!"

3. The upcoming International Seminar could also provide the occasion to renew our efforts at implementing the *OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti* , as well as other relevant Decisions, in order to overcome the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion that so often affect people on the move, including Roma and Sinti. The dignity of Roma and Sinti populations must be safeguarded, their families protected, their collective identity respected, initiatives for their education and development encouraged, and their rights defended. In this way, we might be able to reinforce our efforts aimed at ensuring that Roma and Sinti people are able to play a full and equal part in our societies.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.