

## **Presentation**

Hello, my name is Sabicha Souleiman, I am the president of the roma women association of Drosero.

Roma Women's association of Drosero " Elpida", meaning hope, is a Community Based Organization.

Drosero is a Muslim Roma community of over 5000 men and women, south east of town of Xanthi in Thrace, Greece.

## **Attempted forced assimilation by Turkish-speaking—Greek-Muslims of our area.**

Apart from the housing, education and employment problems to which I am going to refer later, the last few years, we are facing a new grave problem.

We, the Roma people of Drosero are afraid of forced cultural assimilation pursued by segments of the dominant (in numbers) Turkish-origin minority in Thrace, who discriminate against non-Turkish-speaking Muslim minority members. The Turkish-speaking Muslims of our area are trying to stop our children from using our mother Romani language and to force us speak Turkish instead.

Ironically, although they organise events inside the community with a strong Turkish character, in order to impose their own identity and cultural customs, at the same time they refuse to register their children in the same schools with Roma children. Unfortunately Muslim Roma identity for the Turkish-origin Muslim minority members is negotiable, not respected and unrecognised.

## **The main objectives of the organization are:**

- to empower women of the community to support their role in their families, but also in the community.
- to mobilize around the rights of the Roma people
- to create opportunities for a better future for their children

## **Ways to achieve our goals**

To achieve our goals, we are very active in many sectors notably education of our children. In order to support our dreams for a better future for our children, the women of the association decided to prioritise the need for proper education and along with the help of non Roma volunteers, we developed practices for reducing the number of children who are out of school.

## **Schools**

In 2007, almost 100% of the inhabitants of Drosero were illiterate. Although many people have certificates from primary school, usually they don't know how to write or read.

As a result of our efforts, currently 500 children are registered in the primary school of the Drosero, a de facto Roma – only school, 50 teenagers attend a de facto Roma- only high school and 2 people have university degrees.

## **Nursery school**

Two years ago, an all day nursery school was established for first time in the community. The number of children who attend school every day ranges from 30 to 40. Apart from the two trained teachers who are responsible for the children's education, two women of the association work also for the school as mediators.

As the majority of children do not understand Greek and speak Romane, mediators play very important role for the children's communication with the teachers.

The school provides two meals per day. Teachers and social workers are also responsible for children's vaccination.

## **Environment**

The majority of our people live under poor environmental conditions. The community is segregated from the non Roma citizens in Xanthi. The majority of people get out of the community only when they have to use public services or during the weekends when the local market is on. Children have no contact with non Roma children unless they sell products to them during their summer jobs.

We took many initiatives, among them, to clean our roads and yards and paint the exterior of the houses and the nursery school. In addition, we produced the plans for the creation of a new central square, which is now under construction by the state.

## **Appeal**

As you can understand, some of our problems are already starting to be solved thanks to our efforts and thanks to the support of the Greek authorities.

But, one problem, the one of attempted forced assimilation by Turkish-speaking-Muslims, is very difficult for us to solve. Therefore, we make an appeal to you, because we need all the support you can give us. You are hereby invited to come and visit us and see for yourself our situation and our efforts towards a better future. Please help us survive!

Thank you very much