

Assembly Meeting of Romani Non-Governmental Organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Hotel Park, Vogošća, 9-11 November 2001

PLATFORM FOR ROMA IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Preamble

Recognising the Roma as a national minority with its own language and culture living in Bosnia and Herzegovina;

Appreciating the initiative of authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to draft legislation on national minorities, which provides Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the status of a national minority;

Having regard to the commitments concerning the protection of national minorities in United Nations conventions and recommendations, particularly the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, the *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* and the *General Recommendation 27 Discrimination against Roma*;

Considering the provisions of the *United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* adopted in 1951;

Having in mind the documents of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, particularly the *Copenhagen Document* of 29 June 1990, as well as the *OSCE Lund Recommendations of the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*;

Considering the provisions of the *Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, which entered into force in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 01 June 2000;

Having regard to the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR)* and to the Protocols thereto, in particular the *Additional Protocol no. 12 to the ECHR*;

Having in mind the *European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) General Policy Recommendation No. 3 Combating Racism and Intolerance against Roma/Gypsies*;

Having in mind the *Recommendation (2000) 4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the Education of Roma/Gypsy and Travellers Children in Europe*;

Bearing in mind the *European Union Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment between Persons Irrespective of Racial or Ethnic Origin* and *Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 Establishing a General Framework for Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation*;

Bearing in mind the *Guidelines Improving the Situation of the Roma in the Candidate Countries* drafted by the Council of Europe and the OSCE-ODIHR and adopted by the COCEN Group of the European Union at Tampere in 1999;

Referring to the *OSCE-ODIHR and Council of Europe Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies Joint Recommendation on Setting-up National Consultative Bodies between Roma/Gypsies and Governments*;

Taking into consideration the activities of the Council of Europe/OSCE-ODIHR/European Commission Joint Project *Roma under the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe*;

We, the participants of the Assembly Meeting of Roma NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina held on 9-11 November 2001 in Vogošća, have agreed on the following recommendations:

Political Participation and Advocacy

1. To amend, in consultation with Roma representatives, the State and Entity Constitutions (Dayton Agreement) so that they reflect and acknowledge the historical existence of Roma as a national minority on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with the legislation on national minorities to be adopted;
2. To create a national advisory board composed both of representatives from relevant ministries at State, Entity and Cantonal levels and Roma representatives in order to ensure a joint and co-ordinated approach to Roma by BiH authorities in the field of education, culture, social welfare, health care, housing utilities, employment, and other fields;
3. To establish the mandate, goals and functioning rules of the advisory board in close consultation with appointed Roma representatives, bearing in mind that these representatives shall represent, consult and report to all Roma communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including Roma refugees, returnees and displaced persons;
4. To ensure that the financial means for the functioning of this advisory body are secured in the annual budget of the responsible ministry;
5. To ensure that the proposed sub-department on national minorities, to be established under the BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, includes full and effective participation of Roma representatives;
6. To ensure that Roma are represented in all governmental structures, including State, Entity, Cantonal and Municipal levels;
7. To promote minority representation within political parties by making it mandatory for political parties to have a specific number of minority members within their candidate lists;
8. To establish quotas for minorities, and Roma in particular, in Parliaments and Cantonal and Municipal Administration;
9. To ensure equal access to media for Roma and other minority members;
10. To combat prejudices and stereotypes against Roma in the media in order to improve the image of Roma in the face of public opinion;
11. To undertake public information campaign within Romani communities to encourage the self-identification of Roma in the next population census, and to ensure that Romani associations of Bosnia and Herzegovina are involved when authorities conduct the next population census;
12. To keep in mind when implementing the proposed legislation on national minorities, that figures concerning Roma are based on the 1991 census, which does not reflect the real Roma population living in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
13. To ensure access for Roma to documentation and statistics concerning their situation during the pre- and post-war period.

Education

1. To ensure non-discrimination in the school system and to guarantee equal access to education for Roma at all levels (kindergartens, elementary, primary, secondary school and university);
2. To provide opportunities for the training of Roma teachers;
3. To ensure the right of Roma to learn Romani through subsidised additional classes in Romani language, or as a subject in schools based in municipalities with large Roma populations;
4. To take measures to encourage the knowledge of the Romani culture, history and language among the majority population, and particularly teachers, through adequate curricula;
5. To ensure that budget for educational matters at all levels (Entity, Cantonal and Municipal levels) include a specific budget line for the education of Roma in order to provide free-of-charge textbooks, transport to school and one free-of-charge meal;
6. To sanction according to applicable laws in BiH, school directors and teachers who discriminate against Romani children;
7. To organise (Roma-to-Roma) training workshops for Romani adults willing to assist teachers in schools;
8. To ensure that curricula address the specific needs of Romani communities;
9. To receive national support for the production and distribution of Romani language teaching materials;
10. To assist Roma and the Council of Europe and OSCE mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the organisation of initial fact-finding field visits in Tuzla, Bijeljina, Kakanj and Sarajevo to take place in early 2002 with a view to make an assessment of the education of Romani children and make concrete proposals to solve them, and ensure participation of relevant authorities (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees and Entity/Cantonal Ministries for Education and Labour) in these activities.

Employment

1. To respect international labour standards, as well as to adopt regulations in the field of employment;
2. To take effective measures in cases where discrimination against Roma by labour offices/ministries and/or employers occurs;
3. To introduce public work programs for which Roma and other minorities would be employed;
4. To provide subsidies/incentives for small businesses in traditional fields (i.e. blacksmiths, coppersmiths, musicians, tapestry, etc.);

5. To establish social action or training programs for young Roma, ensuring that job offers correspond to the level of qualification;
6. To develop international re-qualification or upgrading programs for Roma, in particular, firms at the local/community level;
7. To encourage and assist Roma with the development, implementation and financing of income-generation programs (i.e. recycling projects);
8. To adopt measures to combat discrimination of Roma in the employment sector, particularly in the private sector, for example, abuse of working hours, delays in salary payments, lower salaries for equal work, termination of contracts on ethnic grounds and abuse of payment;
9. To ensure that employers pay social insurance benefits equally to Roma employees (i.e. health, disability, pensions, etc.).

Housing/Property

1. To ensure that reconstruction projects for Roma focus on the integration of Roma into society, rather than the construction of segregated settlements for Roma;
2. To guarantee that priority areas for reconstruction activities and donor assistance are identified by Roma communities and are then channelled to governmental authorities or international donors;
3. To ensure that reconstruction projects for Roma communities are given adequate political and financial support (including support from international donors).
4. To co-operate with Romani representatives in order to address the following:
 - a) The issue of ownership of houses by Roma since many Roma did not have legal entitlements to property/housing before the war;
 - b) The issue of the land ownership by Roma, in particular expropriation during the period 1941-1992;
 - c) The issue of Romani homes built without construction authorisation through inclusion of them in the Urbanistic Plan since many Roma were not in a position to pay the necessary fees to register in the Cadastre;
 - d) To develop a welfare housing program for Romani families with many members and with poor living conditions;
5. To create a program for improving infrastructure of Romani settlements (i.e. equal access to water, electricity, road construction, etc.).

Health

1. To improve access of Roma to health services;
2. To identify solutions for increased access by Roma to the health insurance system, such as free of charge prescription and medicine;
3. To include Roma into governmental program for health protection;
4. To ensure health insurance for Roma, taking into account that many Roma are not employees;
5. To find a solution for increasing the knowledge of Roma about the healthcare system through the organisation of:
 - a) Information campaign on the prevention of diseases (i.e. Tuberculosis);
 - b) Vaccinations programs;
 - c) Family Planning/Contraception projects;
6. To increasing the number and the training of medical personnel working in Romani communities;
7. To increase the number of medical staff originating in the Roma community by setting aside special openings for Roma students in medical programs.

Romani Refugees/DPs/Returnees

Roma Refugees in Camps

1. To increase the access of Romani refugees, especially to the educational and healthcare system;
2. To provide for increased freedom of movement in and out of the camp;
3. To ensure that local authorities provide utilities within the camps (i.e. water, electricity);

Roma Refugees/Displaced Persons and Refugees

1. To increase access of Roma to public services (i.e. refugees who do not register themselves on time, lose their right to humanitarian aid, health insurance and temporary shelter, lack of knowledge among refugees about how to register);
2. To provide identification papers free-of-cost or at a lower rate for Roma given their high rate of unemployment and difficult economic situation (e.g. birth certificates);
3. To organise an informational campaign among returnees, displaced persons and refugees about the importance of registration and the procedure for doing so.