

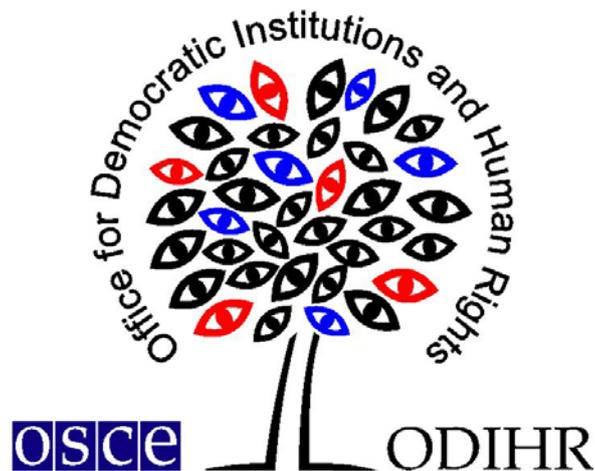
**SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING**

**Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration**

**Side Event: Roundtable for Civil Society**

**10 July 2008  
HOFBURG, VIENNA**

**Opening remarks by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič  
Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and  
Human Rights**



Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this Roundtable for Civil Society which is taking place just prior to the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) on Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration.

The ODIHR is very happy to host this roundtable today. We are building on the successes of several previous civil society roundtables which have been organized in connection with OSCE tolerance and non-discrimination conferences and meetings. Our earlier experiences have been very good, so our hopes are set very high for this event today. We are also very grateful to the Finnish Chairmanship for their continued support and interest in this topic.

The constructive and necessary role of the civil society to provide checks and balances vis-à-vis States and international organizations has been particularly highlighted in the OSCE framework. The format of the OSCE human dimension meetings has always provided for the participation of the civil society and we have been privileged to receive many forward-looking recommendations to strengthen the human dimension commitments and their implementation.

I am convinced that the participation of civil society today and tomorrow will again prove to be invaluable for the quality and richness of the debates and will strengthen the outcomes of this SHDM.

Let me recall the context in which this roundtable takes place. With the support of my Office, the Chairman-in-Office organizes every year three SHDMs in order to discuss implementation of key human dimension commitments by the OSCE participating States and review necessary follow-up.

In the Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/03 adopted in Maastricht in December 2003, the participating States have committed to “*recognizing the*

*particular difficulties faced by Roma and Sinti people and the need to undertake effective measures in order to eradicate discrimination against them and to bring about equality of opportunities, consistent with OSCE commitments”* when they have not done so yet.

This meeting is an opportunity to take stock and assess particularly how regional and local authorities can be more proactive in implementing the Action Plan on Roma and Sinti at the local level. Examples of successful practices and ways to overcome obstacles will be discussed, as well as enhancing policies to facilitate equal access of Roma and Sinti to public services.

As you are well aware, the role of regional and local authorities is increasingly important in present day Europe – more powers are handed to them but also more responsibilities for realizing what local constituencies need or request. Regional and local authorities are the main providers of services vital to people’s well-being. In practice these two - the needs of the local population on the one hand and services provided on the other - do not always meet, and instead we often witness the exclusion and neglect of the Roma and Sinti communities in the localities where they live.

As civil society, you are the best placed to assist Roma and Sinti who are marginalized by building bridges with regional and local authorities. For this to take place, specific and viable integration models which support and promote respect for diversity, while simultaneously addressing the practical needs of integrating Roma and Sinti, are necessary.

These issues can be discussed in the context of partnerships with civil society; for instance, by focusing on ways for civil society to support, complement and challenge regional and local authorities in order to ensure their timely and adequate responses to the needs of Roma and Sinti communities.

The Action Plan on Roma and Sinti specifically encourages the ODIHR and OSCE institutions and field missions to work with civil society representatives

in assisting implementation of its measures. In this regard, both the ODIHR and the participating States should benefit from your valuable contributions. Since you are an indispensable actor at the local level, there is plenty of room for co-operation with local authorities given the common objectives of improving the plight of Roma and Sinti.

There are still not enough good practices at the local level. But what does exist, frequently comes from the work of civil society. Regional and local authorities should capitalize on these successful stories, especially given their responsibility for basic services which are vital for improving the situation of Roma and Sinti.

Clearly, you already have a sound basis for solid expert discussion on what needs to take place regarding building and ensuring sustainable policies for Roma and Sinti integration. I know that there is a lot of work for all of you this morning in order to produce a set of well-formulated recommendations. As you know, they will be presented at the opening of the SHDM this afternoon. I will also add that you are welcome to attend the next Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw later this year where the recommendations from this Meeting will be presented and further discussions on the topic will be held.

Before concluding, I would like to mention one particular tool that my Office has developed, which can be of special interest for civil society, namely our website TANDIS which gives access to information from participating States, international organizations and civil society on all matters related to tolerance and non-discrimination. You are invited to send information, reports and best practices to my Office in order to raise awareness on your priorities, activities and in particular the results of your monitoring activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you the most productive meeting and thank you in advance for bringing inspiration as well as concrete suggestions to this morning's roundtable and the following SHDM.