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European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion

Launch event

Communication by Nils Muižnieks
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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I warmly welcome the launching of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, which aims at strengthening co-operation between local and regional authorities on improving the situation of the Roma in member states.

Protection of and respect for the human rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe has been a major part of my Office's work since its inception. In almost all member states of the Council of Europe, Roma continue to suffer some of the most serious human rights violations. I am particularly concerned by the rise in hate speech against Roma, notably in dominant political discourse and in the media, and the multiplication of acts of violence against them. Tackling anti-Gypsyism in Europe must be given much higher priority in all member states.

I am also convinced that no real improvement of the human rights of the Roma can be achieved without the resolute commitment of local authorities both to combating racism and to solving some of the acute problems faced by Roma in their daily lives, in close co-operation with the communities concerned. As an example of the need for human rights compliant local policies, I would refer to the recent wave of forced evictions that have taken place in a number of European cities and regions. These evictions infringed the basic human rights of Roma, and heightened their destitution, marginalisation and stigmatisation. I therefore strongly welcome the emphasis placed by the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion on improving the housing situation of the Roma. I trust that the exchange of information and knowledge on good practices in this field can help cities and regions to solve long-standing Roma housing problems in a sustainable manner, in compliance with Council of Europe human rights standards.

I also note with satisfaction that the Alliance of Cities and Regions focuses on the need to enhance opportunities for inclusive education for Roma children. Segregation of Roma children in education is of particular concern to me since it is one of the worst forms of discrimination which feeds the vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion.

Lastly, I find it heartening that this initiative is supported by a coalition of various international institutions working on Roma issues, including the Council of Europe, the European Union, UNDP and the World Bank. Experience has shown that it is of primary importance to use the valuable expertise and resources of all competent international organisations in a consistent and co-ordinated manner in order to attain a higher level of human rights protection for all, especially the most vulnerable social groups, to which Roma still belong.