EU ROMA POLICY COALITION

Tuesday, May 20, 2008

<u>**Anti-Roma events in Italy are a wake up call for the EU.**</u>
The European Roma Policy Coalition calls for coordinated EU action based on European anti-discrimination legislation, social inclusion measures and the respect of human rights.

As representatives of human rights, anti-discrimination, anti-racism, social inclusion and Roma rights organizations promoting values of human rights and democracy, we firmly condemn the recent attacks against the Roma community in Italy that were carried out by non-state actors, as well as the statements of discriminatory nature made by high ranking Italian politicians. We therefore urgently call on the Italian authorities to take action against anti-Roma discourses in Italian media and to stop anti-Roma discourses by politicians; and take all the necessary measures to provide protection to the Roma community and pursue their active inclusion in society. Furthermore, we request a prompt reaction by the European Commission and the European Council to these events.

Italy, a European Union Member State, is blatantly disregarding the values and principles of the Union as enshrined in Article 6 of the treaty establishing the European Union, by conducting arbitrary detentions with a view to facilitate expulsions, making provisions for discriminatory anti-Romani and anti-Romanian laws and measures and by fuelling racism through anti-Romani speech.
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We are addressing this call to all EU institutions to condemn and take action against the anti-Romani hate speech and actions of discriminatory nature that contravene Italy's non-discrimination obligations under European and international human rights law.

We call on the European Commission, as guardian of the treaties to do the utmost to ensure that the rights of EU citizens are being protected against state abuse perpetrated on grounds of ethnic or national origin. To come up with an EU Roma strategy aiming at making Roma inclusion an urgent priority, to provide leadership and coordination for Member States in their responsibility to ensure the respect for the rights of their Roma citizens.

Further, we call on the Members of the European Parliament to convene an emergency session and appoint a fact finding mission to review the planned discriminatory legal measures, instances of inciting racial hatred and fanatic anti-Romani behaviour in Italy. The European Parliament needs to condemn such acts and convey its position publicly.

Finally, we urge the Italian authorities as a matter of urgency to take all necessary steps to provide adequate protection to the Roma against such attacks and other acts of violence and ensure that an independent investigation is conducted into each attack carried out by non-state actors and state actors. Persons believed to be responsible for the violence should be brought to justice and adequate reparation, including compensation, made available to all victims and their families. We also call on the Italian authorities to refrain from engaging in racist speech against Roma persons, and to seek in every possible way to counteract violent anti-Roma sentiments in broader society.

We urge the EU member states to join up, coordinate measures towards social inclusion of Roma as the right way forward rather than further marginalizing and expelling Roma from one country to another. We urge the Commission to provide leadership and a coordination role for Members States in helping to ensure respect for the rights of their Roma citizens. We firmly believe that joint coordinated action by the EU has to set the standard, in order to avoid the bad and damaging examples set by Italy in these days. We call this approach the EU Roma Policy.

We commend the statements of the Spanish deputy premier, Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega as an example for other European governments: "The government [of Spain] rejects violence, racism and xenophobia and does not support what is happening in Italy... [we] do not support the policy of expulsions without respect for the law and rights, or actions which exalt violence, racism and xenophobia."

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